



# *Land access in rural Africa: Strategies to fight gender inequality*

FAO-Dimitra workshop – September 2008





**Land access in rural Africa:**  
**Strategies to fight gender inequality**

**FAO-Dimitra workshop:**

**Information and communication strategies  
to fight gender inequality as regards land access  
and its consequences for rural populations in Africa**

22-26 September 2008 – Brussels, Belgium







## For Marie Mwira



Dear Marie,

This publication is dedicated to you, the brave and tireless activist for women's rights and peace in the Great Lakes Region. You impressed us with your courage and strength in such a difficult environment. The last time we met you, in February 2008, you told us how many of Africa's problems were connected to customary discrimination against women and to land control issues. Your strategies for dealing with these problems – information campaigns to repackage and disseminate texts and conventions on human rights, education, exchanging experiences, advocacy, and so on – would have fit in perfectly with this document.

We will never forget you.  
The Dimitra team and its partners

Marie Mwira was President of the *Réseau Femme et Développement* (REFED – Women and Development Network) in North Kivu as well as President of the organisation *Genre et Tradition pour le Développement et la Paix au Nord-Kivu* (Gender and Tradition for Development and Peace in North Kivu). She died of a heart attack in Goma on 2 December 2008.





“ Thérèse, a widow, lives in a camp for displaced people near her native hill (*colline*). Her brothers have refused to give her access to the family land, saying that you cannot mix clans and upset the patriarchal system.

Marie lives in a camp for returnees. She does not have access to her father's property, despite being an only child. Her uncles denied her access to the family property.

Antoinette, a divorcee, came back to live at her family's home while her mother was still alive. When her mother died, her brothers drove her away from the house and denied her access to the land. She asked neighbours for help, but they would not or could not settle the dispute. She went mad and now lives in poverty underneath an avocado tree. ”

*Extract from the presentation given by Concilie Gahungere, CAFOB, Burundi*

Thérèse, Marie and Antoinette are false names used to describe the very real experiences of women in Burundi and all over Africa, especially in rural areas. The fight against gender inequality as regards land access in Africa is the subject of this brochure, which was published following the workshop on this topic organised by the FAO-Dimitra project in September 2008.





# Table of contents

## Part I:

- Foreword [9]
- Ten years of the Dimitra network [10]
- Aim and key objectives of the workshop [13]
- A methodology based on listening and participating [14]
- Understanding the past and focusing on the present [15]
- Common issues [19]
- An inventory of the current situation [22]
- Action plan [24]
- Self-evaluation [27]
- Example of good practice: South Kivu –  
Solar-powered radios changing the lives of rural women [31]
- Speeches by officials [34]
- List of participants [46]

## Part II:

- Written contributions by the participants –  
Dimitra's partners and FAO representatives [49]





# Part I

## Foreword



Dear readers,

On behalf of FAO, I would like to offer heartfelt thanks to the King Baudouin Foundation and the Belgian Ministry for Development Cooperation for their support of the Dimitra project. Since its inception, these two bodies have always shown genuine interest in the work and activities of this project that has become increasingly integrated in the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division of FAO. As well as supporting Dimitra's activities in Brussels, they express their confidence in the project by cooperating directly with its partners in the field.

We would also like to thank our colleagues from FAO's technical divisions who participated in Dimitra's 2008 workshop. Their presence and expertise made a huge contribution to the success of the work done there. Their enthusiasm and commitment will doubtless lead to further cooperation and will contribute to boosting synergies within our institution.

Our thanks also go to Dimitra's partners, who are at the heart of the action. Their presence in the field is a vital factor in the collection and dissemination of information as regards rural populations. If the Dimitra network is constantly expanding and interesting an ever greater number of people, this is largely due to the commitment and determination of all of its partners.

This document comprises a summary of the work accomplished during the meeting and a range of articles that were produced for the workshop by our FAO colleagues and the network's partners. Dimitra is issuing this brochure in the aim of reproducing the participants' discussions and making them available to a larger public. The participants' expertise is a major source of information, inspiration and enrichment that could be useful for everyone.

I would like to wish you all a happy reading.

Marcela Villarreal  
Director, Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division  
FAO



# Ten years of the Dimitra network

2008 marks the tenth anniversary of the Dimitra network's inception as an FAO project under the auspices of the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division. This year's workshop provides an excellent opportunity to stop and take a look at the progress that has been made so far. We should first of all mention the cooperation and commitment of all of our partners in realising common projects and objectives. At our most recent meeting in Brussels, one word came up again and again when defining the Dimitra network: a network dominated by a warm and open state of mind, the Dimitra spirit. Commitment, the ability to persuade people and the pleasure of working, sharing and learning together are the cornerstone of cooperation within the network. The joint participatory approach extends to the choice of topics to develop and to the trust, friendship and loyalty of all members. So here's to ten years of shared experiences...

## No development without information and the ability to communicate

In 1998, the following was clear: there was a huge shortage of information on and for rural populations, particularly those in Africa. There was very little information available on the work of NGOs dealing with the issue of *rural women and development*. From its launch in 1994 and the publication of a first directory with information from European development NGOs working in the area, Dimitra became an FAO project with the mission of raising awareness of gender issues and gathering and disseminating information on the vital role rural women play in development. These themes are still at the heart of the network's activities and interests.

With a view to performing its mission, Dimitra set up strategies and tools enabling it to listen to the populations concerned. Links with NGOs, workshops and study sessions and Dimitra's publications are the foundation of the network's activities. Its partners in the field get valuable feedback on their initiatives and achievements, among others thanks to the Dimitra newsletter – a publication to which they are the main contributors.

The newsletter, the workshop brochures, the on-line database that has just been published on CD-ROM for the third time and the revised website are tools that are available to everyone. These information and communication tools are also a vital way to raise the profile of rural women at all levels of intervention.

## Dimitra, a network based on partnership and participation

Dimitra is not only concerned with informing rural populations, but also with ensuring that they can participate in the projects aiming to support them. This wish for involvement reflects the participative character of the network which aims to give rural women a voice.

In the beginning, information collected from rural populations emphasised the involvement of women in health projects and the creation of income-generating activities. But it quickly became obvious that

rural women, once they had more information, were prepared to perform activities for promoting literacy, organising and structuring their groups, developing networks, creating synergies and increasing knowledge of their rights.

The advent of the Internet has certainly made a major contribution to Dimitra's development, but its expansion is primarily due to networking, sharing and the involvement of its partners. The first factor that springs to mind is local actors who work in grassroots organisations at local level and who have a direct line to the rural populations. Partnerships are mainly with intermediary-level organisations, which are a vital link to the grassroots level when it comes to collecting and disseminating information. These partnerships make it possible to develop an approach based on participatory communication.

### Strengthening the network and creating synergies

The Dimitra network is becoming larger and stronger, relationships are being formed and synergies are being created. A clear example of this is the Round Table organised in Mbour, Senegal, in June 2008 (for more information, consult [www.fao.org/dimitra](http://www.fao.org/dimitra)). In this case, Dimitra's partner organisations ENDA-Pronat from Senegal and RECIF/ONG-BF in Burkina Faso, joined the Dimitra team and cooperated with the



International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada) on the topic of women's access to land in Africa. This cooperation is set to continue in the form of an action-oriented research project led by these partners.

It is also necessary to mention the renewed confidence of the bilateral and multilateral organisations in some countries. These organisations continue to support the fulfilment of the network's objectives and work more frequently with Dimitra to set up new projects. One example of this would be GTZ-Health's activities in the DRC, where it is working with SAMWAKI, one of Dimitra's partners, to create radio listeners' clubs on HIV/AIDS and the fight against sexual violence in South Kivu in a project financed by the King Baudouin Foundation. Other examples include the urban and peri-urban horticulture (HUP) projects being carried out by FAO in Burundi and the DRC and the literacy projects in Niger, which are being executed by ONG-VIE with the support of the Swiss, Canadian and Belgian development cooperation agencies.

Here is another example: within the framework of FAO's new programme, 'Knowledge management and gender', which is being financed by Belgium, Dimitra will be involved in cross-sectoral support as regards gender issues and dissemination of information in the Sahel on topics such as input stalls, rural credit, literacy, etc.

Synergies have also been boosted within FAO – there is now increased cooperation with various technical departments, as shown by the presence of colleagues from other divisions at this year's workshop.

## Many challenges ahead

Over the past ten years or so, there has been considerable progress when it comes to taking account of gender in development actions. This has had a real impact on the appreciation and promotion of women's roles. However, there is still a lot of work to be done and many challenges lie ahead. The 2008 workshop allowed us to discuss the fight against gender inequality in land access in Africa, and the discussions showed that this issue is linked to a wide range of problems: access to information, education, securing land, food security... – all factors that contribute to engendering poverty.

Poverty is neither trivial nor inevitable. It is a challenge that involves everyone, men and women at all levels, from households right up to decision-makers, for the survival of communities and countries. As far as its means permit and in the framework of the collaboration with its African network, Dimitra wants to take up this challenge by highlighting the fundamental role of agriculture and of its producers, the large majority of whom are women.



# Aim and key objectives of the workshop




## Aim of the workshop:


Establish, in cooperation with all partners in the Dimitra network, information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality as regards land access and its consequences for the food security and living conditions of rural populations in Africa.

## Key objectives:

1. Draw up an inventory of the impact of gender inequality in land access on the food security and living conditions of rural populations.
2. Identify the causes and consequences of these inequalities and categorise them according to level (micro, meso and macro).
3. Present examples of information and communication and knowledge management strategies with a view to increasing the security of land rights.
4. Develop common information, communication and advocacy strategies within the framework of the Dimitra network.



Exploring the past, analysing the present, defining an action plan and looking to the future with a view to fighting gender inequality in access to land.



# A methodology based on listening and participating



FAO-Dimitra once again asked Cynthia de Windt to facilitate the workshop. This year, the group was made up of participants from various walks of life: actors in the field, NGO partners, partners representing institutions (bilateral cooperation, ministries for agriculture, etc.) and FAO colleagues.

As ever, Cynthia's good humour and ability to encourage the participants to express themselves were valuable assets and kept the group motivated throughout their work. Cynthia's approach is based on cross-fertilisation within a process of discussion based on differences and agreements that allows ideas to be shared. She supports the group on its mission and sees her role as being like that of a midwife: even when the pain is extreme (and the discussions difficult or chaotic), she cannot do anything about it – work must continue until the birth. The importance lies in the exchanges which take place.

As with previous workshops, the methodology was based on listening and participating, an approach where each individual talks about his or her experiences and listens to and learns from others' contributions. The principle is that every idea is valid and all remarks are useful, since, all things considered, the most important thing is that suggestions are shared. This process may be rather surprising or unusual at first, but it proved popular with all of the participants.

# Understanding the past and focusing on the present

A **timeline** was set for the period between 1995 and 2008 – each participant had to discuss his or her experiences over this period and share a vision of key events and developments as regards land access. The following four contexts constituted the main focus of the discussions:

- Personal/organisational (professional)
- National/regional/global
- Thematic: gender inequality and land access
- FAO-Dimitra: achievements made in the domain of gender inequality and land access

Participants exchanged experiences on each of these points, which allowed them to obtain an overview of the situation as regards the impact of gender inequality in land access on the food security and living conditions of rural populations in Africa.

## The personal/organisational context

- **Personal:** marriage/ children, acquisition of property, death in the family, change in marital status (marriage, divorce, remarriage)
- **Professional:** beginning professional activities, absences, capacity-building /training, new projects, promotion and change of professional status
- **In organisations and in the domain of access to land:** starting work in an organisation, supporting women's organisations in the domain of land tenure, project evaluation, experiences in field-schools, flourishing community radio stations, creation of Dimitra in 1994, shift from “women & development” to “gender & development”, advocacy for the adoption of laws on tenure, promotion, repackaging and dissemination of inheritance laws



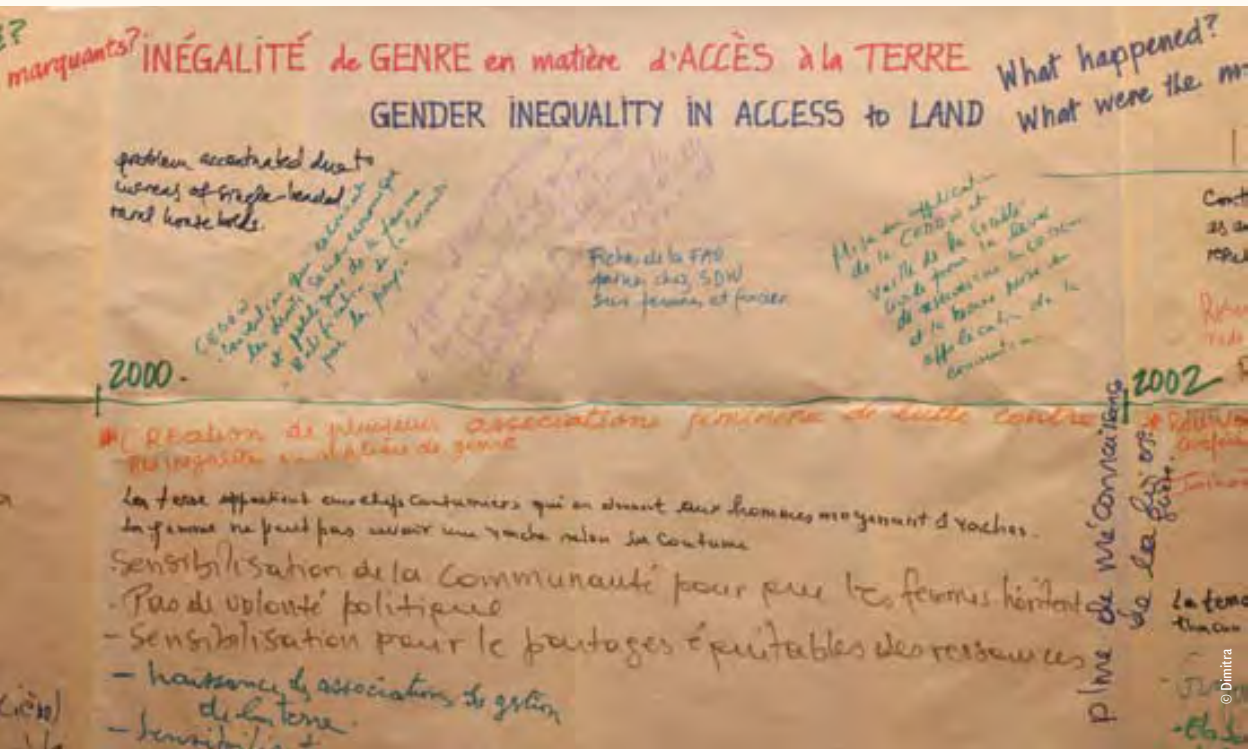
## The national/regional/global context

### Economic and development issues:

- Overall background of climatic, political and economic instability
- Millennium Development Goals far from being achieved
- World food crisis
- International community not interested in financing agriculture
- Creation and adoption of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs), including food security
- Decentralisation processes
- Boom in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), both traditional and modern (Internet, text messaging, etc.)

### Gender issues:

- The Beijing Conference
- Increased attention to gender issues, but with no tangible results
- Adoption of laws on quotas and creation of Gender Units in several countries (ministries, institutions) and international organisations
- Adoption of Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security by the UN Security Council



## The context as regards gender inequality in access to land

### Obstacles and constraints related to land access:

- Absence of laws or non-application of laws on land tenure
- Dichotomy between state/customary systems
- Lack of political motivation
- Poverty in rural areas
- Single-parent families (female-headed households)
- AIDS

### Some progress and achievements:

- Involvement of civil society
- Documentation of the problem
- Early stages in development of political motivation
- Participatory approach when drawing up laws and texts
- CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by many countries
- Information and communication on gender and land tenure: FAO publications, Dimitra newsletters, Dimitra workshops in Senegal, FAO-UNFPA-UNICEF documentary films, discussion forums, media, and so on

## The FAO-Dimitra context

### Publications :

- Several publications: Dimitra newsletter, workshop brochures
- Database: online and on CD-ROM
- Reports and publications in national languages
- Media: radio, written press, television

### Participatory communication:

- Via the radio and other media
- Radio listeners' clubs

### Partnerships, synergies and activities

- Cooperation and sharing with all local partners
- Cooperation with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), German development cooperation (GTZ-Health), Swiss development cooperation, Canadian development cooperation, UNDP, UNIFEM, and others.
- Future project in the framework of the 'Knowledge management and Gender' programme (led by FAO)
- Networking





# Common issues

Following discussions on the time lines, it was possible to draw up a **list of topics and problems which are common** to everyone. The participants then worked in small groups for further consideration of the issue of land access. At this stage in the workshop, all participants had to highlight, based on their own knowledge and experience, what should be taken into account when discussing gender inequality in land access. In which areas should action be taken, what are the direct and remote causes, what are the effects on women's status and role, especially in rural areas?

The participants then drew a **mind map** with the core issue – gender inequality in access to land – in the centre, and all the ideas and suggestions on the subject added in around it. All of the participants could add new branches or extensions to the mind map, placed depending on how important the suggestion was deemed to be. Reading the mind map highlighted the significance of the problem of rural women's access to land and the extent of the obstacles to be overcome.

These **obstacles** can be placed into several categories:

- Sociological and cultural: traditions and customs, patriarchal systems, land tenure systems that favour men;
- Legal and legislative: absence or non-application of laws, dichotomy between laws and customs, laws that discriminate against women;
- Political: women's role and status, decision-making reserved for men;
- Economic: difficulties in accessing means of production and loans, limited income;
- Obstacles linked to education and training, lack of information on women's rights, and so forth.

## “Prouds” and “sorries”

The trends outlined by the mind map were then used as a basis for the rest of the workshop. The participants worked in groups to analyse the main themes, discussing what is being done at present to fight gender inequality in land access, the progress that has been made, what should be done and what can be done, with each person talking about his or her own area of expertise. This exercise led to participants mentioning **sources of pride** and **regrets** in relation to specific issues.

**Laws:** real progress has been made as regards the willingness to revise/adopt laws aiming to improve women's status. However, the gap between laws and their implementation and the absence of repackaging and dissemination of adopted laws is still deplored.



**Customs:** we have noticed an increased attention to gender by traditional chiefs (religious or customary) and a heightened awareness among women and other members of the community. However, there are still obstacles to overcome, such as the dichotomy between laws and customs, the fact that it is impossible / difficult to question old-fashioned traditions and customs, and the inadequate adaptation of the gender concept to the local context.

**Education:** more girls are going to school and there is a real drive to promote education and literacy in rural areas. However, stereotypes are still dominant in education. The gender dimension has not been integrated into educational projects and the Millennium Development Goals are far from being achieved.

**Economic and political power:** when discussing this point, the participants emphasised the development of female leadership, increased involvement of women in decision-making bodies, participation of women in meetings or training courses and the existence of organisational structures led by women at local, national and regional level, not forgetting women's role in the creation of banks, health insurance funds and microfinance programmes. The participants' regrets in this area included the lack of control women have over resources, their limited access to economic and financial resources, insufficient funding of agricultural economic programmes, inadequate budgets being allocated to vulnerable sectors (agriculture, gender, health, education) or the lack of representation of women.

**Taking account of gender:** a growing number of studies and research works have been written on gender and gender issues are also mentioned in speeches and in discussion meetings such as those held in radio listeners' clubs. Thanks to capacity-building, women are now more able to make their voices heard. However, the gender concept is still insufficiently understood and, in general, men do not tend to become involved in defending the cause of women. Reliable statistical data and broader dissemination of the findings of studies would certainly support capacity-building and skills development for the concerned communities and their decision-makers.



# An inventory of the current situation

After analysing and discussing the 'prouds' and 'sorries', the participants formed two groups, one to draw up a list of areas requiring action and the other to suggest solutions. The suggestions in the reports from the two groups were retained for use as an action plan for future information and communication strategies.

## Dearth of information and communication on:

- Human rights (international conventions) and their universality
- Existing laws (land tenure, family law etc.)
- Farming techniques, financial management, organising and structuring organisations, appropriate communication techniques

## Problems posed by laws/customs/religion:

- Existence of discriminatory laws
- Absence or non-application of laws
- Dichotomy between laws and customs
- Ignorance of laws/procedures
- Women/community stakeholders often not involved in drawing up laws
- Predominance of discriminatory customs, especially in rural areas

## Too little research:

- Shortage of reliable and gender disaggregated data (quantitative/qualitative)
- Not enough investment in research
- Inadequate documentation
- Insufficient sharing of findings and experiences
- Lack of cooperation between researchers, communities and decision-makers
- Findings of research not applied



## Impact on the living conditions of rural populations, particularly women:

- Insufficient agricultural production
- Food insecurity, with repercussions for health and infant and maternal mortality
- Under-investment in rural development
- Lack of progress as regards women's status
- Dependence of women / women's work overload
- Children's under-education
- Increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and sexual and domestic violence
- Defeminisation of agricultural production
- Relocation/exodus

**Analysis of the situation emphasises the urgent need to take action in certain areas, such as capacity-building, education, repackaging and dissemination, support, action-oriented research, advocacy and lobbying and boosting women's socio-economic and political power.**

It is also essential to carry out cross-sectoral activities at different levels (local, national, regional and international) for networking, in cooperation with those involved in the field, federating all stakeholders and mobilising resources.



# Action plan

After examining the state of play of the current situation and discussing the problems, the participants drew up an action plan for information and communication strategies. It concerns six key areas:

## Education, training and capacity-building:

- Equal education and training for boys and girls
- Informal education and training for young people, outside of formalised educational structures
- Literacy activities for adults
- Exchanges
- Structuring organisations and associations

## Repackaging, dissemination and support:

- Legal texts and laws
- Good practices and lessons learned
- Capacity-building
- Technical assistance
- Legal assistance

## Action-oriented research:

- Research
- Gathering information
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators
- Gender disaggregated data
- Documenting experiences
- Publicising findings



### Advocacy and lobbying:

- Mobilisation of organisations for monitoring and advocacy
- Political positioning and involvement for women
- Advocacy and lobbying of customary chiefs and various state bodies
- Building capacities in the domains of communication, advocacy and lobbying of civil society

### Women's socio-economic and political empowerment:

- Securing land
- Access to resources
- Control of production
- Participation of women in decision-making bodies

### Cross-sectoral actions:

- Networking
- Synergy with players in the field (coordination and sharing)
- Federating stakeholders (governments, civil society, donors, communities, etc.)
- Mobilisation of resources (funding, human resources, skills, etc.)

# Appropriate methodologies and communication tools

Each partner will outline its own communication strategy, which will be implemented according to needs and depending on the different target groups. A whole range of tools are available that can be combined to reach several target groups at the same time, at local, intermediary or national level. Tools will be adapted and used differently from country to country and from one context to another.

**Television:** national, private, TV magazines

**Written press:** press conferences, press coffees, press releases

Theatre, sketches, proverbs, sayings, songs

**Radio:** national and community stations, radio series, radio listeners' clubs

Exhibitions, posters, leaflets, brochures, newsletters

## Tools...

**Websites,** blogs, Wikis, e-mail, CD-ROM, database

Open letters, discussion forums, press breakfasts

**Mobile phones,** text messaging

Literacy centres, Community Knowledge Centres

**Films/video:** documentaries, short films, adverts

Workshops, field schools, round tables, facilitation, exchange visits

# Self-evaluation

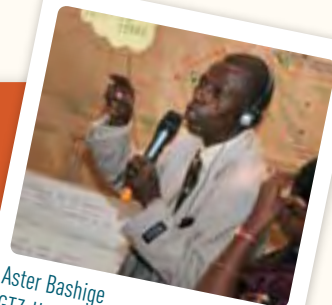
At the end of the workshop, participants had the opportunity to assess their participation in the workshop. From the choice of topic to the methodology and the action plan, all participants were pleased with the quality of the work. They were particularly enthusiastic about the opportunity for exchanging knowledge and sharing good practices.

Here are a few comments:

“ The workshop completely lived up to my expectations in that the conclusions we drew will serve as inspiration for creating information and communication strategies in my area of activity, that is, HIV/AIDS and violence against women.

The workshop also gave me the opportunity to see various partners again and I was particularly happy to see that the network had expanded and that there were new members.

As for the workshop itself, although the first two days went very well, I got the impression that we lost the thread somewhat on the third day. In the end, we concluded well and set up a good communication strategy. I have enough elements to give a good report of the workshop to my organisation, GTZ-Health, but also at Province level and to grassroots organisations in South Kivu. ”



Aster Bashige  
GTZ-Health, RDC

“ I think that we explored the topic well since the objectives were clear and we could tell that everything was well-prepared from the start. The exchange of experiences from the field and the discussions of concrete examples consolidated and confirmed my own experiences in the field in Africa. I think that capacity-building for women is an important subject and I will certainly broach it with my colleagues in Rome. ”



Lucia Palombi  
FAO-NRLA

“ The Swiss Development Cooperation is very active in the development of pastoral and agricultural production in Niger. This workshop was an opportunity to increase exchanges and strengthen our partnership with the FAO-Dimitra network. And I’m convinced that the dynamic generated by the workshop will boost this cooperation in the future.

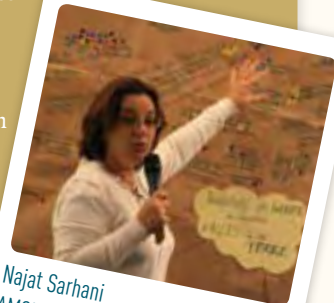
What really grabbed my attention over the five days of the workshop was the participatory process, which allowed a lot of room for exchanging ideas and sharing experiences. It was so interesting that I was never tired at the end of the day. ”



Catherine Belemsigri  
Swiss Development Cooperation in Niger

“ For me, this workshop was an opportunity to get a better idea of activities within the network and the relations between the FAO-Dimitra project and bodies such as FAO and the King Baudouin Foundation. I left the workshop with more conviction as regards strengthening our partnership. Thanks to the exchanges that took place, I was able to learn from other people’s experiences and this backs up my wish to expand our data collection programme, for instance, to Tunisia and Algeria.

My organisation works in the domain of water management but I think that defining communication strategies and capacity-building are useful in all sectors linked to agricultural development and rural populations. ”



Najat Sarhani  
AMSED, Morocco

“ The friendly atmosphere and the feeling of being part of a family gave this event a particularly pleasant feel. I must admit that in the beginning I had some doubts and concerns about how the work would be followed through. I thought that we’d just be congratulating ourselves and exchanging hugs for the rest of the week and that nothing would come of what we’d done in the workshop. However, at the end of the first day, I saw that the methodology we’d been using was completely different to anything I’d experienced. We’ve reached the end of the week now and I realise that I wasn’t bored for a second. All participants were involved at all levels, all the time. The facilitator reorganised the work whenever necessary, which allowed us to share ideas. I found the exchanges of experiences particularly good. I thought that this workshop was very interesting and I must say that the work done exceeded my expectations. ”



Åke Olofsson  
FAO-AGSF



a.s.b.l.

# RADIO BUBUSA



## Example of good practice



During the workshop, the experience of the listeners' clubs in South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was often cited as an enriching experience, an example of a good practice to be shared. This project shows to what extent information and communication are essential elements for awareness raising and mobilisation, for the empowerment of rural women, for them to know and recognise their rights, for their capacity to organise themselves and for a better acknowledgement of their role within the community. By way of illustration we present a few excerpts from an article which was published in the Dimitra Newsletter, Issue 14 (March 2008)

### South Kivu – *Solar radios change the lives of women in rural areas*

Communication equipment – more specifically solar-powered radios, recorders and digital receivers – was recently provided to listeners' clubs for men and women, women's networks in rural areas and community radio stations in the Province of South Kivu in the DRC. The solar radios have been put in the care of women. This means that radios are no longer the exclusive possession of the men of the villages. Whole evenings can now be spent round the fire listening to the radio; the radio wave has entered people's kitchens and can even be listened to by farmers – both women and men – as they work their fields. (...)

The listeners' clubs and women's networks are based in eight rural districts within the province. Their members were delighted to receive the solar radios. The women, who are in charge of the radios, are particularly pleased that they will now be able to stay abreast of activities carried out by women in other areas. This in turn will better arm them to tackle their main concerns: safeguarding the daily survival of their families and promoting the development of their communities. (...)

#### Sharing knowledge and experiences of development

Mrs M'Bisimwa is a member of the Mugogo Communication Axis (a unit that brings together two or more women's groups so as to enable them to exchange information and share experiences). Together with the other members of her group she recently listened to a programme broadcast on Radio Maendeleo on breeding guinea pigs. She learnt a lot from it and within just two weeks' time she had started breeding them herself. For now she has only a few animals, but she already manages to feed her children with the meat at least once a week, which is good for their health.

Again thanks to a radio programme, the members of the Rhuhinduke listeners' club in Mugogo learned of a twofold initiative undertaken by a group of women from Fizi. On the one hand they had created a mutual assistance fund for women and, on the other hand, had begun to manufacture corrugated tiles which





they placed onto their kitchen roofs, without any intervention by their husbands. The mutual assistance fund is capped at USD 100. The 150 women who are members of the fund keep it afloat by paying in USD 0.20 each week. Those who are most in need are then given an interest-free loan which they can pay back over time.

After discussing what they had heard during the programme, the members of the Mugogo listeners' club took the idea launched by their counterparts in Fizi one step further: they decided to create a savings and credit cooperative. They calculated that, without being overly ambitious, by breeding 20 rabbits they could earn the group a sum of USD 1500 over a period of 12 months. They are already collecting the money to buy the first 20 rabbits, which will be distributed amongst the 20 members of the club, 15 of whom are women and 5 men.

### Breaking the silence in families on HIV/AIDS

Many members of listeners' clubs and women's networks in rural areas report that those men and women who take part in activities to raise awareness of how to combat HIV/AIDS, very often tend to pass on and discuss the relevant information within their group only. A large majority is hesitant to broach the subject



within the family unit, in front of their spouse and children.

One evening, when it was her turn to take the solar radio home, Mrs Iranga, who is a member of the Ciherano Communication Axis, took advantage of the opportunity to talk about HIV/AIDS with her family. Her husband, children and neighbours all listened to a programme on HIV/AIDS broadcast in Mashi, the local language. She had expected that everyone would leave, preferring not to be confronted with this sensitive issue, but was surprised to see how attentively they all followed the programme, even her husband. And before she could speak at the end of the broadcast, one of her neighbours had already set the tone. The entire group then chimed in, young and old alike. Ever since, Iranga has felt much freer to talk about HIV/AIDS within her family and with her neighbours. *“My neighbours are impatiently awaiting my next turn for the radio. Once it has made its way round the 42 other members of my group, it will come back to me and we will listen to more programmes, particularly sketches. This has become my task and I feel responsible for it”*, she explains.

In Uvira, as in Kalehe, various listeners' clubs have discussed specific traditional practices that can favour the spread of HIV/AIDS in their area. These include tattooing, polygamy and discrimination against women and girls. Using illustrations, the facilitators of the Kalehe listeners' club analyse the transmission chain of HIV/AIDS and clearly demonstrate that if people do not become aware of the problem, the scourge can be passed on to an entire community in no time by one individual who may even be a stranger to them.

### Equality in expression and in division of tasks

*“This is the first time in the many years I've been a member of various groups that I have participated in a debate on gender awareness. I had always thought this was a topic that favoured women and went against men!”* This observation was made by one of the members of the Kalehe listeners' club at the end of a debate on the roles of women and men in running the household. The discussion was held during a SAMWAKI training session for the members of the Kalehe listeners' club and women's networks in September 2007. At the end of the training session, in view of the many ambiguities and misunderstandings put forward by the participants on the notion of gender roles, a debate was held during which the men and women became quite entrenched in opposition to one another and were no longer really listening. In order to defuse the situation, the facilitator suggested that they make a table of the different activities carried out by the men and the women.

Once they had accounted for all 24 hours in the day, fresh momentum was given to the discussion and the participants recognised that the well-being of the family can only be attained through cooperation between men and women, specifically by fair distribution of tasks within the household.

### Conclusion

Solar, crank-powered radios provide the people, and in particular the women, of the rural areas of South Kivu with access to information and enable them to share ideas and practices. The members of the listeners' clubs now have at their disposal a tool that will enhance their knowledge in a host of areas related to community development. Combating HIV/AIDS, gender education, agriculture, animal husbandry and food security, protection of the environment, hygiene, habitat, human rights and women's rights are just some of the issues being debated within the listeners' clubs and grassroots organisations. (...)

A woman wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned headwrap and a matching sleeveless top and skirt sits on the ground next to a large, circular concrete water tank. She is holding a large bundle of green leafy vegetables, possibly fennel or a similar root vegetable, with both hands. She is looking towards the right of the frame. The background shows a field of green crops. The text "Speeches by officials" is overlaid in white on the image.

Speeches by officials

## Luc Tayart de Borms

Managing director, King Baudouin Foundation



I would like to begin by welcoming you to the premises of the King Baudouin Foundation for the closure of the FAO-Dimitra workshop in which you have just participated.

It is a great pleasure for me to see all of the partners of the FAO-Dimitra workshop here at the King Baudouin Foundation and to see how the Dimitra network has grown over the years, which is obvious by the higher number of participants in the workshop. The commitment of all of these partners has meant that we now talk about a Dimitra spirit. We at the King Baudouin Foundation are proud to contribute to Dimitra. This is why the Foundation has been working for several years on boosting synergies with the Dimitra network's partners in the provinces of South Kivu and Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

An awareness-raising project on HIV/AIDS was conducted in partnership with Dimitra and GTZ-Health, supporting SAMWAKI, a network of rural women's organisations that was created in 2002 and is one of Dimitra's partners. With the support of the FAO-Dimitra project, SAMWAKI has set up radio listeners' clubs and has distributed 44 solar-powered and wind-up radios.

In rural areas, little is done to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. In partnership with Dimitra and GTZ-Health, SAMWAKI integrated awareness-raising on gender issues and HIV/AIDS into its activities by forming nine rural 'radio listeners' clubs' to discuss HIV/AIDS and develop strategies for advocacy and action.

Initial results, which are very encouraging, show that:

- men and women are represented equally when it comes to managing radio listeners' clubs;
- in three territories, men now accompany their wives to prenatal consultations, where information is given about HIV;
- thanks to their attendance of prenatal consultations, men are increasingly willing to be tested for HIV.

We are very pleased that this joint initiative has been recognised by FAO's evaluation service as an example of "successful integration of raising awareness of HIV/AIDS into an FAO project".

Furthermore, a good indicator of this initiative's success is that the radio listeners' clubs method is going to be replicated in Katanga Province by REFED-Katanga, Dimitra's partner in Lubumbashi, with the support of GTZ-Health, SAMWAKI and FAO.

It is a great pleasure for the King Baudouin Foundation to have supported the FAO-Dimitra project for so many years, and I would like to congratulate the project for its high-quality activities and the impact of its work.

I am particularly pleased to see all of those who work in the field here today. You are the ones who make things move, contribute to changes in behaviour and work for the well-being of your communities.

I am also very glad of this opportunity to meet all of the other participants who, with their knowledge and expertise, help to strengthen the network. I refer to the technical divisions of FAO as well as the representatives of bilateral organisations, GTZ-Health and the Swiss and Canadian development cooperation agencies.

I will be very interested to hear more about what you have been discussing all week and I can assure you that the King Baudouin Foundation will pay very close attention to your conclusions and recommendations.



**Joergen Maersk Pedersen**  
Director of the FAO Liaison Office  
with the European Union and Belgium



It is an honour for me to join the partners of the FAO-Dimitra project a little more than three years after the workshop on the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security.

The theme of this year's workshop, developing information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality in access to land in Africa, is vitally important for agriculture, nutrition and food security on the African continent.

Africa is currently being badly affected by the massive increase in the price of foodstuffs. This price explosion is forcing more and more vulnerable people, particularly women, far below the poverty line. It is having devastating consequences for households who sometimes spend more than 80% of their income on food.

The African continent is very vulnerable in this food crisis. It imports up to 70% of the food it needs, whereas in the 1970s, it was self-sufficient. Decades of negligence and inadequate investments in the agricultural sector account for the lack and poor state of infrastructure. On average, only 7% of arable land in Africa is irrigated (dropping to 4% in sub-Saharan Africa), while the average is 17% for the world and 38% in Asia. Crop losses are sometimes as high as 40 to 60% for some agricultural products.

It is no longer necessary to prove the vital importance of women's role in food security. At major conferences and summits in recent years, political leaders from all over the world have pointed out and reiterated the need to adopt measures aiming to guarantee rural women work and increase their economic security as well as their control of and access to resources and services. Particular examples include the Food Summits in Rome in 1996 and 2002, the Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Porto Alegre in 2006 and, more recently, the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome in June 2008.

In 2005, the UN's member states ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. If this international instrument is not applied, it will not be possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those relating to reducing poverty and hunger by half by 2015.

And yet there is still a paradox: a high proportion of foodstuffs are produced by women, but women are often denied access to the instruments they need for this work, such as the factors of production, credit, information, training and decision-making power.

Most cultivable surfaces are owned by men, with women only owning 20% of arable land at the very most in many countries. Despite owning so little land, women in sub-Saharan Africa are responsible for around 80% of food production and make up 80 to 90% of the workforce in processing, storing and transporting food. In many regions, their contribution is even larger due to the exodus of men towards the towns.

Land tenure rights are often held by men or family groups controlled by men, and women only have access to land via a male relative, usually a father or husband. Moreover, the limited access to land that women do have is very unstable.

A Zambian study has shown that over a third of widows are denied access to the family land after their husbands die. A World Bank study conducted in Ghana demonstrated that when women have tenure rights for the land they are cultivating, there is a significant rise in productivity: female agricultural workers who do not have guaranteed tenure rights are less inclined to let their land lie fallow, and yields are severely reduced as a result. Estimates say that their production could increase by a third if they were given deeds to the land.

Despite concerted efforts in several countries to promote equal rights for women with regard to land, as part of the agenda for development, many institutional, social, cultural and particularly economic obstacles still exist, meaning that rural families, and especially women, are denied appropriate access to land and the guarantee of being able to use the land and its produce.

The international community is now committed to dedicating more resources to supporting the agricultural sector in developing countries, especially the productivity of food-producing crops, in which women play an important role. Strategies and solutions for increasing production, developing sustainable agriculture and ensuring fair development must involve giving rural women access to information and communication.

The FAO-Dimitra project's vital activities in this domain are indisputably recognised by everyone. The project is able to make its information tools and communication methods available for spreading knowledge and encouraging discussion of access to and control of productive resources.

This has certainly been the case for the work we did today on gender inequality in land access.

The Dimitra project's exemplary activities over the years were made possible by the support and financial involvement of the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and the King Baudouin Foundation, both of which I would like to thank very much on behalf of FAO. My thanks also go to all other donors contributing to the project's activities in the field, including GTZ and the Swiss and Canadian development cooperation agencies, to name but a few.

I would like to conclude by thanking the entire coordination team of the Dimitra project, all of its partners who are here today and finally everyone from FAO's technical divisions for your dynamism and your contribution to the project's success.

**Marcela Villarreal**

Director, Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division

FAO



## **Gender and access to land: the impact of crisis situations**

In spite of numerous commitments by the international community, FAO recently presented disturbing new numbers on food insecurity in the world.

In addition to the 842 million undernourished people before the crisis, 75 million became undernourished due to soaring food prices. As usual, it is the poorest people who suffer the most from this type of crisis.

FAO analysed who was most affected by this crisis. Using data from 12 countries, we found that those most affected are the urban poor; not surprisingly, as they cannot or usually do not produce food and cannot afford to buy it if it becomes more expensive. But an interesting finding in the poorest countries was that also in rural areas, most people are not net food sellers but net food buyers. One tends to assume that people in the rural areas are food producers, but nationally representative data showed that more or less two thirds of rural dwellers are net food buyers! Of course, they are much more affected than others by the current crisis because they have to pay for their food and are not able to increase their production to the level in which they would profit from selling the produce at a higher price.

Another finding was that in all the countries under analysis, the most affected by the crisis are female-headed households. There are several reasons for this:

- Generally, male-headed households own statistically larger average land holdings than female-headed households (in some countries, male-headed households have land holdings which are up to three times larger than those of female-headed households).
- In equal conditions and at the same level of income, female-headed households tend to spend relatively more on food than male-headed households. Therefore, increased food prices will affect them more.
- There is a huge difference in access to resources, and very specifically to land. Hence, the data show clearly that the fact that female-headed households carry the brunt of the crisis is related to the issue of lack of access and/or ownership of land and other productive resources.



Considering these findings, FAO has recommended to governments a policy agenda to mitigate the impact of soaring food prices:

- Safety nets, social protection and rapid recovery of agriculture;
- Improving trade policies;
- Stimulating agricultural investment and supply response as fundamental priorities;
- Creating a global enabling environment for carrying out policies.

Female headed households should be given special attention particularly when developing safety nets, as well as for targeting households to increase small scale production through the distribution of subsidised inputs.

### Gender and land in sub-Saharan Africa

Land rights in sub-Saharan Africa, as in other regions, are governed by institutions that are culturally and socially determined. Many sub-Saharan African countries, for example, practice a custom called “levirate”, a system in which, when a husband dies, the wife will marry one of the brothers or another relative of the deceased person. On the one hand, levirate can be seen as social protection: the widow will not be left on her own, she will continue to be part of the clan and therefore will have access to its resources. But on the other hand, levirate, besides being a custom which does not allow women the right to choose their partner, can be seen as an institution that protects male rights to land, as it doesn’t allow women to own land. They only have access to land through marriage, and if the marriage breaks up, through for example HIV/AIDS or any other crisis situation, the women lose their access to the clan’s resources, and very specifically to land. It is therefore important to promote women’s property rights, not only to ensure access, as access rights may be temporary.

In many countries, there are laws that give equal property rights to women and men. However, in most cases these laws are not enforced. Most of the time, the customary systems that grant inheritance in property rights only to men have prevalence over the statutory laws that advocate for equality of land inheritance.

### The impact of HIV/AIDS on land access and ownership

HIV/AIDS is one of the issues which have been extensively discussed throughout the week. Available data show that the spread of the epidemic is incredibly fast and its consequences huge, even in countries where HIV prevalence rates are starting to go down. Even in those places, the impact of the crisis is going to be felt for a very long time. AIDS orphans, for example, estimated to be 18 million in 2010, will grow up without the agricultural skills and knowledge that their parents would have transferred to them. Without this knowledge, their future food security will be compromised.

FAO has been studying the impact of HIV/AIDS on the agricultural sector, on agricultural labour and production and on food security for nearly 20 years. Over the years, we have found that the epidemic has very concrete impacts on land tenure systems: loss of land rights, including inheritance rights, shifts in ownership tenure and distress-sales. The use of land is also changing because of the epidemic. Very specifically, there is a huge reduction in the amount of land cultivated in the most affected areas.



There is also an increase of the traditional custom whereby male relatives of a widow grab her property and that of the deceased man. In one of FAO's studies in Namibia, 42% of widows reported losing cattle, livestock and farm equipment. Many other studies have also shown loss of land, very specifically land grabbing by male relatives of widows, leaving these women completely destitute. We have also seen an increase in intra-familial disputes related to land and HIV/AIDS.

Another FAO study showed that female-headed households in the northern province of Zambia have smaller average land size than male-headed households affected by HIV/AIDS, and all of these are significantly smaller than those of households not affected by HIV/AIDS.

Many studies have demonstrated a clear interaction between HIV/AIDS, gender issues, land issues, increase of vulnerability and increase of food insecurity.

### What can we do?

There is a need for:

- Promoting statutory laws which address these issues, very specifically those related to the interaction between HIV/AIDS, gender and land systems, in order to have more equality in the distribution of resources.
- Information and communication initiatives involving all of the local stakeholders, including community leaders, religious leaders, traditional healers, etc.
- Setting up community watchdogs. The example of listeners' clubs can be very powerful to address this specific kind of issue.
- Improved public policy so that it can reach more effectively the most vulnerable.
- Promoting the empowerment of women with specific strategies, based on information and communication.
- More research to provide data that allows to better understand the situation, and to inform information, communication and advocacy campaigns.
- Effective communication strategies which are context-dependent: in order to be effective and to address the specific needs of different groups, communication strategies have to be very clearly grounded in the local context and the cultural norms, institutions, attitudes, values and history of that context.
- Active promotion of property rights for women, not only promote and advocate for access to land and inputs.

### Malawi: an example of a communication campaign

In Malawi FAO promoted, together with other organisations, an amendment to the Wills and Inheritance Act, in order to improve property and inheritance rights for women. Through this amendment, any property grabbing by a deceased spouse's relatives is declared to be a criminal act, subject to prosecution. The bill was passed as a result of a large information and communication campaign which aimed to convince people by making them see how this bill would be important to reduce food insecurity and to promote gender equality.

A lot of work was done through information and communication, sensitization and awareness-raising on the relationship between property grabbing, food insecurity and poverty. There were also quite innovative workshops with media houses and, at the level of decision-makers, with the parliament and at community level on writing wills. A big radio campaign with jingles, thematic advertisements, radio dramas and all-in panel discussions was organised for about four weeks. All programmes were broadcast in local languages, in order to reach more people.

The outcomes of this information and communication campaign were:

- An increased awareness among rural and urban people on the existence of this Bill;
- Enhanced understanding of the importance of writing a will;
- Enhanced understanding of the relationship between property grabbing and food security (many people called the radio station telling them their stories of property grabbing).

I would like to finish here and just underline once again the importance and the powerfulness of the FAO-Dimitra project to address these very acute problems in an innovative and participatory way which will lead to solutions based on a clear understanding of the issues.

I would like to very much thank the Belgian Development Cooperation, without which the Dimitra project would not be possible, as well as the King Baudouin Foundation and all the other partners that have contributed to this initiative.



**John Cornet d'Elzius**  
Assistant Director of the Policy Unit  
of the Minister for Development Cooperation



It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to represent Minister Charles Michel at the closure of the workshop on land access organised by the FAO-Dimitra project and its partners. Dimitra is a trailblazing, innovative project in the domain of gender equality and the topic selected for the workshop is particularly important: women's access to land has always been a major problem and it remains so today. Exchanging information, communication and developing advocacy at local, national and regional levels are crucial for tackling this problem. This is all the more true given the current background of the food crisis that is devastating many countries. I will return to this point later.

The Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation has been supporting the Dimitra project for several years now via its multilateral cooperation with FAO. A new four-year phase in this cooperation began this year. Between 2008 and 2011, the Belgian Development Cooperation will contribute a total of four million dollars to the Dimitra project. As I said before, Dimitra is an innovative project since it gives power and a voice to rural women's organisations by linking them up in networks, supported by new information technology or traditional local methods like rural radio stations, as well as by publications and workshops like this one. Dimitra is also a participative project as it listens to rural women and meets the needs that they have identified via a bottom-up approach. Dimitra is a unifying project, stimulating the emergence of communities of interest by exchanging information, experiences and good practices. Finally, Dimitra is a catalyst project – it strengthens its partner organisations by helping them to develop strategic advocacy with a view to influencing all development actors. At this point, I would like to congratulate the project's coordinator, Eliane Najros, and everyone involved in this inspiring project that is a source of both hope and change.

In the general policy memorandum that he submitted to the Chamber of Representatives in April 2008, Minister Charles Michel stressed once more that gender equality was a priority. He reiterated that gender equality is both a basic human right and an issue of social justice and emphasised that gender equality and work to build people's defensive, socio-cultural, political, economic and human capacities are vital for ensuring fair and sustainable development, fighting poverty and food insecurity, guaranteeing lasting peace and achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals. Women's rights, particularly their status and the respect of their rights, therefore lie at the very core of the Minister's policy and also tie in with the main concerns of the Dimitra project.

The Belgian Development Cooperation is therefore determined to accelerate progress in the domain of gender equality by supporting its partners' efforts. With this in mind, it has developed a gender mainstreaming strategy that is complemented by funding for specific initiatives aiming to fight discrimination against women and/or promote their rights and their independence.

As far as policy is concerned, four priority areas for action have been identified:

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights, with particular attention to preventing and fighting HIV/AIDS;
- The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, with a focus on aspects linked to combating sexual violence and impunity;
- Education for girls and training for women;
- Involvement of women in economic development.

All of these priority areas are very similar to those debated in Dimitra's workshops at local, national and regional level, meaning that Dimitra is making an active contribution to implementing this policy and that, thanks to Dimitra, we and other donors can benefit from experiences and good practices from the field.

As I mentioned before, the topic chosen for this workshop is vitally important in the framework of the debates on responding to the food crisis. Indeed, we should bear in mind that women produce 60 to 70% of food in most developing countries and that they are responsible for half of world food production. Women's key role



as producers and providers of supplies and their essential contribution to food security should therefore be given our full attention and emphasised very strongly.

Over the past few months, rapidly climbing food prices have placed the issues of hunger and food security at the top of the international agenda. According to estimates, over 100 million people are currently at risk of not having enough food, in addition to the 860 million who already suffer chronic food insecurity.

In this specific context, a human rights based approach is essential and it is crucial that women have equal access to land (and all of its elements, including wood, water and sub-soil), credit, inputs and services. It is now more urgent than ever that the causes of gender inequality – and more specifically, gender inequality linked to land access – are identified clearly and that appropriate strategies are defined to fight them.

I am convinced that this workshop has made an important contribution to finding solutions at local, national and even international level.

The key role of agriculture, especially the food-producing crops in whose production women play a major part, was stressed at FAO's recent Food Summit.

Minister Charles Michel advocated increased investment in agriculture, a sector that has been neglected in recent years. He pledged to allocate 10% of Belgium's official development assistance to agriculture by 2010 and to increasing this to 15% by 2015. He also encouraged the international community to make the same commitment. Furthermore, he lobbied for a gradual increase in the purchase of local food products by the World Food Programme (WFP) and other national, regional and international institutions. Belgium is therefore dedicated to working to promote self-sufficiency and food security in Africa, the continent that has been hardest hit by the food crisis and will certainly suffer the most from the effects of climate change. To implement this commitment, we need to define a course of action, both qualitative and quantitative, in which gender equality and women's independence must play an important role if we are to achieve the expected results.

In this context, it is clear that exchanging knowledge, experiences and expertise on such important themes as land access – themes at the very heart of the Dimitra project – are essential factors and must be taken into account.

On behalf of the Minister, I would like once more to congratulate the Dimitra project, all of its partners and their representatives on both their continued efforts to promote gender equality and their working methods. I would also like to congratulate the Brussels and FAO teams for their commitment and dynamism, and finally the King Baudouin Foundation, which has supported the Dimitra project since its inception.

I will most certainly inform the Minister of the workshop's conclusions and recommendations and I can assure you that they will be taken on board, in accordance with their true value.



# List of participants

Ali Abdoulaye	ONG-VIE	Niger
Aster Bashige Ndjuzi	GTZ-Santé Bukavu	Democratic Republic of Congo
Catherine Belemsigri	Swiss Development Cooperation	Niger
Sophie Charlier	Le Monde selon les Femmes	Belgium
Yannick De Mol	FAO-Dimitra	Senegal
Cynthia de Windt	Facilitator	United States
Tiziana Franceschelli	FAO-Dimitra	Belgium
Concilie Gahungere	CAFOB	Burundi
Alison Hodder	FAO (AGPC)	Italy
Maartje Houbrechts	FAO-Dimitra	Belgium
Bernadette Kapend Mwambu	REFED-Katanga	Democratic Republic of Congo
Noah Lusaka	ALIN-EA	Kenya
Adamou Mahamane	FAO	Niger
Elise Muhimuzi	CONAFED	Democratic Republic of Congo
Grégoire Mutshaila Mutomb	FAO	Democratic Republic of Congo
Eliane Najros	FAO-Dimitra	Belgium
Adeline Nsimire Balika	SAMWAKI	Democratic Republic of Congo
Dorothy Okello	WOUGNET	Uganda
Åke Olofsson	FAO (AGSF)	Italy
Lucia Palombi	FAO (NRLA)	Italy
Mabika Dakeini Phuna	FAO	Democratic Republic of Congo
Mihaja Rasamimanana	ONE	Madagascar
Najat Sarhani	AMSED	Morocco
Marie-Antoinette Saya	Canadian Development Cooperation	Democratic Republic of Congo
Fatou Sow	ENDA-Pronat	Senegal
Sophie Treinen	FAO (KCEF)	Italy
Christine Tuyisenge	Pro-Femmes / Twese Hamwe	Rwanda
Françoise Bibiane Yoda	RECIF/ONG-BF	Burkina Faso







# Part II

Written contributions by the participants:  
Dimitra's partners and FAO colleagues



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## Ali Abdoulaye

ONG VIE Kande Ni Bayra

NIGER

Ali Abdoulaye is Coordinator of ONG VIE Kande Ni Bayra and President of the CaCoPEd network (Cadre de Concertation pour la Promotion de l'Éducation). His vocation is lobbying for quality education for all, in particular for young girls and rural women. His favourite pastime is camping in the African savannah, especially in his native "Moribaka" where the environment expresses, with its variations throughout the years, a sense of life, of existence and of bringing out intrinsic values.

His reading of the rural environment and of rural women is an integrated part of his daily existence. The education of his children and the activities which mark his commitment to development are all oriented towards the rural areas.

As he says: "I am rural, and I love being rural!"

ONG-VIE is Dimitra's partner organisation in the Sahel, covering Benin, Mali, Niger, Tchad and Togo.

# Rural women and farmland in Niger



## 1. Introduction

Niger is a large Sahelian country in West Africa with an area of 1,267,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of around 14 million (in 2006), of whom 80% live in rural areas. The country's national priority is fighting poverty.

Agriculture is the main economic activity practiced by the population of Niger and it accounts for 19% of the GDP. In spite of this, food insecurity has structural effects on over 30% of households and there is a food production deficit of 100,000 to 300,000 tonnes almost every two years. This situation results from the fact that over 60% of the population lives below the poverty line.

Agricultural production, which amounts to 3,000,000 tonnes per year, is generated by only 36% of land parcels, although there are 15 million hectares of land which could be cultivated. Around 1.6 million farming households are responsible for this production, and only 6.5% of these have women in charge.

This situation shows that although the causes of food insecurity include climatic and technological issues and the low rate of land development (36%), which is the result of serious problems regarding land, there is also extreme inequality between men and women. Our analysis focuses on the latter factor.

There are various different land ownership systems for agriculture in Niger. These are applied to varying extents:

- the system based on customary law, which is the most frequently applied system;
- the system based on Islamic law, which is normally referred to in disputes about inheritance;
- the system based on civil law.

Given that poverty and food insecurity are escalating, it is increasingly necessary to make women responsible for meeting their families' needs as regards food. If we want to gradually achieve autonomy for rural women without

overturning traditional values, we must consider the issue of women's management of agricultural production. It is especially important that their right to access and own the land they have operated for so long is recognised.

The fact is that over 50% of the working population are rural women, and the way they are marginalised and viewed as inferior when it comes to managing agricultural resources is a part of the reason that around 64% of potentially cultivable land is not being exploited. This situation explains the chronic deficits in food production that leave over 30% of households facing food insecurity.

Recurrent questions arising from this are as follows:

- Are there any strategies and opportunities for rural women to be able to own land, rather than just having access to it? If so, what are they?
- Could any local traditions, administrative rules or legal principles allow rural women to benefit from advantages regarding land rights and if so, are they aware of this?
- Is it only necessary to launch agricultural reforms or should there be concrete initiatives at local level to ensure that rural women are involved in obtaining their rights?

This article constitutes a layman's analysis of the land ownership situation. We will attempt to highlight the position of Niger's rural women as regards agricultural land, then we will focus on the Djerma-Songhai tradition and the Hausa tradition of Maradi, while also considering Islamic law and in Niger's civil law.

## 2. What land rights do women in Niger have?

Society in Niger, whose cultural diversity is the result of the presence of several ethnic groups (Hausa, Djerma-Songhai, Fulani, Tuareg, Kanuri, Buduma, Arab, Toubou and Gurma), is organised along traditional, patriarchal lines in most communities. Farming land generally belongs to



the families who founded the village or canton, and it is the village or canton chief who allocates land belonging to the community.

Land can be accessed through inheritance, though this is normally limited to men. There are other ways to access land, which differ depending on the customs in the area. They include purchase, rental, bequest, borrowing or land use in exchange for a deposit. However, the right to non-permanent ownership varies according to the traditions of different ethnic groups (Djerma-Songhai tradition and assimilated groups, and Hausa tradition and assimilated groups) and according to how much influence Islam has in the area.

Very few women have access to land property, despite provisions in both Islamic and civil law that grant women such rights. And although Islamic law seems to be spreading rapidly from the towns into the countryside, the same cannot be said of civil law – most people seem to be unaware of civil law and in any case, it is very rare for it to be used or applied.

Customary law does not allow women to own property in land because it is assumed that they have little or no time to tend it (as they spend most of their time looking after children and doing household chores) or because they marry outside the family and may sell their precious heritage to someone outside the family.

According to customary law, women's opportunities for accessing land are limited to user rights over plots of land of a few square metres (home gardens, plots for market gardening) covering less than half a hectare (*gamana*). These plots are allocated by the person in charge of exploiting them, the woman's husband. If women organise themselves into a group, they may receive permission from the village or canton chief (who is in charge of allocating the land in the area) to borrow and work collective irrigated or rain-fed land (on sites where off-season crops are grown).

The field or home garden is the area surrounding the house and is used during the rainy season to grow intensive crops or cash crops such as maize, sesame, bambara groundnuts, okra, sorrel or moringa. In the dry season, it is used as a garden, provided there is enough water. In these cases, most of the food produced is used to feed the household, so rural women cannot do as they please with their produce. In some traditions, this area, which is generally very fertile because of the household waste and animal dung

that permeate it, is exploited by the head of the household himself.

Community land for growing off-season crops is allocated to women's groups by village chiefs or other such officials for seasonal use only. They may only use the land to grow annual herbaceous crops and can only grow crops one season per year (not during the rainy season). Their entitlement to this land can be withdrawn if the group breaks up, if the owner decides to withdraw it or once the exploitation period as set out in the oral agreement permitting use of the land has ended. If an agreement has been made, the women may make some investments in the land (market garden wells, irrigation canals, fencing), but they may not plant fruit trees, as these are a symbol of land ownership.

#### **a) Djerma-Songhai customary law and women's access to farmland**

The village chief may bequeath some of the community's land to descendants of the families that founded the village. Members of these founding families may lend plots of land to families wishing to settle in the village, or they may sell the land.

In fact, the inheritance system makes it difficult to buy or sell farmland. In Djerma-Songhai culture, only male heirs can inherit farmland, which is distributed on a pro rata basis depending on the heirs' position in the family. One section of the inherited land is kept for the use of all the sons of one mother if they decide to continue working together for the time being. Possible and common speculations on farmland are purchase, lending, rental and use in exchange for a deposit, which only allows the user to use the produce from the land for a set period.

In Djerma-Songhai tradition, women are usually exempted from ploughing and hoeing the land for major cereal crops, but they are involved in sowing. Nevertheless, they have to tend the plot of land allocated to them by their husbands or third parties for growing cash crops.

Although this system protects small farmers' access to land, the flipside is that it excludes women (i.e. over 50% of the working population) from taking decisions relative to the development and working of farmland. This reduces the amount of land that can be developed, since women may only use the land or, in some cases, they may only use the land's produce. This largely explains why so much land – even the most fertile land – remains undeveloped in these areas.





### b) Hausa customary law regarding access to farmland

In Hausa culture, the village's founding families (zara'a) divide up the land and the village chief manages the community's land, as in Djerma-Songhai tradition. The village chief may not sell the community's land, but he may lend or give it to families from the village or families who wish to move to the village. Unlike in Djerma-Songhai tradition, farmland can be subject to various commercial transactions (rental, use in exchange for a deposit, sale or trade).

The Hausa define entitlement to land using the gandu/gamana system. The gandu is made up of all the large fields belonging to one family. The gandu chief (who is in charge of farming the land) is the owner of family land inherited from his parents. He is allowed to use the land, benefit from its produce and dispose of it if he wishes. The family, which is made up of several households (the gandu chief's household, his younger brothers' households, his sons' households, and so on), can use the produce of the gandu for some of the year. As a result, the gandu chief's right to dispose of the land is limited by the social control imposed by the rest of his family, though he may still sell some of his land.

The gandu chief grants his sons (aged 15 or over), his wives, his younger brothers, his younger brothers' wives and his sons' wives the right to operate small plots of his land, gamanas (covering around 0.25 ha). They can use this land and its produce. During the main agricultural season, the members of the gandu have to work in the gandu's main fields five or six days a week. Women and young people only have one or two days a week to tend their gamanas.

The produce harvested from the large fields in the gandu is the exclusive property of the gandu chief, who mainly uses it to feed himself (i.e. only himself, not his wives or children). He can also sell produce and use it to satisfy other needs (e.g. weddings, baptisms, journeys). The family can only use the produce of the gandu for food for three to four months of the year, during the main agricultural season. For the remaining eight or nine months, the women and children must feed themselves with the produce from their gamana and the remainder of the harvest from the gandu's fields.

A man inherits his part of the gandu when his father dies or when he is old enough to claim it, which is normally when he has sons old enough to have gamanas. At this point, he is given full rights (i.e. to use the land, use the pro-

duce and dispose of the land) over his own individual share of the *gandu*. He is then independent and a *gandu* chief in his own right.

Traditionally, women do not inherit land. They may only operate the *gamana* allocated to them by the land chief (their husbands), but they can own fields if they purchase them. When working in the fields, women are assisted by their sons-in-law (their daughters' husbands or fiancés), who must help them for a set number of years.

This system, since it allows land to be bought, favours larger operators who can expand and modernise their farms at the expense of small producers who, pressurised by poverty, may be expropriated.

### c) *Islamic law and ownership of farmland*

Islamic law allows women to inherit: a woman may inherit half of what a man inherits, and this applies to all property, including farmland. A woman may also inherit a quarter of her husband's land.

However, Islamic law remains largely theoretical, especially in rural areas, even though the people are Muslim. Transfers in the framework of Islamic law normally only take place in urban areas and outlying suburbs, and usually apply to property other than farmland. However, it is largely due to Islamic law that, according to the census, 6.5% of agricultural land is farmed by women.

### d) *Civil law on ownership of farmland*

The system for property law, as set out in the Niger Civil Code, defines three different types of ownership right to land: *usus* (the right to use the land); *fructus* (the right to use the produce from the land) and *abusus* (the right to dispose of the land). As far as farmland is concerned, we are most interested in *abusus*, which is not granted to women under customary laws.

The Niger Civil Code, which was based on Niger's constitution and some of the country's other laws, lays down a certain number of provisions to ensure that women have the right to access and own farmland.

We must reiterate that the political desire to break with certain exclusivist traditions has been put to the test since 1974, when the head of state declared that "land belongs to those who cultivate it". Although the state's adoption of this position allowed several minority communities to access land, it has had no significant positive effect for women.

Worse still, landowners have discovered the trick of refusing to let or lend land for more than five consecutive years.

Within the framework of its development policies, the state is making major investments in developing land for agricultural production. Since it owns this land, it is also distributing it to producers' groups or cooperatives under management agreements. Groups of women have been the main beneficiaries of this new system.

Since the law laying down the principles of the rural code was enacted in 1993, land committees have been set up to simplify the process of recognising and registering rights to rural land and other natural resources. Ownership is recorded in the rural land register after conducting surveys and hearing testimonies from witnesses. If no-one is opposed to the registration, the committees deliver property ownership registration certificates that differ depending on whether the land has been inherited, gifted, bought or allocated. Registering land has helped owners to protect their rights and safeguard the investment they made to develop and operate the land. A small number of women have been able to use this system to register their plots of land, but the level of information and the fact that the committees are effectively run by men limit women's opportunities of becoming landowners.

### 3. *Overview of strategies to boost women's access to owning farmland in Niger, particularly in VIE's areas of activity*

Niger has already created a national gender policy, which was drawn up by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children. The government is expected to submit it to the national assembly for approval in 2008. The document outlines a number of strategic guidelines, including the "fair promotion of the potential and position of both women and men in the household economy and the market economy", or more specifically, "boosting women's participation in sectors generating growth, as defined in the sustainable poverty reduction strategy".

From a practical point of view, there are also initiatives, some of which have proved useful, for promoting women's access to ownership of farmland and the fair management of natural resources:

- Increase efforts to guarantee gender equality when drawing up agricultural development projects and ensure that any activities planned are implemented and evaluated.

- Develop agricultural projects exclusively for women and/or women's groups and provide them with specialised technical training enabling them to create suitable conditions giving them access to funding and inputs. This will allow them to increase the yields and production of their gamanas, home gardens or the fields they may acquire through purchase. It could even help them to buy new land.
- Establish an allocation system to ensure that plots of land are distributed fairly between men and women and their organisations within the framework of the projects' work to develop land for agricultural production.
- Where land has been allocated to groups of women for market gardening or use as a communal field, legalise the groups' use of the land through a transfer document from the local land committee. The document will aim to safeguard land investments by female farmers.
- Ensure that the principles of Islamic law are respected as regards inheritance of farmland. This could help increase the amount of farmland that is developed.
- Set up literacy projects, programmes on rural radio stations, information strategies on legal provisions and practices promoting women's access to property in land.

#### 4. Conclusion

Land rights are not clear enough in Niger because, in practice, there are a great many different systems and they often contradict one another. Despite everything, customary law remains the best-known and most frequently applied system. The protagonists in a dispute over land can use a legal system that suits one party and puts the other, usually a woman, at a disadvantage. Women do not demand their property rights because they are unaware they have any or they are afraid of retaliation by men or by their families.

Nevertheless, the situation is now changing for the better, and the process is running relatively smoothly. The change is backed up by the creation of a Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children, whose activities are based on a national gender policy.

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## Aster Bashige Ndjuzi

GTZ-Santé (GTZ Health)


DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)



Aster Bashige Ndjuzi is Provincial Coordinator for GTZ Health (a division of the German technical cooperation agency) in South Kivu and is the Focal Point for a project financed by the King Baudouin Foundation, in collaboration with SAMWAKI, partner of Dimitra in South Kivu. Through the exchange of experiences, he supports his colleagues of GTZ working for the implementation of this project in different provinces of the DRC. Expert in the fight against HIV/AIDS in rural areas, Aster provides technical support for the development, planning, management, resource mobilisation and coordination of HIV/AIDS-related projects and programmes. He is, by decision of the Provincial Medical Inspector, member of the Provincial Study and Planning Office.

Concerned with the promotion of women's rights, he provides sustained support and advice to a number of women's organisations in South Kivu (SWAA, FADI, ADFEMER, SAMWAKI, GRACE, APACI, AMAMA and the Réseau Provincial des Associations des Femmes Rurales). He is also very committed to the promotion of young people through sport (football, basketball, etc.).

# A model for supporting the fight for access to land by people living with HIV and/or women who have suffered sexual assault in Walungu, South Kivu



## 1. Brief overview of GTZ Health's activities in South Kivu

GTZ Health has been active in South Kivu (DRC) since March 2003. Since then, it has cooperated with public and private institutions, NGOs and agricultural, community-based and religious organisations to build up their organisational capacities, with the aim of developing high-quality services. GTZ Health also works with other international partners who can help achieve its goals in its different activities.

GTZ Health's work in South Kivu focuses on three key areas:

### 1) Supporting the fight against HIV/AIDS

- GTZ Health provides institutional support to the Provincial Health Inspectorate through the Office of the Medical Inspector, the Anti-HIV/AIDS Programme and the Reproductive Health Programme.
- A major part of GTZ Health's activities are based on prevention. It provides technical support to the various local organisations' (NGOs and community-based organisations) work to decrease the virus' infectivity, improve access to voluntary screening and prevent HIV transmission from mother to child.
- GTZ Health provides laboratory equipment and materials and medication for preventing and treating opportunistic infections to 17 healthcare structures in four health zones, including seven hospitals and hospital centres offering antiretroviral treatments.
- Local organisations are being strengthened and assisted in giving psychological and social support to people living with HIV (PLHs) and people affected by the disease (family members, AIDS orphans, etc.).

### 2) Supporting efforts to enhance the healthcare system

- GTZ Health provides support to local healthcare structures with a view to ensuring high-quality care. This requires a good supply of equipment, materials and

medication. Work in this area is complemented with training courses and seminars to build the capacities of service providers.

- Particular emphasis is placed on managing medication and inputs, as well as on different methods of contraception within the framework of family planning.
- The strategy being employed is based on purchasing services: the service providers and management team in each health zone are awarded bonuses depending on performance, which is assessed on the basis of indicators and the services the health zone is expected to provide.

### 3) Supporting the fight against sexual violence

In this area, GTZ Health aims to contribute to projects that have been launched by other partners:

- Firstly, efforts are being made to relieve the pressure on Panzi general hospital, which currently treats more than 10 victims a day, by finding local structures that can provide initial care. Only cases requiring specialised surgery (e.g. to repair fistulas) should be referred to Panzi hospital.
- Secondly, men and community leaders should be involved with a view to reducing the number of cases of rape and sexual violence against women as much as possible.
- Various strategies have been implemented, such as involving male leaders and disseminating pre-prepared messages, to name but a few.
- GTZ Health is supporting information and dissemination initiatives on the law against sexual violence, assisting society in advocacy and awareness-raising and indirectly fighting impunity.
- The fight against sexual violence is backed up by projects focusing on psychological and social support and socio-economic reintegration and a special project

- for treating post-traumatic stress.
- GTZ Health's efforts to fight sexual violence are based in the chiefdom of Ngweshe, in Walungu territory. It cooperates with the NGOs ADFEMER, Action pour le développement de la femme et l'enfant en milieu rural (Action for the development of women and children in rural areas) and SAMWAKI, Sauti ya Mwanamuke Kijijini (The voice of rural women), among others.

GTZ Health would like to use this article to share the experiences of ADFEMER and SAMWAKI in trying to guarantee access to land for vulnerable people, including people living with HIV, women who have suffered sexual assault and orphans. Their experiences are based on concrete, visible activities to help the weakest people exercise their rights, which are often flouted by stronger people on the pretext of respecting the customs of their area.

## 2. Socio-economic context

The chiefdom of Ngweshe is a decentralised administrative entity in Walungu territory in South Kivu province. It has a population of around 414,000 people and an area of 1,600 km<sup>2</sup>, which is further divided into 16 groupings (a geographical subdivision comprising several villages and managed on a day-to-day basis by a chief) and 493 villages.

Agriculture is the main economic activity in the area and it is mainly carried out by women and girls. Men are usually responsible for selling products, and most of them are street vendors. To practice their trade, they have to make long journeys on foot to reach the province's mining towns, where they often stay for months or even years on end. While the men are away, the women are left to raise the children alone, feeding and dressing them with the produce from their fields or from small-scale animal breeding.

The exodus of men and boys from Ngweshe puts the women and girls in the area at a far greater risk of poverty and infection with HIV. Girls generally join their mothers in the fields between the ages of 7 and 10. Girls who attend school normally stop after primary school or, in some rare cases, the first two years of secondary school.

Medical care in the area is something of a sensitive issue for a variety of reasons, notably the absence of health infrastructure and the poverty of the people in the region, especially women and children. This situation makes people affected by HIV/AIDS and their dependents even more

vulnerable, since there is a lack of support. As they cannot receive treatment from a nurse or a doctor, the vast majority of the population simply pray or go to local practitioners of traditional medicine if they are ill.

## 3. The issue

One effect of the armed conflicts that have taken place in the DRC in recent years has been the gradual erosion of the status of Congolese women, rural women in particular. The use of sex as a weapon in two successive wars has intensified the gender-based discrimination that has been perpetuated by traditions and customs, families, religious beliefs, laws and even women themselves. Discrimination against women often goes hand-in-hand with abuse and violation of the fundamental rights that women never claim, especially not in the communities they come from.

Considering the huge school drop out of girls, their domestic chores and forced early marriages, the future looks bleak for girls in rural areas of South Kivu. Furthermore, sexual violence during the war has sadly served to damage the already weak image of women that at least allowed them to be heard as sisters, wives or mothers in their rural communities.

The post-conflict period in South Kivu has been characterised by widespread poverty, which hits rural women particularly hard. Agricultural production, which they depend on for a living, is in severe decline because the fields were not tended during the war and the plants and small livestock were looted and destroyed by the soldiers. And as bad things always seem to happen at once, the disease known as mosaic struck down the cassava crop – the main crop in the region – just as the women were trying to resume agricultural activities. The presence of this disease was the main reason for so many men to leave the area in favour of the centres for traditional exploitation of mine products, urban areas and large rural agglomerations.

The men are thus abandoning women and children to hunger and life in an unliveable environment. Women are not capable of re-thatching the roofs of their huts, so the huts collapse in bad weather and cannot be rebuilt.

In Walungu (especially Kaniola), as in the rest of the province, women and girls have been subjected to sexual violence, but the assistance they receive is inconsistent. They are also given very little support by their families and the community. In Mushinga, which is also in Walungu ter-

ritory, the majority of women and girls who suffered sexual violence or were made into sex slaves by members of the Mudundu 40 militia, which operated in the village during the war, have sought refuge in Mukungwe, a centre for the traditional exploitation of gold, where they no longer have to listen to the harsh words of their families and other members of the community. However, they are forced into prostitution to survive. They have lost all hope of finding husbands or even resources for the future.

Against this backdrop of extreme poverty, hunger and abandonment by their partners, rural women in Walungu are resigned to their fate. They can only make limited efforts to improve their situation, due to the factors mentioned above and many others, including:

- illiteracy and insufficient education;
- the isolation of grassroots women's organisations from a local, national and international perspective;
- insecurity;
- lack of access to information and training;
- ignorance of human rights;
- the continuation of customs that discriminate against women;
- the community's failure to act against domestic violence.

Worse yet, these people, who are already vulnerable, often do not own any land, though land is the only asset they can use to ensure their survival. Customs and traditions in Bushi, South Kivu, do not grant women the right to have possessions, no matter what they are. Land belongs to the chief, who then rents it out or gives it temporarily to a man who has paid a guarantee in the form of cows, the number depending on the land awarded (arable or grazing land). Women cannot even take part in discussions, never mind negotiate or rent land.

Men's refusal to register marriages limits many women's opportunities in terms of exercising the rights inherent to legally recognised marriages, such as the right to own or benefit from property that legally belongs to the household, for example land.

Tradition does not grant women, and especially not girls, the right to inherit. Only men can inherit fields, pastures, cattle farms, and so on. Even though 90% of the work involved in clearing, ploughing, sowing, hoeing and harvesting is performed by women, men are still responsible for managing the products from the fields.

#### 4. SAMWAKI's work

As an organisation operating across the whole of South Kivu, SAMWAKI is involved in building the capacities of rural women and guaranteeing cohesion between local development initiatives and groups created by rural women and girls or working to promote their interests. Its main activity is linking up these women's groups to form networks – this should help them get to know one another, analyse the particular problems faced by women, launch joint initiatives to find activities that suit them all and exchange practices and experiences related to development.

Access to training, information and communication will enable these groups' members to deal with key development topics actively and responsibly. Important subjects include human rights, rural women's rights, resolution of conflicts, farming techniques and food security, the use of information and communication technology to promote rural development, the fight against the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, governance and citizenship and environmental protection.

Women have a major role in rural development issues as agricultural production, which is necessary for survival and the cornerstone of rural communities, the continuation of the species and basic education of children all depend on women. To tackle these issues, SAMWAKI is intensely lobbying community leaders (religious, civil, political, administrative and traditional authorities) with a view to eliminating all forms of prejudice and discrimination and infringements on the rights of rural women and girls with the aim of helping them to play their part as actors in rural development and vital partners for men.

SAMWAKI has organised several workshops and meetings to combat backward customs that see women expropriated of arable land under the pretext that they have been raped (tradition says that land tended by these women cannot yield crops). A similar attitude is that people living with HIV are a burden on the community (*guli muziro in mashi*).

Impunity and ignorance of the law make violence against women even worse. In rural areas, where traditional and cultural values define women's status, women are often treated in a way that contravenes national and international laws and legal principles relating to human, and therefore women's, rights.

The DRC's law on violence against women was enacted in 2006, but people do not have enough information on the

law in the rural areas, which are home to both the majority of victims and the majority of perpetrators. However, repackaging and disseminating the law in rural communities could have positive results, especially if it is applied to make examples of the men who have performed violent acts against women but have not been punished for their actions. SAMWAKI, which has the support of GTZ Health, has adopted a two-pronged approach: on the one hand, it ensures that Walungu's population is aware of the existence of this law that defines and punishes violence against women and girls, and on the other hand, it takes the necessary steps to ensure that the law is applied in known cases. This is why the victims need legal support.

### 5. ADFEMER's work

ADFEMER mainly works with:

- female farmers, encouraging them to be self-sufficient;
- women who have been abandoned by their husbands or their families;
- illiterate women;
- women who have been raped;
- children born of rape;
- AIDS orphans;
- people living with HIV (PLHs), by organising home visits and psychological and social support for their families.

Concerning this last point, ADFEMER has enhanced its cooperation with a voluntary screening centre (VSC) in the community, SOS-AIDS (which also receives support from GTZ) and Walungu general referral hospital, which provides clinical treatment for PLHs.

When providing support to PLHs, ADFEMER has been able to make a full list of their needs and give them the opportunity to talk to people who are in the same situation as them. An initial meeting for PLHs was held in January 2007, and six people (three men and three women, including one couple) participated. Following the success of this meeting, ADFEMER decided to organise another in February 2007, involving both SOS-AIDS and the general referral hospital. Nine PLHs attended this meeting. Since then, meetings have been held every two months. The attending physician and advisors from the VSC prepare educational talks for the meetings, sometimes in cooperation with the PLHs themselves.

33 PLHs came to the third meeting, and the number of PLHs voluntarily attending each meeting has been increasing steadily. There are currently 159 PLHs meeting on a regular basis – 118 women (of whom 35 are widows), 39 men and two children under the age of 12. 41 of the participants are undergoing antiretroviral (ARVs) tritherapy treatment. The people come from different places – most of them are from Walungu, but some are from Kanyola or Mubumbano.

At each meeting, PLHs exchange experiences and there is also an educational talk by a PLH, a VSC advisor or a healthcare worker. Topics that have been discussed so far include: living positively with HIV; self-support for PLHs; the importance of continuing to take ARVs and medicines to protect against opportunistic infections; the importance of respecting medical appointments; the ways in which HIV is transmitted; how to use condoms correctly; how PLHs can participate in developing their environment, etc. After each meeting, PLHs can exchange addresses, and those who accept home visits can give their contact details to members of the organisation.

The main problems that PLHs mentioned in the meetings were poverty and the constraints linked to the cultural traditions in their communities, both of which lead to difficulties in financing hospitalisation and sending orphans to school.

ADFEMER has rented community fields in three villages to serve as examples – the fields are being worked using new growing techniques for better seeds. The organisation has also created a revolving loan system to encourage PLHs who are working in the fields and breeding small livestock.

Thanks to lobbying by GTZ Health, ADFEMER and KOKO Multifunctional Centre will receive FAO support in the form of market gardening and food-production kits, ploughing tools and parent animals (such as rabbits, ducks, guinea pigs or goats) for at least 500 households in Kaniola in September 2008. The households benefiting from this support all include at least one PLH, one woman who has suffered sexual assault, one orphan or one other vulnerable member of the community, such as a malnourished child. The idea is to improve the process that grants land access and to encourage vulnerable people to play an active part in environmental development and, more importantly, support themselves financially.

This ADFEMER initiative, which was launched with the



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cooperation of the community VSC and the general referral hospital, has been a great success and is now being used as a positive example for several psychological and social support organisations in Walungu and other health zones.

The Walungu PLHs receiving ADFEMER support are now pleased to have guests at their meetings (even if they are not PLHs) and some of them have even agreed to tell their story in public. The aim of these meetings is to help all PLHs to lose the feeling of being stigmatised and think positively. In the future, ADFEMER intends to organise a special meeting of all the PLHs involved with the different psychological and social support organisations in Walungu, perhaps even including organisations from Ibanda, Uvira, Kaziba and other places besides.

In Bushi, and particularly in Ngweshe, the Mwami (traditional chief) blesses the seeds every year. This year, the seed-blessing ceremony was part of a mass celebrated in the Catholic parish of Mugogo. This village is home to Radio

Bubusa, which, along with Radio Mulangane, reported on the ceremony. The Mwami asked the chiefs of the different groupings to involve women in negotiations for access to land and to allow women to rent land, a right that their partners, men, already hold. He called on the population to give women responsibilities, reminding them that women are central to the chiefdom's economy and adding that they must therefore be made responsible for production. The desired result of this is that women's role will no longer be limited to reproduction – they will also be viewed as key stakeholders in decision-making and distributing products.

Buoyed up by this vision of the future communicated by the chief, Mwami Ngweshe Weza III Pierre Ndatabayé, the NGOs SAMWAKI and ADFEMER now feel that their approach is supported and that they have considerable encouragement to give more assistance to PLHs, to women who have suffered sexual assault and, in short, to all women and all vulnerable people in rural communities.



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## Concilie Gahungere

*CAFOB, Collectif des Associations et ONG Féminines du Burundi (Collective of Burundian Women's Associations and NGOs)*

**BURUNDI**

Concilie Gahungere has been CAFOB's Coordinator since December 2004. She has work experience in the field of human rights and women's rights training, conflict management and resolution, leadership, organisational management, project development, planning and follow-up/evaluation, gender and development, the fight against violence against women, etc.

She also has an experience in management as she has worked at a ministry, where she was in charge of the gender and human rights portfolio, then in a conflict resolution organisation, and now at CAFOB.

# Burundian women still have problems accessing and controlling land and water



## 1. Introduction

**In Burundi**, women are important because of their two key roles: on the one hand, they are mothers, and on the other hand, they are central to their families' livelihoods and their country's economy. However, women do not benefit from the fruits of their labour – they remain the poorest people in the community and are given little social respect. The causes of this are stereotypes in Burundian culture, which treats women as second-class citizens.

Agriculture is Burundi's main economic activity, and most farming is done by women. However, women are doubtful of politicians' intentions to develop the agro-pastoralist sector, which still lacks appropriate technologies. The main tools used for working the land are still the hoe and billhook and women do not have access to weather forecasts, for example. No effort has been made to reduce women's workload when it comes to storing and processing agricultural surpluses – produce is still stored in granaries or jars.

However, the situation is not hopeless as the desire to reconsider women's social status and grant them their rightful place in the community is clearly on the rise.

**At global level**, a feminist movement emerged in the 1940s. As the years passed, the movement grew and allowed women to make considerable progress, even though there are still challenges to be faced. One of the crowning achievements of this long process was the **Beijing Action Plan**, which was supposed to serve as a base for governmental policies. More recently, the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** accorded special attention to women, aiming to bring them out of poverty and ensure that they are literate. The MDGs are a key point of reference for states, and women must benefit from them.

With a view to increasing understanding of the situation of Burundian women, this article discusses the problems they face in accessing and controlling land and water.

## 2. Access to land

Over 85% of Burundi's population is involved in agriculture. It is chiefly women who perform agricultural activities and ensure their family's survival, yet women are mere usufructuaries of the land, since the patriarchal system governing Burundian society does not allow women to inherit as their brothers do.

In fact, Burundian women are viewed as labourers for the family. From a very young age, girls have to help their mothers with the housework, look after their brothers and sisters and work in the fields. Together with their mothers, they are responsible for the family's agricultural production. After harvest, production is managed by their fathers or brothers. Women have no say in how family resources are distributed, even though they are the main producers, and their personal needs are rarely taken into account.

When a woman gets married, she leaves her parents' house and invests her strength in building her future life with her husband. She works the farmland, tends the food-producing and industrial crops, looks after the livestock, harvests the crops, and so on. However, the land is owned and managed by her husband. When the man decides to go and sell the produce at the market, the woman must transport it there, whether she wants to or not.

Although women are the main producers, they have no control over proceedings and are unable to take decisions on the distribution of family resources. And the way these resources are spent makes women's situation even worse – at harvest time, a time of plenty, men keep mistresses and become polygamous, which causes their wives a great deal of suffering.

Moreover, women put up with being beaten by their husbands because they cannot simply take their children and go back to where they came from. In a sense, we could say that not allowing Burundian girls to inherit constitutes a form of violence against women.





The number of women and children living on the street is constantly increasing. There are several reasons for this phenomenon:

- Divorced women cannot return to their parents' house – even if they are taken back, they will not be with their children;
- A large number of destitute, disaster-stricken women (widows, women who have been repatriated or deported from Tanzania, etc.) are denied their right to family land;
- Women are abandoned and driven away by their husbands, who want to marry other women;
- Refugee women who marry men from their host country are driven away, with or without their children;
- Some women are born in refugee camps and do not know where they come from, while their parents died in the camps;
- Widows' families-in-law reclaim the land belonging to their dead husbands;
- Young girls with children are cast out by their families;

— Young girls who are raped and fall pregnant are forced to live on the street.

All of these women are forced into poverty and have to wander the streets of the country's capital and the main towns in the provinces. There is no governmental programme to support all the women who end up living in such awful conditions – the country is thus depriving itself of a significant proportion of the workforce, all because of customs and culture.

Here are **a few examples**:

1. The case of Marie H., who lives in a returnee camp. She cannot inherit her father's property, even though she is an only child. Her uncles denied her access to the family property.
2. The case of a divorced woman who went back to live at her family's home while her mother was still alive. When her mother died, her brothers drove her away from the house and refused to give her access to the land. She asked neighbours for help, but they would

not or could not settle the dispute. The woman is now poor and half-mad, and lives underneath an avocado tree.

3. The case of a displaced widow who lives in a camp for displaced people near the colline (hill) on which she was born. Her brothers have refused to give her access to the family land, saying that you cannot mix clans and upset the patriarchal system.

It is absolutely imperative that the legislation is improved. For example, there should be fairer inheritance laws that allow women to access and control land, since it is a necessary resource for families. The only way to bring about this change is to take action against the patriarchal system that deprives women of their right to land. It is obvious that customary laws are incomplete in this respect, so they must be changed to promote women's rights.

### 3. Access to water

There are regions of Burundi where there are very few sources of drinking water. Even when people want to collect water, they cannot find a place to do so. This is the case in the regions to the north, north-east and east of Burundi. The central plateaus and the Mumirwa regions, on the other hand, have adequate sources of water.

Women are responsible for providing their families with drinking water. But there is a severe shortage of water and only a tiny percentage of the population have access to it. Women's access to drinking water is a long-standing, critical issue, but no solution has been found so far. Burundian women are forced to travel long distances to find water, and the water they draw from wells is often not drinkable. Women sometimes have to use stream water for all their household needs, including consumption.

The absence of wells near people's homes has serious consequences for hygiene and increases the risk of diseases being transmitted. The lack of wells also has negative effects on girls' futures as they are often forced to abandon their education in favour of helping their mothers with household tasks by fetching water from distant sources.

Women living in towns are also affected by the shortage of drinking water. Every day, women, both young and old, living in suburbs of Bujumbura, have to travel long distances to find drinking water. Some draw water from the rivers running through Bujumbura, such as the Ntakangwa and the Ruzizi.

Some women are still unaware of the importance of drinking water. Others, who live in poor areas, cannot afford drinking water. Water is expensive in Burundi, especially for a population that has a very low standard of living.

Moreover, even if there is water, Burundian women are unable to make decisions that would allow them to plan how it is used in the house and, above all, for agricultural activities.

We can conclude that government officials must take action to ensure that women have access to drinking water, domestic energy sources, land and inputs for food production.





## Alison Hodder

*Groupe des Cultures Horticoles, Division de la  
Production Végétale et de la Protection des Plantes*

FAO

Alison Hodder is expert in horticultural development policy and improvement of horticultural technologies in developing and transition countries, with particular reference to vegetable, fruit, viticulture and edible mushroom sectors, covering both commercial and urban-peri-urban areas.

She has 25 years experience as technical adviser to some 40 countries of Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean and Latin America within the context of international development cooperation programmes: formulation, technical supervision and evaluation of horticulture-related programmes and projects.

She has been technical officer at FAO since 1984, and is currently leader of the FAO global horticulture programme based in the Agriculture Department, coordinating field programme support functions and inter-agency multidisciplinary programmes related to the improvement of the fruit and vegetable chain.





**HORTIVAR** is geo-referenced database on performances of horticulture cultivars and a platform for horticulture knowledge management and exchange.

**HORTIVAR** addresses the needs of producers, public and private sector, seed companies and horticultural research centres for information management related to horticultural crop cultivars in different agro-climatic environments.

**HORTIVAR** covers six categories of horticultural crops: fruits, vegetables, roots & tubers, ornamentals, mushrooms, herbs & condiments.

**HORTIVAR** allows users to identify cultivars and cropping practices adapted to their specific requirements and environment.

**HORTIVAR** is:

- A standard methodology for data collection and record keeping on the performances of horticulture cultivars
- A powerful search engine for easy retrieval and comparison of information (search by: crop, cultivar, country, eco-zone and/or: organic, soil-less, greenhouse production)
- A standard template for educational purposes - A to Z of a crop cycle including all field practices
- A Gateway to horticulture knowledge and statistics (e.g. production data; seed sources; standard cultivar descriptors; photos of cultivars; experts on specific crop, subject; nutrient composition data; climate data per location)

**HORTIVAR** is accessible on the Internet ([www.fao.org/hortivar](http://www.fao.org/hortivar)), on CD-ROM and on forms.

**Good Morning HORTIVAR** is a message board on the HORTIVAR website ([www.fao.org/hortivar](http://www.fao.org/hortivar)) to share information on horticulture and its benefits for food, income and health. New messages are published daily.

The idea is to have a window where Hortivar partners can post news information items in different formats:

- Text
  - Text with images/photos or video
  - Information on new publications
  - Information upcoming conferences/meetings
- A new message will be posted every day.

**How to submit messages:**

To submit a message,

- Go to the portal [www.fao.org/hortivar](http://www.fao.org/hortivar)
- Click on Good Morning Hortivar
- Login with your username and password (or apply for a username and password)
- Go to the tab *Submit daily message*, then:
  1. Choose the message type
  2. Fill out the mandatory fields
  3. Preview /Edit your message
  4. Submit your message
  5. You will receive a confirmation e-mail with the date on which your message shall be published on the Good Morning Hortivar message board

**Search messages:**

You can search past messages according to different parameters and keywords.

**HORTIVAR: a decision support tool**

- The web-based interface is tailored for agricultural/horticultural technicians;



- For outreach to non-technicians and producers, the main interface is the IPP card system - building up a data base of adapted Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs);
- Producer-focused field workshops foster understanding development, adaptation and illustration of GAPS for assuring safety and quality of horticultural products.

#### **Urban and periurban agriculture/horticulture**

- Rapid urbanization trends and the harsh reality of urban poverty require improved food supply and distribution systems to address increasing levels of urban food insecurity. While rural agriculture continues to be the primary source of basic food for urban dwellers in many situations, urban and periurban agriculture/horticulture (UPA/UPH) has become a key part of the survival strategies of poorer sections of the population while also providing a significant contribution to the urban fresh food supply chain.
- Within this reality, a key challenge is developing policy, strategies and technical support mechanisms ad hoc for the sustainable management of urban and peri-urban agricultural systems, considering crop and fodder production alongside animal husbandry aspects and marketing facilities, as well as criteria of water use efficiency and food safety.
- Support programmes need to consider the broad range of crops and activities that can contribute to the food security, employment, and livelihoods of poor people in urban and peri-urban areas. A multidisciplinary approach has been adopted to respond to the need for effective development and management of urban and periurban agriculture systems, with several FAO departments and divisions involved in supporting programme and project activities. We also engage with local authorities and policy makers to support the development of policy advice, strategies and technical guidelines within

an integrated approach to the sustainable management of agriculture in urban and periurban zones.

✿ **Support for capacity building:**

We are working with decision makers in member countries with the objective of strengthening national capacity for policy and strategy development related to urban and periurban agriculture. This programme has been built up with very strong and continuing support from Belgium but also other donors have recently joined to further strengthen and scale up the programme.

✿ **Strengthening national pilot interventions and projects:**

We are interacting with the donor community to mobilize funds and assist member countries to initiate or strengthen national initiatives on UPA/UPH through the implementation of short- and medium-term projects. Recently, opportunities for “decentralized cooperation” offered by some countries of the North have been captured, enabling a broad stream of benefits to flow from city-to-city programmes of assistance.

✿ **Partnership activities and linkages:**

- The multidisciplinary character of work is reflected in FAO’s links and partnerships with other organizations that are actively working in the field of UPH/UPA.
- Within the implementation of a related programme – **the FAO/WHO Global Fruit and Vegetables for Health Initiative** – UPH and horticulture supply chain improve-

ment are being supported as key components. IDRC and RUAF are long-standing partner organizations, and close partnerships have been forged with CIRAD (French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development), with the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) and with the Global Horticulture Initiative (GHI) and their programmes in the area of urban and periurban horticulture.

✿ **Capitalizing on lessons learnt:**

Through the implementation of these projects, it has been learnt that the long term sustainability and the safeguarding of urban and periurban agricultural activities is based on a **3-S integrated approach** and a decentralised process to involve municipal authorities and related stakeholders:

- **Securing the institutional context** through formal recognition of urban and periurban agriculture and its integration in urban and periurban development and resource management planning;
- **Securing the land**, the quality and the quantity of **water** for irrigation;
- **Securing markets as well as the quality and safety of the produce** for consumers.

With support from the Belgian government we are now shaping a programme component designed to capitalise on lessons learned and to foster a sharing of the knowledge that is being generated by technical assistance interventions around the world.





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## **Bernadette Kapend Mwambu**

*REFED-Katanga, Réseau Femme et Développement  
(Women and Development Network)*

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Bernadette Kapend Mwambu is project manager by training and by profession. She was the initiator of several development projects (in the fields of agriculture, functional literacy training, community development, micro-credit, etc.), with the grassroots support of the Forum pour le Développement de la Femme (FDF – Forum for the Development of Women). She is one of the first extension workers using the gender approach for a sustainable and fair development in Lubumbashi and its surrounding areas and in the rural areas of Katanga province.

Since 2005, Bernadette is President of REFED-Katanga, partner organisation of the Dimitra Project in this province. Bernadette is also a member of the Provincial Committee for the Elaboration of the Strategic Document for Growth and Poverty Reduction (DSCR), in charge specifically of gender issues.



# Gender inequality in access to land and its consequences for rural people in Katanga province

## 1. Introduction

The history of Katanga, a mining province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has been shaped by the large companies that were central to the country's production sector. Some of its districts were veritable agricultural granaries which fed industry workers in the major towns of Katanga and the two Kasai provinces.

Today, Katanga no longer has the same image as in the past, as is reflected by the results of recent studies conducted as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP):

- wage-earning heads of households only account for 42% of active workers, compared with 85% in 1973. Of this 42%, 17% work the fields in peri-urban areas;
- 39.8% of the population is chronically undernourished;
- Katanga's people have poor access to basic services.

The issue of land access is one of the main causes of poverty among local populations in Katanga. There are proportionally more poor women than poor men in the province, particularly in rural areas.

## 2. Land access

Land is an important resource for rural communities. Without land, the people cannot carry out agricultural activities, which are the main source of revenue in rural areas. Nevertheless, land access for rural people, who make up 72% of Katanga's population, is subject to various restrictions. Some of these restrictions are related to the contradictory nature of the land law, which, on the one hand, states that land chiefs who inherited from previous occupants are responsible for managing the rural land used by local communities and on the other hand, stipulates that "land belongs to the state and the state manages it". Furthermore, problems accessing land are mainly linked to the mining code taking precedence over the land law; the lack of an agricultural code and an agricultural policy; the failure to apply the laws related to land, forests and mining, and,

finally, the prevalence of customs and traditions in rural land management.

According to the most recent statistics compiled by the provincial government, the national ministry granted 1,312 mining permits for Katanga province. This figure can be broken down as follows:

- 1,179 exploration permits (89.8%)
  - 2 exclusive exploration permits (0.15%)
  - 79 exploitation permits (6%)
  - 4 exploitation permits for small mines (0.3%)
  - 35 permits for exploration for quarry products (2.6%)
  - 13 permits to run permanent quarries (0.9%)
- (Source: Priority Action Plan 2008-2010).

These statistics explain why rural people in Katanga are constantly victims of relocation. It also explains why farmland is so rare and the poverty rate is increasing.

A notable example of this phenomenon is the relocation of Lubwisha secondary school, a prominent girls' school in Lwisha village on the Likasi road, after an exploitation permit for a mine was awarded for the area. The provincial government, the Catholic Church and civil society launched several actions to oppose this relocation. Another example would be the many villages across Katanga that have been relocated or are threatened with relocation.

It is obvious that the presence of so many mining companies, both industrial and small-scale, will not have any positive effects for rural people in Katanga while the relevant legislation is not being applied and has not been revised.

## 3. The consequences of the deterioration of the situation in Katanga for rural people, especially women

The deterioration of the situation in Katanga has many consequences, including:

- the relocation of local communities;



- a lack of respect for land used for agricultural activities, in comparison to the attention given to mining land and activities;
- insecurity for agricultural producers (leading to conflicts over land);
- the increasing rarity of farmland;
- the loss of habitat and agricultural heritage;
- the loss of farmers' knowledge;
- a lack of consideration for agro-pastoralist activities;
- soil impoverishment;
- relatively little land being cultivated;
- non-existent or inadequate structures for supporting farmers and granting micro-credit;
- malnutrition;
- isolation;
- a lack of information and communication;
- illiteracy;
- divorce;
- the abandonment of the agricultural sector in favour of mining by young men from rural areas;
- rural exodus;
- the exploitation of farmers by economic operators;
- high vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases;
- poor access to healthcare (lack of resources and distance from services);
- problems with bureaucracy and the police.

#### 4. Consequences of gender inequality

In addition to the aforementioned consequences, rural women have to cope with other difficulties linked to gender inequality.

##### ✿ *Lack of respect for the contribution made by rural women*

75% of the workforce in agricultural production is female, and women constitute the majority of Katanga's rural population. However, the contribution made by women is still held in low esteem, and so they often have their land despoiled by mine operators and large farmers who, thanks to the mining code and the political and administrative authorities, have a decisive role in the province's development and the transformation of Congolese society.

The large areas of farmland in Katanga province belong to owners of mines and farms and heads of clans – and it is obvious that rural women do not belong to any of these

categories. Moreover, women are faced with the following problems:

- difficulties accessing and controlling resources (land, agricultural inputs, credit, etc.);
- a lack of knowledge of laws and rights;
- the predominance of customs and traditions;
- the absence of a gender policy at national and provincial level.

Women depend on their husbands or live under the supervision of their male relatives (e.g. fathers, brothers, uncles, brothers-in-law) and cannot own valuable property, e.g. a plot of land in the village, so they can perform agricultural activities. They are also unable to inherit any valuable property.

There are various different proverbs that illustrate the attitudes of people from this culture, such as “Uli Ha Mafuchi kechi kwanda njamba” (if you are on someone else's shoulders, you cannot pick up the elephant – i.e. women are supported by their husbands and cannot inherit property).

##### ✿ *Non-involvement in managing and controlling production and agricultural inputs*

Surveys conducted on this subject have shown that rural women do not manage agricultural production and have no control over their agricultural inputs or the income from their production activities.

Women are viewed as mere farm labourers who cannot easily access or control the income from their production activities. There is a Chokwe proverb “Kandandji wemba upite wa chilombola”, which literally means that the young apprentice sings and the income from his work (singing and dancing) belongs to his master (his tutor). This proverb teaches that women must accept their role as production agents (active economic agents) but that men will retain control of the resources they produce. Women must therefore accept being exploited by their ‘masters’, who will use and manage the income from their work. This same proverb is taught by the Ndembo and Lwena-Luvalé people of Lualaba in Katanga.

##### ✿ *Subject to discrimination*

Katanga's women are subjected to discrimination and violence right up to the present day. The situation is even worse in rural areas – this was confirmed by basic surveys conducted by REFED-Katanga and local NGOs in August 2000 as part of efforts to repackage and disseminate the



gender approach, in June-July 2005 as part of activities for the Dimitra project and once more in July-August 2008 as part of the preparations for the Dimitra workshop on access to land to be held in Brussels in September 2008.

These surveys showed that the situation of women in rural parts of Katanga has taken on a new dimension following the mass exodus of young men towards key mining areas. These men left behind their young wives (aged between 13 and 25) and young children with no support from the village. The young women are overloaded with work – they have to work in the fields, perform household tasks and look after the children – and live in an extremely unstable situation.

Despite all the efforts made in the DRC, particularly in Katanga, the promotion of women's rights and the gender dimension in development policies and programmes are far from being implemented, especially in rural areas, which are usually isolated and rarely visited by decision-makers.

#### ✿ **High vulnerability to HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS is gradually taking on a rural dimension due to:

- a lack of knowledge among rural populations, especially women;
- small-scale mining operations, which employ all the members of a rural household. The reason for this is that agriculture is no longer a profitable activity and farmers, most of whom are women, no longer have a secure position and regularly lose their land. As a result, they suffer poverty or are forced to go and work in quarries, where all sorts of high-risk sexual propositions are made to women and girls;
- the presence of a large number of lorry drivers and ore transporters from southern Africa, which has a high rate of HIV/AIDS infection;
- gender inequality in managing sexuality – men usually make the decisions as regards sexual relations and women must obey;
- a lack of access to contraception and the impossibility of using preventative measures without the husband or male partner's consent.

#### ✿ **Access to education**

Surveys and campaigns on the subject of girls' education have shown that parents in a difficult financial situation

prefer to send their male children to school, particularly in rural areas. In Katanga, this situation varies from region to region and according to distance from large towns.

### 5. **Suggested strategies/recommendations**

#### ✿ **For civil society:**

- Organise awareness-raising campaigns and consult rural communities, especially women;
- Organise information and awareness-raising campaigns on human rights and gender;
- Set up community radio stations in rural areas;
- Create radio listeners' clubs;
- Repackage and disseminate the land, forestry and mining laws using local languages;
- Celebrate major events honouring rural communities (e.g. World Rural Women's Day);
- Open literacy centres in rural areas;
- Conduct advocacy and lobbying activities for rural communities.

#### ✿ **For mine operators:**

- Respect the country's laws.

#### ✿ **For the public authorities:**

- Revise the land, forestry and mining laws;
- Revise all mining contracts;
- Apply national legislation;
- Draw up a code and policy on agriculture;
- Create a development plan incorporating all agricultural activities;
- Support the agricultural activities of rural communities and grassroots organisations;
- Develop a national policy on information and communication in rural areas;
- Outline development policies and programmes incorporating the issue of promotion of women's rights and the gender dimension.

#### ✿ **For donors:**

- Support communication systems in rural environments and organisations of female farmers;
- Lobby for the interests of local communities to be taken into account when mining contracts are concluded.





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## Noah Lusaka

*ALIN, Arid Lands Information Network*

KENYA

Noah Lusaka holds a degree in environmental studies and has a vast experience in regional development issues in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. His key experiences include: participatory projects implementation, monitoring and evaluation, documentation of project activities, dissemination of appropriate technologies to communities, community facilitation and empowerment to enhance easy information exchanges.

At ALIN, Noah works as a Project Manager in charge of capacity building and partnerships. His responsibilities include capacity building for ALIN members and communities on varied development issues, including the formation of ALIN focal groups and the establishment of Community Knowledge Centres (CKCs). He trains them in the use of appropriate ICTs, networking approaches, writing skills and much more. Noah also supports the ALIN team in fundraising and is member of the BAOBAB journal editorial committee and of other ALIN publications. To enhance information exchange activities, he's involved in fostering partnerships, management of the Community Information Volunteers programme (CIV), gender mainstreaming and supporting members' networking activities in the region.

ALIN-EA is the Dimitra Focal Point for Kenya.

# Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequalities in access to land in Africa: the Kenyan experience



## 1. About ALIN and Background

ALIN is a network of Community Development Workers (CDWs) with an interest in sharing development project experiences. Network members are drawn from government departments, NGOs, institutions and Community Based Organisations (CBOs). With a membership of more than 1800 men and women, the network's activities are regional and spread in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia. ALIN's mission is to enhance livelihoods of communities through information exchange.

The network supports CDWs by encouraging the exchange of ideas, information and their own experience on development work using appropriate ICT tools. ALIN has established Community Knowledge Centres (CKCs) in the region to facilitate local content generation and sharing. ALIN also coordinates Dimitra project activities in Kenya.

This paper highlights issues that leave little doubt that the social security of women, who account for 70% of agricultural labour and 80% of food production, are not covered under provisions of the Kenyan social security, legal and policy framework. The paper further shows that women are frequently relegated to the status of second-class citizens in that their rights are dependent on husbands or other male relatives, resulting in negative impacts. In conclusion, some information and communication strategies are proposed to ensure gender equality, especially regarding access to land and other resources.

## 2. Introduction

Gender relations in Kenya have been characterized by discriminatory and inequitable practices against women. These practices are embodied in the legal system and administrative structures of Government. Discrimination against

women is also firmly anchored in the customs, traditions and usages of various ethnic communities in the country.

Women are faced with two sets of issues that are pertinent regarding women's legal status: one pertains to the state of current legislation and the way it treats women – an issue of lobbying for change on the part of the women and awareness raising on the part of the legislators and other policy makers; the other issue relates to women's awareness of their legal rights and their ability to claim these rights, which is more related to information and communication, legal literacy and legal counselling.

One of the most pronounced aspects of gender imbalance in the country is in the area of resource allocation and management. Despite the fact that women constitute over 70% of the productive land-based labour force in Kenya, land relations in particular are based on laws, customs and practices which marginalise and disempower women in terms of their right and capacity to own, manage and transfer land.

This situation has forced reformists across the board to urge for gender equity mainstreaming in constitutional, legislative, institutional and policy regimes. This trend has dominated the constitutional and legal reform discourse during the last twelve years.

The draft constitution contains bold provisions that outlaw gender-based discrimination in all spheres of national life. It follows therefore that any laws or policies which by their very nature promote any sort of discrimination against women must be changed to conform to the constitution. Even where the new constitution may not come into force in the foreseeable future, it is imperative that new laws and policies embrace gender equity principles. This will be in keeping with the democratisation wave that is sweeping across the African continent.



### 3. Key gender issues

#### ✿ *Who owns the land?*

Despite the fact that Kenya's land laws are largely gender neutral, only 5% of women have land registered in their names. Women have limited economic resources in their hands, and also lack decision-making power at the household level to buy land independently of their spouses.

There are laws that deny women equality with men in their rights to own property, borrow money and enter into contracts. Women's full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including equal rights, opportunities and access and control of resources are critical to the development of a democratic and just society.

Trends show that the Trust Lands (community and public lands) are increasingly being privatized into individual hands and titles given to individual male owners. This has an adverse effect on the pastoralist communities. In the past, women accessed these lands for food, fodder, firewood, building material, medicine and herbs. Selling Trust Land to individual male owners has not only eroded the women pastoralists' land rights but also their sources of livelihood for themselves and their families.

Women's rights to land also continue to be determined by their marital status, and by laws of inheritance, succession and divorce.

#### ✿ *Issues of inheritance*

Culture and customs continue to support male inheritance rights to land. Women are regarded as strangers in their natural home and also in their marital clan. Fathers transfer land to sons, a wife's inheritance rights to her husband's land is not guaranteed, while widows are often dispossessed by their in-laws and rendered homeless. The adjudication and land titling process is conducted in favour of the already established male inheritance patterns thereby denying women their share in family land.

For example, Islamic law recognises women's rights of inheritance, although her share is usually smaller than that of a male relative. Upon marriage to a man in another village, women are often obliged to leave land in the hands of male relatives and may find it difficult to exercise their rights over land.

#### ✿ *Issues related to provisions of land tenure*

The present Land Tenure Reform tends to emphasise the extinction of all customary land tenure systems, replacing them with individual tenure systems and title deeds. Title deeds are given in the name of the heads of the families or group representatives who are usually men. The adjudication and registration processes themselves have resulted in converting multiple overlapping rights into exclusive and absolute rights over family or community land. The positive aspects of the customary norms which ensure women's rights of access to land and enhance security of tenure over family or community land are not recognized by statutory land law.

#### ✿ *Provisions in Trust Land (community and public lands)*

Although the local authorities and county councils under the Trust Land Act hold land in trust for the benefit of the people, the Commissioner of Lands, as the direct representative of the President, has on many occasions irregularly allocated Trust Land to individuals in total disregard of the interests of the communities to which it belongs. The Local Authorities / County Councils charged with the custody of community land under the Act do not always protect community interests.

#### ✿ *Provisions for succession and matrimonial property*

Although the Law of Succession Act provides for wives and all children, including daughters, the right to inherit property and titles, specific socio-cultural factors hinder them from enjoying this right. Often, women have been forced to surrender their titles to male relatives, relinquish their inheritance rights or sell land cheaply as a result of social pressure.

There is no legislation that governs property belonging to a married couple. Most of the time matrimonial property including land is registered in the name of the male spouse. Problems arise upon death, divorce or separation. Sons, rather than widows, remain the legal heirs to the matrimonial home and land, thus leaving the widow only with rights of occupancy which are forfeited upon re-marriage. Upon divorce or separation, women are sent away empty handed.



### ✿ *The impact of HIV/AIDS on women's land rights*

Women and girl children are the most affected by the HIV/AIDS scourge. Statistics in Kenya indicate that the impact of HIV/AIDS hits hardest on the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society, those least able to cope with the burden of care, the loss of labour and income, and the cost of medicines and funerals. The majority of these are women and girls in rural areas where they depend on land as a source of livelihood.

Kenya has dual legal systems that recognise both customary and common law, depending on circumstances. For instance, when women marry according to customary law they join their husband's clan and property including land devolves along the male line. Women access land through men – fathers, husbands, brothers, sons or male cousins. This is highlighted by the fact that men pay a dowry (bride

price) upon marriage which strengthens their hold over women and property. Women and girls face destitution after the death of their husbands, partners or parents, while poverty and economic dependence leave them exposed to increased sexual exploitation and violence.

Examples of women dispossessed of land by in-laws upon the death of their husbands are recounted all over the country and it's exacerbated by weak enforcement of their rights to own and inherit land especially when the death toll from AIDS is on the increase in both rural and urban areas.

Under these circumstances women are left without recourse. Fear of violence, the social stigma of pursuing a claim, and being considered greedy or a traitor to one's culture, serves to keep many women quiet. For those women who do try to fight back, navigating the complex land law system governing land administration in Kenya requires





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time, literacy and a large dose of patience, as well as money for accessing justice. This appalling situation is compounded by women and girls' lack of knowledge of their rights or support for pursuing claims of restoration.

In some traditions, inheritance is intertwined with such practices as “widow inheritance” and sexual “cleansing”. Because a woman joins her husband’s clan upon marriage, she may be required to marry one of her husband’s male relatives upon his death to retain this link with the clan and her claim to land. Traditionally this implied a responsibility on the part of the man to ensure well-being of the woman and her children, but it now mainly appears to be a way of gaining possession of the property of the deceased.

Given the fact that customary norms and practices and prevailing social attitudes are heavily weighted against women inheritance rights, the women who suffer from

AIDS or lose their husbands to AIDS are further marginalized in the inheritance equation.

#### ✿ Land markets

Presently land reform is based on a liberalised land market, based on the principle of a “willing buyer, willing seller.” Registered land title deeds in the name of a male head of household imply that the man has the legal right to dispose of the land by any means, without recourse to the other members of the family. The majority of poor women suffer when their spouses alienate family land and also have little say in the way money from the sale is used.

#### 4. Proposed information and communication strategies to address gender inequities on access to land

The starting point will entail the harmonisation of various statutes which regulate similar land matters. It would also



call for the repeal of laws and regulations which contradict the basic principles of the National Land Policy, as well as the enactment of new laws which are necessary to enforce aspects of the policy that are not catered for by existing legislation, especially gender inclusion.

There is need to establish counselling and education on property and inheritance rights and succession planning to be incorporated into secondary school curricula, marriage preparation and counselling, and/or voluntary testing and counselling programmes. A set of guidelines should be developed to include such issues as inheritance planning, will-writing, guardianship of children, and, where feasible, how to save money for the future care of dependants.

The Ministry of Lands should put in place mechanisms to facilitate protection against dispossession for women and girls; restoration of taken land, alternative shelter and livelihoods for those who have been dispossessed; and training of paralegals to provide education and assistance at community level.

There is need to avail trainings and sensitization of women's rights and access to property. These can be effectively done through mass media especially use of radio and through formation of peer lobby groups that advocate women's issues.

It would be equally important to avail information on gender issues at existing information / knowledge centres that can be used during trainings and sensitisation forums.

Finally, the establishment of and partnership with organisations which implement gender-based initiatives. For example the GROOTS mobile mentoring project in Kenya should be adopted with the aim of scaling up both horizontally (geographically) and vertically (influencing and effecting institutional and policy changes). The GROOTS project involves the formation of community women watchdog groups who monitor and report any land rights violations involving women and orphans. Vital information is sent via SMS to inform local leaders about the violation and a mentoring process is initiated and shared through mobile phones.

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## Adamou Mahamane

*Project for the promotion of the use of agricultural inputs by producer organisations*


FAO-NIGER

Adamou Mahamane is a journalist. After numerous positions in the media, he decided to orient his professional activities towards communication for development. He was recruited as communication expert by UNDP for a rural development project in Mayahi. After that, he worked as communication expert for the Keita Integrated Project of the Italian Development Cooperation, where he set up a community radio station. He also was National Coordinator of the project “Relaunch of rural radio in Niger”, financed by FAO and UNICEF.

At present, he is communication expert for the project “Promotion of the use of agricultural inputs by producer organisations” (known as Inputs Project), a partner project of Dimitra. His work consists of providing farmers’ organisations with information at the technical (e.g. the reasonable and rational use of inputs), economic (e.g. the availability of inputs, their quality, price, etc.) and financial (e.g. the availability of credit, interest rates, etc) levels, through information and communication activities (production of films, radio programmes, technical information cards, etc).

# Inputs Project

## “Promotion of the use of agricultural inputs by producer organisations”



### 1. Introduction

In Niger, the majority of poor people live in rural areas, and their livelihoods depend on their access to land and other natural resources. But as in many countries in the world, there is gender inequality as regards land access, and this has many effects, especially for women.

Studies have shown that in Niger and almost everywhere in West Africa, gender inequality in land access is very costly indeed, both for individuals (especially women) and society as a whole. According to the World Bank, “gender inequality is an obstacle to the promotion of human rights, poverty reduction, economic growth and sustainable development”.<sup>1</sup> Yet everyone must be involved in meeting objectives for sustainable development – both men and women must be able to take part effectively and fairly in the different stages of creating and redistributing wealth. In Niger, the first stage is access to land, since despite the irregularity of rainfall in the country, most people depend on agriculture for a living and land is the main source of income and food security for the majority of rural households.

Within the framework of this workshop, our contribution will focus on the effects of gender inequalities in land access and rural women’s access to credit in Niger.

### 2. Social and cultural background determining social relations between men and women in the household and in society

Niger’s society is characterised by its rich cultural diversity, a result of the presence of various different ethnic groups (10) throughout the country. In most communities, society is traditionally organised along patriarchal lines. “Despite the diversity of their beliefs and practices,” the different ethnic groups “have the same ideas on the respective roles of men and women”.<sup>2</sup>

In all ethnic groups, relationships between men and women are based on inequality between the man, who is the head of the household, and the woman, who is a wife and mother. Generally speaking, in most of Niger’s social systems, family life is governed by a culture in which women are subordinate and men are dominant.

### 3. Land access

The main way of achieving direct access to land is by acquisition or inheritance, both of which are normally reserved for men. Both men and women may gain indirect access to land ownership by renting or borrowing land (from husbands or other family members). In the past, the availability of cultivable land and the fact that most agricultural activity focused on food production made it easier to gain access to land. However, this is no longer the case now that there is a “crisis for agricultural and environmental systems due to the rapidly rising population and the continued use of unsuitable production systems, which calls into question current land management methods”.<sup>3</sup>

We should also note that when land is being distributed, whether it was obtained through inheritance, borrowing or renting, women are allocated the least significant plots of land. Their plots are small and the soil is of poor quality, so it is impossible for women’s agricultural activities to be productive or give good yields. And since women’s access to this land is not guaranteed, they avoid making investments to conserve their land and boost its fertility, even if they can afford to do so, because they know that the landowners could expropriate them at any time.

But why has land access been made so difficult for women? Women’s difficulties in accessing land and, by extension, the income it brings, have their origin in the traditional view of social roles, which reflects the position of men and women in the family and in the community. In our society, the main role of women is reproduction, which cov-



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ers activities that are not paid because they are considered to be ‘natural’: giving birth, doing housework, taking care of the children, looking after their health and education, and so on.

Yet no-one today can be unaware of the importance of women’s involvement in agricultural production and the sale of agricultural produce. Unfortunately, when it comes to managing the family production unit, despite the recognition of the fundamental role women play in the day-to-day management of family and agricultural activities and the significant contribution women make to acquiring household goods, women are not guaranteed the right to access or control production resources, the main resource being land.

Women’s lack of access to land and production resources does not only have devastating effects on agricultural development (since we know that women put more effort into agricultural activities than men), it also causes the de facto dependence of women on men and influences their access to complementary resources such as credit.

This is a major obstacle to women being able to develop income-generating activities that, when combined with proper land access, could help them make up for or even overcome the economic and social inequalities that put women at such a disadvantage.

#### 4. Access to credit

In Niger, access to funding in the agricultural sector is also subject to inequality because of the eligibility criteria, which rural women have difficulties meeting. Banks already grant very few loans to rural people, and restrict women’s access to such resources even more.

Women have to overcome several obstacles if they want to take out a loan, including the obligation to present guarantees (title deeds to property in land) or material mortgages, even if they are unable to do so. Moreover, the few loans awarded to women are for low amounts. In spite of this, some women have managed to achieve ‘trader’ status, which gives them a degree of financial autonomy and allows them access to owning production resources, particularly land.<sup>4</sup>

Given the recent food crisis in the world and in Sahelian countries in particular, access to land and funding for agricultural production are strategic needs that men and women must meet in order to increase their production and their income.

We are therefore convinced that giving women access to land could contribute to boosting agricultural production, since it has been observed that women make far more investments when they have rights over the land. We believe that ways and means should be found to allow legal texts on gender equality to be applied (in countries where such laws exist) and that information, communication and advocacy strategies should be developed with a view to “creating an environment that will help women to gain rights relating to land use and improve their access to funding, which will allow them to become more independent”.<sup>5</sup>

However, to create such an environment, a range of activities must be performed to promote change in people’s mentalities, attitudes and practices which will help to eradicate gender inequalities. In this context, we should take note of the recent emergence of a female civil society that is increasingly enterprising in both rural and urban areas of Niger.

In fact, women from both rural and urban areas, with support from the state, NGOs, the international community and various other organisations, are gradually forming more and more groups, unions and federations. They are not only aiming to gain economic independence and emancipation, they are also looking to obtain rights. These groups are beginning, for example, to demand access to land, basic infrastructure and production equipment, as well as the opportunity to participate in the economy of their country.

Furthermore, thanks to projects launched by the State and some NGOs to stop soil erosion, “women are putting major efforts into techniques that have allowed them to rehabilitate large areas of land, which they now own”.<sup>6</sup>

Other women’s groups, unions and federations, including those receiving support from the Inputs Project (“Promotion of the use of agricultural inputs by producer organisations” – in French known as “Projet Intrants”), a Dimitra partner project implemented by FAO, are beginning to gain access to land and loans. These primarily agricultural organisations are gradually being granted access to community land lent to them by traditional landowners, who are generally less reluctant to award land rights when the land is being allocated to a group. With a view to supporting such organisations, the Inputs Project has developed a system to give members of such structures easier access to credit.

Indeed, the Inputs Project realised that most rural producers in Niger, women in particular, live in poverty and that these women are faced with many problems when trying to obtain loans to fund agricultural production (needs usually expressed by men) and income-generating activities (animal fattening, market gardening, processing agricultural products etc., which are generally performed by women). With this in mind, it found a system linking loans to the sale of agricultural products. This credit system is known as “warrantage”.

#### ✿ *The warrantage credit system*

The warrantage credit system enables the producer organisations (men and/or women) to:

- secure their own loans;
- benefit from increasing prices;
- acquire inputs or carry out income-generating activities without having to adapt the household’s small budget;
- develop the use of inputs to ensure better productivity.

The warrantage credit system works as follows: at harvest time (November for rain-fed crops), when the markets are flooded and prices are at their lowest, producer organisations (POs) deposit part of their harvest in a safe, secure warehouse and use it as collateral rather than selling it for a low price on the market. First of all, the produce is inspected by the warehouse’s banker (usually a microfinance institution), who checks the quality and quantity of the goods. The produce is then locked away in a warehouse secured by two padlocks – one for the PO and one for the bank, meaning that neither party can remove the goods without the other. The PO is awarded a loan corresponding to 80% of the produce’s lowest value.

Four to six months later, the loan can be repaid with the profits earned from an income-generating activity. Following repayment, the microfinance institution frees up the produce being used as collateral, which, in the meantime, has increased in value. With this system, the producers win on two fronts. Experiences of the warrantage credit system in Niger indicate that the value of the produce used as collateral generally increases by 30 to 40% (depending on the goods and varying from one year to the next). The idea has spread to several other West African countries, where it is applied by farmers’ organisations representing both men and women.

In Niger, this system of flexible credit based on depositing agricultural produce as collateral has allowed several women farmers' organisations to access funds enabling them to perform income-generating activities. Some of them have even been able to buy the land they work, to the great satisfaction of their members and their communities. The women's unions that are partners of the Inputs Project, including those from Torodi, Saboudey Carré and Kollo, now have their own land. They carry out agricultural production activities, notably growing seeds that they sell to institutions supporting agricultural development, such as FAO.

As far as working the land is concerned, the Inputs Project is supporting organisations through agricultural information and dissemination activities through in 'farmer

field schools', a suitable framework for teaching producers about new technologies.

**5. What information and communication strategies should be implemented to promote women's access to land and credit?**

Guaranteeing women access to land, coupled with access to credit and technical support, is the best way for poor families to contribute to national development and benefit from it.

In Sahelian countries such as Niger, everyone must be convinced that food security is difficult to achieve without the involvement of women, and rural women in particular, as their social and economic role and traditional expertise in agriculture no longer need to be proven.



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One of the best ways to promote women's involvement is to guarantee women's ownership rights over the land (where they do not already have such rights) by putting through legal reforms or applying legal texts pertaining to the matter (if there are any). An information and communication strategy should then be developed along the following lines:

- Campaign to raise visibility and promote rural women's involvement in their communities and at national level;
- Information, awareness-raising and advocacy campaign targeting different stakeholders in society (especially traditional chiefs, religious leaders and male heads of households) and promoting women's access to land;
- Broadcasts (particularly by community radio stations), supported by traditional and religious authorities, on aspects of traditional and religious law that are favourable to women;
- Projects to inform women of their rights, the existence of credit facilities and how to access such facilities;

- Literacy programmes for women to ensure that they have easier access to information and that they understand the information.

## 6. Recommendations

### We recommend that the authorities of Niger:

- Accelerate the process of adopting the national gender policy.

### We recommend that Dimitra:

- Build on and disseminate good practices and experiences as regards information and communication on rural women's access to land and credit;
- Improve existing strategies and develop new ones to encourage and communicate with traditional leaders and political decision-makers on subjects related to women's access to land and credit;
- Build women's capacities through literacy projects.

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6. Mahalmoudou Hamadou, expert in natural resource management/land and pastoralism – CILSS Executive Secretariat, Ouagadougou.





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## Elise Muhimuzi

*CONAFED, Comité National Femme et Développement  
(National Committee for Women and Development)*

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Elise Muhimuzi coordinates and manages CONAFED. She is a social extension worker who has since 1993 been working for the dissemination of information and training to support women. In the DRC, it is important that all women in civil society, throughout the country, are mobilised to fight for a constitutional state. The women of the 11 provinces in the DRC have decided to establish a network to exchange, inform themselves, raise awareness and train other women. CONAFED was created with this goal in November 1997 and Elise has been its Permanent Secretary since then. CONAFED is concerned with women's and men's issues in Congolese society and the gender approach remains its battle horse. CONAFED is one of Dimitra's partner organisations in the DRC.

# Women's access to land in the Democratic Republic of Congo



In many African countries, the problem of unequal access to land is one of the causes of poverty among women. With this article, we aim to provide a synopsis of the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Firstly, it is important to point out that the DRC has a large amount of land that can be used for agriculture or for other economic activities. However, the population (estimated at around 60 million) is unevenly distributed across the 2.4 million km<sup>2</sup> of land.

This means the DRC has a low population density in the vast heavily-wooded areas, but a high concentration of people in urban areas, extra-customary centres and some savannah areas such as Ituri and Nord-Kivu in the north-east of the country. Problems related to land access are particularly common in these regions.

## State sovereignty over land

In any case, the current constitution provides that the state exercises its sovereignty over all land, whether on the surface or underground, which is a way of saying that all land belongs to the state. The state then allows physical persons and legal entities to use the land on a permanent or temporary basis.

The issue of land access takes on different forms depending on whether those concerned live in an urban or rural area, whether the woman is married or single and, for married women, what type of prenuptial agreement is in place.

In urban areas, people need land for houses or commercial or industrial buildings. Any citizen, whether male or female, can request a rental contract for a plot of land from the relevant state department – although much depends on the weight of the applicant's purse.

In the case of a couple, it often happens that the rental contract or registration certificate used as the title deed to the property is in the man's name, though this does not mean that these documents can never be made out to women. In any case, both partners have the same rights over the property, particularly in the case of happy marriages with prenuptial agreements using the joint property ownership system or the joint ownership of acquisitions system.

Under the joint property ownership system, all property is owned by both parties, including property owned by each

individual previous to their marriage. Under the joint ownership of acquisitions system, only property that has been acquired since the date of the marriage is jointly owned.

In rural areas, the state grants citizens the right to own land in accordance with customs – that is, land is owned depending on occupation, from generation to generation, by the descendants of one particular ancestor or relative.

Of course, in a system where succession is primarily through the male line, women go to live in their husbands' villages and help them to work the piece of land to which they are entitled. In such cases, even in overpopulated regions, it is rare for a husband and wife to come into conflict over land ownership. It is more common for the husband or the couple and their children to come into conflict with neighbours or the husband's brothers.

However, single or divorced women have severe difficulties in accessing land. They have to try to share parcels of land with their brothers, either negotiating from a weak position or starting life all over again after having left the conjugal home.

In the latter case, the law allows for property to be divided between the two divorced parties, but some discriminatory customs are so firmly rooted that many women do not even begin the lengthy legal process to have the property divided.

## Outdated land exploitation methods

The biggest problem faced by Congolese women in fighting poverty is connected to land exploitation methods and the length of their working day.

Women remain poor because they are still using outdated working methods – they lack loans, farm machinery, better-quality seeds and fertilisers. As a result, they do not receive much money for their work and they are trapped in a state of endemic poverty.

Moreover, women have far more work to do than their husbands, as they must perform such diverse tasks as ploughing, hoeing, harvesting, selling produce, cooking, taking care of the children, and so on. On average, women work 14 hours a day, which has a negative effect on their health and their ability to teach their children, particularly the girls who are kept home to help their mothers.





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## Grégoire Mutshail Mutomb

*SENAHUP/FAO UPH Project, Lubumbashi*

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Grégoire Mutshail, agronomist and specialist in urban agriculture, has worked since September 2000 as Provincial Coordinator of the National Service for Horticulture and as Advisor for urban and peri-urban horticulture in the city of Lubumbashi, for a project piloted by FAO.

Before this, he worked for 4 years as Provincial Coordinator and Branch Head of the National Rice Programme in Katanga, project piloted by UNOPS; 2 years as Technical Assistant and Chief of Service for Dissemination, Training and Research at the Agricultural Development of the Mining Hinterland of Katanga project, financed by IDA and IFAD; and 4 years as Head of the Entomology Section of the Maize Research Centre (CRM) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Scientific Research.

# Project for the Development of Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture (UPH) in Lubumbashi (DRC)



This document<sup>1</sup> gives an overview of the impact of the Project for the Development of Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture (UPH project) in the city of Lubumbashi by comparing the situation before (2000) and after (2008) the project was implemented in the city. The project focused on women in particular, as 73.7% of those benefiting from the UPH project's activities were female.

The UPH project was carried out by FAO via the National Service for Urban and Peri-Urban Horticulture (SENAHUP), a department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Development specialising in this particular area. Urban and peri-urban horticulture is an essential element of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) as it offers the urban population real opportunities for jobs, income and a daily supply of fresh produce with high nutritional value.

The UPH project identified the following priorities:

- securing access to resources (land, high-quality water);
- guaranteeing sustainable, high-quality horticultural production;
- making the institutional context secure and allowing stakeholders in the domain to take ownership of UPH;
- securing future prospects, including promoting consumption;
- ensuring that information is disseminated and people have access to it.

## 1. Children's education

The number of children attending school has climbed significantly due to the increase in their parent's income, thanks to the good price vegetables fetch on the market. Furthermore, the number of girls in education is not lower than the number of boys, except at university level. With support from the UPH project, the situation is still improving. The emancipation of girls seems to be one of the benefits to the urban gardeners' families, but a more in-depth study would be required to examine the exact details of this phenomenon.

## 2. Food

The number of meals per day in households involved in the project has increased for all age groups. Children usually already ate more meals per day than adults (1.8 meals compared to 1.3 for adults) and this trend is continuing with the support of the UPH project (3.3 meals for children, 2.4 meals for adults).

## 3. Purchase of food with high nutritional value

Far more people are buying a range of foods viewed not as necessary provisions but as desirable foodstuffs, such as beans, fish, meat, rice, potatoes, caterpillars, mushrooms and game, on a monthly basis since the UPH project began supporting them. Families are now buying more of almost all of these foods and, to some extent, fish and rice are now an integral part of the diet in Lubumbashi. Purchase of meat, caterpillars and game has almost tripled, which gives some idea of the extra income that families have available for buying foodstuffs.

## 4. Ability to meet expenditure

% of families who are capable of meeting monthly expenditure	Before	After	Difference %
Medical care	40	100	60%
Costs related to childbirth	60	100	40%
Burial costs	64	89	25%
Costs related to marriage	58	83	25%
Buying clothes	80	100	20%
Buying a mobile phone	11	88	77%

If the data for costs related to marriage are not counted (as they are occasional and social, since the whole extended family makes a contribution), the table shows that market gardeners now have a higher financial margin. Their capacity to cover costs related to medical care and childbirth indicates more sustainable management of their financial resources and confirms their ability to increase their incomes as a result of market gardening activities in Lubumbashi.



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### 5. Saving

Support in the form of training for managing local savings banks has clearly increased beneficiaries' desire and ability to save: the percentage of project beneficiaries who were able to put money aside as savings increased from 18% before the UPH project to 98% after the project. The saving rate has also risen from 0.4% to 1.3%.

### 6. Opening a bank account

Several beneficiaries of the UPH project are now not only able to save money in their own micro savings bank, they have also decided to open bank accounts with credit unions or local banks.

### 7. Availability and use of land

	Before	After	Difference %
% of beneficiaries who rent land	38	23	-39%
% of beneficiaries who own land	36	58	61%
% of beneficiaries who are guaranteed use of land	76	92	21%

There has been some improvement to the situation of market gardeners as regards the land they work. Market gardeners want to own their land and are managing to do so. The drop in the number of beneficiaries renting land is due to the fact that they can use community and customary land.

### Women's status as regards land

Of the 41 registered market gardens, women run 8 (20%), men run 12 (29%) and 21 are jointly run (51%). Thanks to the UPH project's cooperation with the Lubumbashi city authorities, through the Municipal Dialogue Committee, the land access situation has greatly improved and can be summarised as follows:

- 11% of women have family land;
- 13% have three to five-year rental contracts;
- 23% have been allocated land by the Congolese state;
- 47% have customary land in the peri-urban area around Lubumbashi;
- 6% do not have contracts.

### 8. More land cultivated

Increasing the area of land cultivated (from 129 to 524 ha) seems to be the first decision made by market gardeners who receive support from the UPH project and have access to the resources and inputs needed to do so. This trend is most noticeable in Lubumbashi, where cultivating more land is relatively unproblematic for the time being given the huge amount of land available. The total area of land exploited by market gardeners supported by the project now stands at 524 ha, of which 306 ha (58%) is exploited by women.

### 9. Availability and use of water

Access to water is a necessary condition for production in urban and peri-urban areas. While most market gardeners now have better access to water, the amount of time spent on irrigation is also increasing. Given that more land is being cultivated – and needing irrigated – it is obviously very important to improve irrigation.

Irrigation technology is something of an innovation in the DRC. Thanks to support from the UPH project, market gardeners are now familiar with several types of irrigation systems and at present, around 29% of market gardeners buy their own motor pumps to irrigate areas between 1 and 3 ha.

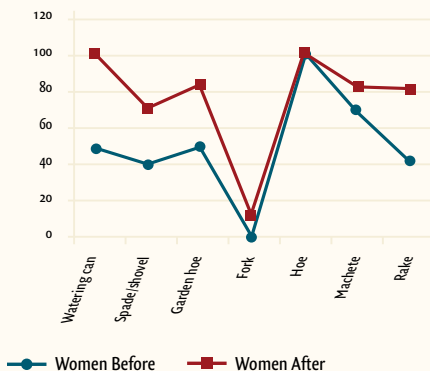
Access to water is not problematic from the point of view of gender discrimination as water is not really a constraint in Lubumbashi. However, inequalities persist in the quality of the water and the way it is used. Most women water their land using basins and watering cans. A small number of women have pedal pumps, and an even smaller number have motor pumps. Men are better equipped because the distribution of tasks in market gardens is such that 80% of irrigated crops are grown by men, who use irrigation systems such as sprinklers and furrows or tools like watering cans, basins, pedal pumps or motor pumps.

Only large farms can use drip irrigation systems, though some market gardeners manage to install such systems after making considerable sacrifices.

### 10. Availability and use of tools

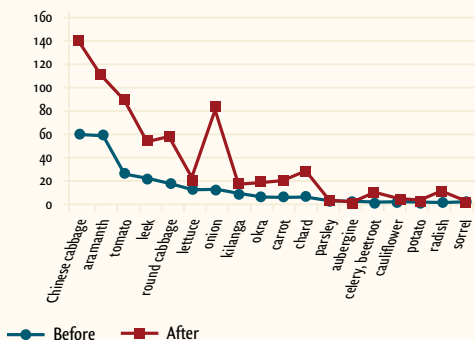
Support from the UPH project has enabled a greater number of market gardeners to acquire basic equipment such as hoes, watering cans and other tools that make it easier to develop and maintain flowerbeds. Before the project was launched, women did not have tools of their own. They

worked with tools belonging to their husbands or their families. Now, an average of 80% of women own tools thanks to the project's credit support:



### 11. Adoption of new crops by women

In Lubumbashi, the adoption of new crops has really taken off. This is especially true of Chinese cabbage and round cabbage. Market demand for crops such as lettuce, sorrel, onions, tomatoes and aubergines has increased now that mining activities have resumed in the province and the population is increasing. Carrots, okra, chard and leeks are also highly valued by market gardeners, who voluntarily decided to grow such crops in order to meet increased demand. The standard of production for amaranth remains high. Before the launch of the UPH project, women only grew four types of leafy vegetable. Now that they have received training from the project, they grow more than fifteen.

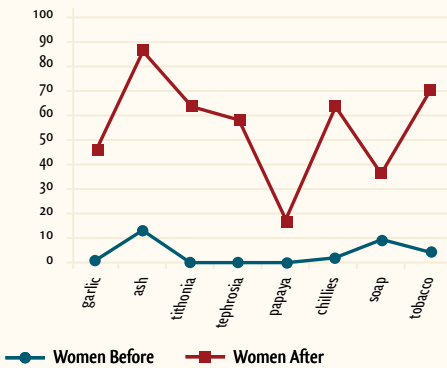


## 12. Use of natural and chemical fertilisers and pesticides

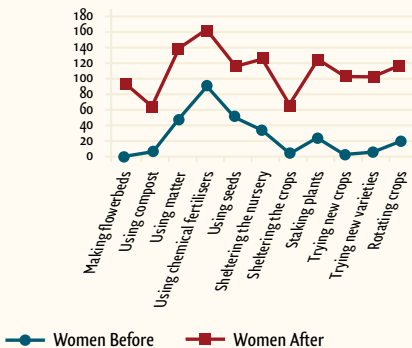
There is a clear increase in the number of market gardeners using natural fertilisers. Use of chicken droppings (+56%), pig manure (+20%) and compost (+52%) has grown considerably. Before the launch of the UPH project, people were not familiar with natural pesticides, but now their use is also spreading. On the other hand, use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which are difficult to find and more expensive, is declining.

Market gardeners are receptive to Integrated Production and Pest Management (IPPM) techniques and have adopted a range of good practices promoted by the UPH project while using fewer chemical fertilisers and pesticides. In this way, the IPPM concept has become a visible and effective reality in the field.

### Use of natural pesticides by women:



### Adoption of good growing practices promoted by the UPH project:



Several women are currently playing a very important part in the sector as they are leading field schools with a view to passing on their training in good growing practices to other women.

## 13. Organising groups

Women have an excellent position in the market gardening sector:

- some market gardening organisations are chaired by women;
- there are several women chairing the management committees of local micro savings banks within the framework of microcredit systems;
- the Comité des Maraîchers de Lubumbashi (COMALU – Lubumbashi Market Gardeners' Committee), a platform for the horticultural industry in Lubumbashi, has two female vice-chairs;
- the Board of Directors of the Coopération d'Approvisionnement et des Consommations (COOPACO – Supply and Consumption Union) is chaired by a woman;
- the Board of Directors of the Filière Horticole de micro-Finances (FHF – Horticultural Sector of Microfinance) is chaired by a woman.

Market gardeners have organised the various branches of urban horticulture within COMALU, an umbrella organisation representing over 8,308 market gardeners, of whom 74% are female and 26% male. The committee comprises twelve members, and seven of them are women.

### a) Organisation meetings and frequency of attendance

Before the UPH project began offering support in the area, the concept of groups and organisations did not really exist. Market gardening organisations were not even legally recognised and they did not have notarised articles of association. Now, however, all such groups have official documents such as a Certificate of Recognition and a Registration Certificate.

The project also underlined the importance of organising and attending meetings and encouraged people to do so. Members meet at least four times a month and attendance has risen by 58% (from an average of 38 participants to 96).

### b) Capacity for internal reorganisation

The groups have been strengthened in all aspects of internal organisation, ranging from their ability to meet their mem-

bers' needs (resolving internal conflicts, offering services such as loans and savings, etc.) to their ability to provide a decent level of support with technical and socio-economic matters or the way they manage community property.

#### **Results:**

- organisation of joint purchasing by groups;
- better communication of information on selling prices for vegetables and purchase prices for seeds;
- structuring of the sector through the organisation of a cooperative – with its own capital – for the sale of seeds and equipment and the creation of an umbrella organisation for savings and loans against equity;
- general improvement in market gardeners' wellbeing;
- better access to water.

#### **14. Impact on incomes**

Net income per are of cultivated land has grown considerably for exotic crops (e.g. carrots, potatoes, celery, round cabbages) while net income for traditional crops (such as kilanga) is stagnating.

There are considerable differences in producers' net monthly incomes and these are due to the relative profitability of various crops (in the current technical conditions). The crops that generate the most income are: peppers, chard, celery, lettuce and tomatoes. The crops with a medium level of profitability are: leeks, Chinese cabbages, okra, pumpkins, cucumbers, courgettes, round cabbages and amaranth. It is not terribly lucrative to grow marrows, kilanga or sorrel.

On the one hand, the increase in market gardeners' incomes is a result of their decision to cultivate larger areas, but on the other hand, growing more profitable crops has also contributed to this rise in incomes. Initial research indicates that the average net income of an average market gardener (working 5 ares) is, in theory, approximately \$120 per month.

#### **15. Access to training and information**

Market gardeners are trained in field schools, where they learn to make their own observations, analyse and find solutions themselves, take important decisions and work independently. Field schools are a framework for learning and information exchange where producers learn by both activity and experience while making optimum use of their knowledge and expertise.

Thanks to information and training tools from the field school, the UPH project has not only improved techniques for horticultural production, it has also helped women to learn French, making it the ideal framework for horticultural literacy campaigns.

To help market gardeners hone their skills, a 'Hortivar café' equipped with two computers was made available to producers three times a week so they could:

- enter information into the Hortivar database; research varieties and cultivars that could be used in their production ecosystem;
- find information on new horticultural technology.

#### **16. The impact of the UPH project on women**

##### **a) Access to technology**

Since it was launched, the UPH project has been assisting female market gardeners throughout the production process by providing a range of training programmes allowing them to access new production techniques and helping them to cast off local practices, which are often less productive. Furthermore, the project was responsible for hydro-agricultural developments in different areas, giving women access to irrigation systems that simplify the difficult task of watering the land with pedal pumps.

##### **b) Access to credit**

Giving women access to credit enables them to increase their income, diversify their activities and be responsible for their own food security. Over 6,124 women have received support from the UPH via local micro savings banks. These are self-managed by the groups, with the help of the NGO SADRI, which provided high-quality follow-up of management and training. The support was valued at an average of \$150 per person.

The financial support the women received was used to buy the necessary inputs, equipment and seeds for market gardening. When women have access to credit, they develop their market gardening activities with a focus on the following:

##### **\* Production of vegetables**

Women stand out by producing 'traditional' crops such as amaranths, nightshade, sweet potatoes, marrows, Chinese cabbages, non-hybrid tomatoes, peppers, sorrel, cucumbers, aubergines, okra, carrots and celery, while men con-



concentrate on more exotic vegetables. Women produce around 12 of the 39 vegetables grown in Lubumbashi (31%).

#### ✿ *Sale*

Women sell their produce in bulk and to individuals. They either sell it near the fields or travel to do so ('mummy carrot' as opposed to 'daddy amaranth').

#### ✿ *Diversification of income*

- several women combine animal breeding with UPH activities;
- one woman has set up a day-care centre;
- several women sell things other than ordinary agricultural products;
- several women have set up sewing businesses using the income from their market gardening activities;
- other women have begun processing and conserving tomatoes so they can sell them off season.

#### ✿ *Access to high-quality seeds*

Out of all the land occupied by women performing horticultural activities (306 ha), only 36% (i.e. 116 ha) is sown with high-performance seeds. This is because women specialise in producing local vegetables and using self-produced seeds for crops such as amaranth, okra, nightshade, sorrel, leafy

sweet potato, leafy marrow, aubergines and a few exotic crops (tomatoes, Chinese cabbages, round cabbages, celery and chard) for which they need to buy seeds. Women choose the seeds themselves, and they prefer to produce traditional vegetables that are easy to grow.

83% of the 181 ha that men use for horticultural activities is sown with high-performance seeds for producing exotic vegetables. This means that the yield/area ratio is higher for men's crops, even though women cultivate more land.

The UPH project has played a vital role in organising the sector at all production stages – it also supports people reselling seeds and manufacturers of ploughing tools, (there were only 12 in 2000, but this had increased to 44 in 2008).

#### *c) Transport methods for selling vegetables*

- Carrying on the head: 94% of women, 6% of men;
  - Transport by bicycle: 16% of women, 84 % of men;
  - Transport by vehicle: 64% of women, 36% of men.
- The project is currently playing a key role in the sale system. Research is underway into ways to further alleviate the women's task of transporting fresh vegetables to commercial areas. The project has so far built seven stalls in markets near the market gardens.

1. Due to space constraints, this document has had to be condensed. The original document (in French), showing all the tables, is available upon request.





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## Adeline Nsimire Balika

*SAMWAKI, Sauti ya Mwanamke Kijijini*

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Adeline Nsimire is Coordinator of SAMWAKI, a rural women's organisation established in 2002 in Mugogo, South Kivu province (DRC).

Sociologist by training and teacher by profession, Adeline discovered during her career that a big gap exists between the schooling of boys and girls in the rural areas of South Kivu. She decided to raise the awareness of her community on this issue by starting up "communication axes" – places for dialogue and exchange of ideas between women – and listeners' clubs for women and men to discuss development issues on the radio and in group, focusing in particular on the gender approach. In 2004, she established REFERUSKI, a network of rural women from South Kivu regrouping eight groups of rural women's organisations from the eight rural districts of the province. In her function as Coordinator of SAMWAKI, she is also in charge of leading "Radio Bubusa FM", a community radio for rural women established in Mugogo by SAMWAKI in January 2008.

SAMWAKI is Dimitra's partner organisation in South Kivu.

# Reflection on gender inequality in access to land and its consequences for rural women in South Kivu

## 1. Introduction

In this article, we will discuss the issue of gender inequality, particularly gender inequality related to land access, and its consequences for rural women in South Kivu province (DRC). We will focus on the link between sexual violence, which is one of the results of gender inequality, and rural women's access to land. By way of conclusion, we will suggest some information and communication strategies for fighting gender inequality.

Generally speaking, women and girls in South Kivu neither have nor want access to land. As far as we know, women in the province have never launched an action to demand land rights. Once, in 2005, rural women's organisations from Miti, Kabare territory (around 30km from Bukavu) made some demands connected to land protection. The women, supported by a number of men, organised a peaceful march to contest a governmental decision allowing the division of the concession housing the Institut National d'Etudes et de la Recherche Agronomique (INERA – National Institute for Agronomic Study and Research) in Mulungu. The demonstrators walked 30 kilometres to Bukavu to submit a memorandum to provincial and land authorities. They felt that erecting buildings for the benefit of rich people in that location was a threat to the lives of almost 500 families who are dependent on agricultural production. They also thought it was unacceptable that experimental plots of land belonging to a renowned Central African research centre recognised for the outstanding quality of its services should be expropriated for the sole purpose of relieving the city of Bukavu.

We can confirm that there are no female landowners. South Kivu province has a total area of 64,829 km<sup>2</sup>, which is divided up between rich businessmen, powerful political figures and traditional chiefs – all of whom are male. Women are excluded from land ownership because of various constraints, summarised below:

### a) Customs

Custom dictates that the land is sacred and it belongs to the king, the Mwami. He distributes the land to his subjects in return for a fee known as Kalinzi in the tradition of the Bashi people, the biggest tribe in South Kivu. The Kalinzi normally takes the form of a dairy cow or a bull. The land must be allocated to a man. When he dies, his eldest son inherits all his land and automatically becomes the one who reports to the king. His brothers are each allocated some of the land, but girls are not entitled to anything as they are supposed to marry and be allocated fields by their new families. Hoes are always involved in the dowry ceremony to symbolise that a girl who is founding a family must, above all, know how to cultivate a field. Everyone watches her to see how well she uses the hoe. If she is deemed to be lazy, she will soon be cast off with no way to plead her case.

When a girl gets married, her husband allocates her some of his family's land. She works it and uses it to grow the food her family needs. If her husband dies, she can continue working her field if her father-in-law says so. However, her situation becomes very difficult if she does not have a son – she will be run off the land and she and her daughters will not be entitled to any property, which will be inherited by another man or boy in the family. We would like to point out that such practices, though extremely old-fashioned, are still used in some villages in South Kivu province and the DRC as a whole.

### b) Land laws

As society has evolved, written laws have emerged. However, as far as land is concerned, traditional law is still the most influential in the villages. This does not apply to land in mining towns, trade centres or large urban agglomerations, where there are public authorities in charge of allocating land.

Unfortunately, land laws have not been subject to enough repackaging and dissemination for rural populations, and women in particular, to be aware of their existence and benefit from their provisions. Land used to belong to the Mwami and now it belongs to the state – that is the only difference. The state can sell plots of land to people, and does so, which means that the state sometimes sells land that is occupied by people who obtained it according to customary law and believe that they own it. This is particularly the case in tea and cinchona plantations, for instance.

**c) Women's status**

In rural areas, which are governed by tradition, it is extremely difficult for women's status to improve. Women continue to be subjected to discriminatory treatment because this is what tradition dictates. A woman cannot own a cow, never

mind a field, which would be a taboo subject. The man owns both the cow and the field, and the woman must submit to him to be able to use these assets, even if she only wishes to rent them.

**d) The media**

While we do welcome the recent emergence of a number of radio stations in isolated rural areas, we are disappointed to note that they do not take account of gender in their broadcasts. Gender is not dealt with in a way that will inform and raise awareness of the issue among men, women and children. It must be said that one of the major obstacles preventing women from accessing land is a lack of awareness, which is caused by the difficulty in obtaining information on administrative procedures for access to land and other resources, loans, work or power.



## 2. Background information on South Kivu province

### a) Geography

South Kivu is one of the 11 provinces of the DRC. It is in the east of the country and shares a border with Tanzania and the Congolese provinces of Maniema and North Kivu. Its population is estimated at 3 million and it has an area of around 65,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It is a mountainous region with two main climate zones, the savannah and the forest. It rains for nine months of the year and is sunny the rest of the time. The province has considerable resources in water in the form of lakes Tanganyika and Kivu and the large rivers that make up the Congo River.

### b) Economic situation

South Kivu is an agro-pastoralist region with very low production, despite the fertility of the land. The main crops are cassava, rice, beans, sweet potatoes, potatoes and similar. Small-scale fishing is practised in the two lakes, of which one is considered to have the greatest variety of species in the world. People also fish in the rivers. Agricultural production has decreased dramatically since the recent wars, while there is a boom in the exploitation of mine products by large multinationals and local people.

The poor state of the roads and the unsafe nature of some areas of the province are major obstacles to economic activity, particularly small trade – in fact, activities have not been resumed everywhere. The situation is the same regarding the sale of agricultural products to isolated villages.

### c) Social situation

- Severe hunger;
- Widespread unemployment, particularly among young people;
- Civil servants' salaries are not paid, paid infrequently or are insufficient;
- Increased rural exodus towards towns and centres for the traditional exploitation of mine products;
- Extreme poverty, mainly affecting women;
- Spread of endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other STIs;
- Fresh outbreak of rape and sexual violence against women and girls;
- Lack of education for children and young people because there is not enough money to pay teachers' salaries;

- Poor access to healthcare;
- Increasing illiteracy amongst women and girls;
- Absence or shortage of information and communication channels in rural areas, and limited access to their services where they do exist, particularly for women and girls;
- Proliferation of phenomena such as prostitution, sexual slavery, children born of rape and street children, early marriages and young “girl-mothers”.

### d) Legal and judicial situation

- Continuation of traditional practices that discriminate against women and girls;
- Land ownership rights held only by men, in accordance with customs;
- Lack of knowledge of national laws by rural populations, especially women, because of illiteracy, limited access to information and communication and the failure of the relevant government departments to repack-age and disseminate the laws;
- Failure to apply the law on gender equality at different levels;
- Rural populations are unfamiliar with their rights (protection, freedom of association, freedom of expression, inheritance, education, property, marriage, etc.) and the applicable legal provisions in each case;
- Judicial and prison administration in ruins;
- Impunity in cases of sexual violence against women and girls, despite the existence of a new law defining and punishing this crime.

### e) Decision-making

In the tradition that is common to all ethnic groups and tribes in South Kivu, women have long been viewed as inferior to men. This belief is still being perpetuated by some customs, even though considerable progress has been made in the area. However, it is regrettable that legal developments do not guarantee that women's situation and social status will improve. In our societies, the length of time it takes judicial bodies to enforce laws that have been duly voted upon and passed constitutes an obstacle in the relationship between women and men and increases discrimination against women and girls.

In our villages, all forms of gender-based discrimination have one thing in common: they exclude women from making decisions on their own fate or that of the village and

force women to comply with decisions made without their involvement, even if these decisions have negative effects for the women and do not contribute to development. For example, it is rare for women to participate in discussions about their daughters' dowries. If there are disagreements to be settled between neighbours or within families, the village chief will only summon the men to resolve the issue. And if a woman feels she is directly affected by the issue and insists on participating in the meeting, she is not allowed to speak.

After long years of dictatorship in the DRC, the image of women has deteriorated as the system has reduced them to objects of seduction rather than giving them responsibilities at the same level as men. There is still a long way to go for women to be able to exercise their full participatory role in decision-making bodies, whether traditional or political.

### 3. Consequences of gender inequality in land access

Lack of access to land is the most visible form of discrimination against women in the rural areas of South Kivu, where wealth and power are based on land. Without land, rural women have no wealth and no power – they have nothing. This situation contributes to the deterioration of women's social status and impedes their access to other resources such as information, training, loans, and so on. Rural women in South Kivu could be seen as having no identity because, as belief goes, *one is distinguished by one's assets, and primarily by the plot of land one owns*.

The consequences of gender inequality as regards land access could have dangerous effects on women's ability to thrive, on their daughters' development and on the development of the community. These include:

- Increased poverty among women;
- Destitution in households and families;
- Dependence and subordination;
- Insufficient agricultural production;
- Poor management of agricultural production by men;
- Women being expropriated of land if their husbands die;
- Exclusion from important meetings on land access;
- Women becoming more vulnerable (to HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, sexual violence, violation of human rights, etc.).

### 4. Vulnerability of rural women in South Kivu to sexual violence

We will deal with this complex issue by attempting to explain manifestations of sexual violence before, during and after the wars that have been raging in the DRC since 1996, and we will study the connection between sexual violence and land access in South Kivu.

The tragedy of sexual violence in South Kivu has been widely discussed at both national and international level, so we do not claim to be contributing new information to existing analysis. However, as rural women living in the province and as victims of this crime, we feel it is our duty to take this opportunity to express our concern regarding the situation. We must ask how, when and by whom these crimes are being committed, and to do this, we must look at three distinct periods: before, during and after the war.

#### a) Sexual violence before the war

Before the outbreak of war in the DRC in 1996, people in South Kivu were not familiar with sexual violence. This does not mean that such crimes did not exist, simply that they may have been given a different name and were certainly managed and treated differently by the various community actors. No-one in our villages had ever heard such crimes being discussed, whether in conversations, books, or around the fire at night. Congolese legislation had not defined sexual violence – the only crimes covered by the law were rape and indecent assault.

However, some analysts confirm that isolated acts of sexual violence were committed in villages and within families, but that the incidents were kept quiet and very few people knew about them. There is a common expression in the area, *Kuberera endaha erunvi*, which means “Break gourds where no-one can see”, or “Hush up an incident before news of it spreads”. This is done to avoid scandal and preserve the honour of the family and the community.

In the relatively distant past, it sometimes happened that young men would lie in wait for a girl at night, carry her off and take her to one young man's hut so he could make her his wife. The next day, the families of the boy and girl would meet to officialise the marriage once the dowry had been paid. Women forbade their adolescent daughters from going near shepherds' rest areas, on the pretext that shepherds were known for “striking” girls. It would seem that the women knew about the shepherds' behaviour towards



girls – they would not just strike the girls with their staffs, they would also tear their clothes and take them by force. However, this was never explicitly mentioned in any reports on such incidents. In the same way, if a girl becomes pregnant in our villages, the boy is usually forced to marry her. No matter how old the two young people are, their parents will meet and make arrangements for a dowry.

This attitude can be explained by women's desire to observe the rule of silence, which aims to preserve the honour and credibility of the community.

#### **b) Sexual violence during the war**

The expression 'sexual violence' first appeared in 1996. At first, the term was not used very frequently, but it became widespread from 1998 onwards. It was discussed everywhere and the media broadcast stories of what soon be-

came the curse of an entire population, whose dignity has been severely affected. The country witnessed indescribably awful scenes where around ten men would take turns at raping a woman, dying old woman or little girl. Worse still, there were many reports of sexual mutilation: knives, bayonets and sharpened pieces of wood being driven into women's vaginas; sand, salt or chillies being put in the vagina or even bullets being shot into women's sexual organs. The procedure was sometimes concluded with the assassination of the victim and/or her family or the amputation of part of the victim's body (often a breast).

Is there anything more inhuman than forcing a man to have sexual relations with his daughter or mother, making a mother sleep with her own son or raping a woman or man in front of their own children or vice-versa? Accounts of sexual violence tell of unimaginably horrific scenes, of men



and women being forced to eat the flesh of their own baby, who had just been disembowelled.

**c) Sexual violence since the war**

Sexual violence is still being inflicted upon women and girls in South Kivu, just as it was during the war. It had long been associated with armed groups, but now, more worryingly still, it has spread to other social groups, both armed and unarmed. For example, sexual violence is being perpetrated by FARDC soldiers, officers from the national police force, church officials, ore miners and other civilians.

At present, those assumed to be committing sexual violence are targeting unbelievably young girls. Analysis of the current situation shows that the criminals have one clear goal: destroying women's sexual organs. We would have to look far back into the history of war and devastating populations to understand the acts of savage cruelty that are rife in South Kivu today. These methods are being used everywhere, by the same perpetrators, with the same reason and strategy: to erode women's dignity and rob them of their ability to reproduce. Similar practices were used on women during the war. In other words, there is still war during 'peacetime'. There are many factors explaining the renewed outbreak of sexual violence, the main three being:

**Impunity:** This is the main reason for the continuation of sexual violence. The victims and the population as a whole are eager to see the application of law no. 06/019 of 20 July 2006 of the Congolese Penal Code, relative to sexual violence. If this law, which aims to "prevent and severely punish crimes relating to sexual violence and provide systematic support for the victims of such crimes", is not applied strictly, then no change will be possible. Quite the contrary, in fact – before, these crimes were only attributed to armed groups (both Congolese and foreign) but now soldiers in the Congolese national military, police officers, pastors, gold miners and other young men are the most frequently-mentioned perpetrators.

**Practitioners of traditional medicine:** In the mining areas of South Kivu, it is no longer surprising to see an adult male caught in the process of raping a young child, regardless of her age (as young as 2 or 4 years old). Most of the men causing young children so much suffering are blindly obeying the instructions of their fetish priests, who promise them supernatural powers that will allow them to find mines full of gold or other ores. For this to happen, the men must sleep with a girl who has never slept with a man before.

**False beliefs regarding HIV/AIDS:** In South Kivu, many people believe that having sexual relations with a girl who is a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS. Since most people believe that adolescent girls are usually no longer virgins, HIV/AIDS sufferers turn to younger girls instead.

**5. What are the connections between women's land ownership and their vulnerability to sexual violence and HIV/AIDS?**

- Land is the only resource available to rural people, most of whom depend on agriculture for survival. Without this vital resource, many women and girls have to leave the areas they come from to earn money for their survival. The easiest solution is to move to centres for the exploitation of mining products or trading centres. They are driven into prostitution, which obviously puts them at risk of HIV/AIDS and brings them into contact with all sorts of violence, particularly sexual violence.
- Many men abandon their wives if they have been subjected to sexual violence. Other women simply flee their villages for fear of being stigmatised, but also because they do not have a plot of land where they can find stability and live off what the land produces.
- The region is full of children born of sexual violence, who are not accepted by the community. Their safety can depend on whether or not their mothers own plots of land that they can give them, since they will not be granted fields by a family that does not recognise them as family members.
- AIDS orphans are often dispossessed of their fields after their father dies because the fields are considered to be family property. A field acquired by a mother will remain the children's property and will secure their futures.
- A field, as an asset, increases women's power and improves their social status. The produce from a woman's field boosts her independence and contributes to reducing her vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and sexual violence.

**6. Information and communication strategies: the role of the media**

- Build the capacities of journalists on community radio stations as regards gender sensitive communication by using modular training programmes on different subjects;

- Provide support to rural community radio stations in the form of equipment or material;
- Set up community radio stations in isolated villages that do not receive media broadcasts;
- Establish radio listeners' clubs in isolated villages with a view to informing the population and raising their awareness of gender inequality and its impact on development;
- Create a permanent framework for journalists from community radio stations, members of radio listeners' clubs, civil society and local judicial bodies to meet and exchange ideas and information;
- Create venues for cultural activities in rural areas;
- Produce participatory programmes and messages on gender and land access, to be disseminated on community radio stations and through other channels (songs, theatre, posters, television, puppet shows, video, etc);
- Identify, analyse and lead radio debates on discriminatory laws and traditions that limit the power of rural women, particularly as regards land access and gender equality, with a view to abolishing or revising them;
- Repackage and disseminate the land code and the forest code, using local languages;
- Inform and lead debates in local languages on legal texts, such as those concerning human rights, the family code, inheritance, marriage, land access, gender, sexual violence and gender equality.
- Interview people, institutions and households that are strongly involved in gender promotion, with a view to reducing the different forms of discrimination against women;
- Cover all meetings organised by the community to deal with agriculture and development with a view to finding the best practices as regards gender;
- Disseminate local content on the fight against poverty, with a particular focus on the spread of poverty among women.

## 7. Conclusion

Continuing gender inequalities in the rural communities of South Kivu prevent both the women and that region of the DRC from thriving. Women's lack of access to land is a sign of the excessive marginalisation of women. As a result, sexual violence against the region's women and girls is a manifestation of the war 'without firearms' that planners and perpetrators are waging, with new strategies, new targets and new stakeholders. Strategies to inform and place responsibility on community members must be implemented to help the community to avoid the current tragedy and its future effects, with the aim of ensuring that everyone is involved in initiatives to fight gender inequality and sexual violence. Building the capacities of and empowering women could lead the community to provide fair access to land. If the media take appropriate actions and are committed to development, they can make a highly effective contribution to realising such a change.

We would like to thank all of the men and women who, directly or indirectly, contributed to this reflection by sharing their experiences and knowledge with us and those who are using appropriate methods to give and/or return to the women of South Kivu their dignity as women and mothers, stakeholders in concerted development and bearers of the same rights as their partners of the other sex: men.





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## Dorothy Okello

*WOUGNET, Women of Uganda Network*

UGANDA

Dorothy Okello is Coordinator of WOUGNET, whose mission is to promote and support the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by women and women's organisations in Uganda. Dorothy has been active in the area of getting more women, small-scale enterprises and rural communities engaged in the information society for development via gender & ICT policy advocacy and via programme implementation and monitoring & evaluation. Dorothy is also a member of the Strategy Council of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Global Alliance for ICT and Development (UNDESA-GAID). WOUGNET is the Dimitra partner for Eastern Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda).

# Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequalities in access to land in Africa – The case of Uganda

## 1. Introduction

Over 80% of Uganda's population of 29 million is rural-based and depends almost entirely on agriculture at various levels for livelihoods. It is widely held that access to accurate and timely information by rural populations can not only increase agricultural productivity, it will also result in enhanced economic and social development. Indeed, the Ugandan government recognises that information is key for all kinds of programmes such as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), and Prosperity for All. Given the central role agriculture plays, it is therefore important to understand and address gender inequalities with respect to ownership, access and right to use land in Uganda.

Uganda does provide a showpiece of work on gender issues at both government and NGO levels. In her paper entitled "Working in Gender and Development in the Ugandan context", Mary Ssonko<sup>1</sup> indicates that Uganda has demonstrated the ability that something can be done to bridge the gender gap between men and women, but that a deeper analysis of the same presents a very complicated situation especially when it comes to the grassroots level in rural areas. On the one hand, NGOs are advocating for changes and women's groups are struggling to help women to meet their daily survival needs and to transform their lives. On the other side of the story, there are deeply embedded cultural beliefs and practices, economic policies by the government and continued rhetoric that seems to have no effect on the gender relations at the household level other than increasing the workloads of women.

Mary Ssonko's observations supplement findings of a recent WOUNGNET study of rural women in 15 parishes in Apac District, Northern Uganda. The April 2008 study indicates that rural women in Apac District acknowledge that governance issues are a concern to them, in addition to domestic violence, health and education. The women

called for more information, awareness and sensitisation in the areas of health, livelihood, gender, education and good governance. Many women expressed great desire to know their rights saying, 'We hear we have rights as women. But we do not know our rights. Can we be educated about our rights? Our husbands should also be educated about our rights'. The majority of the women earned their livelihood through agriculture. They indicated their need for agricultural information decriing their limited knowledge of improved agricultural practices. The women expressed a need to be trained in functional adult literacy so that they would be able to read and write. They decried heavy workloads and domestic violence in their households. Most women reported being barred from women's meetings, and consequently having to bribe their spouses with bits of money so that the men can go off to drink while the women go and attend the meeting.

Consequently, WOUNGNET would like to address different issues regarding women's status in Uganda, in particular through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to disseminate information as well as to provide a channel for women's voices and concerns.

## 2. The WOUNGNET experience: Empowering women through ICTs

WOUNGNET is an NGO initiated in May 2000 by several women's organisations in Uganda to develop the use of ICTs among women as tools to share information and address issues collectively. According to findings from the 2003 WOUNGNET Evaluation Report – which used the APC Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) tool that is useful in assessing initiatives using ICTs for social change – WOUNGNET activities had increased awareness and participation of women in ICT-related activities, as well as increased information sharing and networking among women and women's organisations. However, the benefits were still limited to those organisations that had access to

Internet, leaving out the majority of women and women's organisations in the rural areas.

Though efforts had been made to support women's organisations in the rural areas to explore ICT opportunities in their activities, through awareness workshops, seminars, print materials, etc., this had been done on a limited scale. There was still lack of adequate capacity for women to explore ICTs to their full potential in their activities. Constraints included:

- Inadequate skills and knowledge in ICT use and application in their daily activities.
- Lack of ICT centres where they could exploit ICTs in their activities.
- Lack of connectivity to access the information disseminated online by WOUGNET.
- Lack of information translated in the local language to meet the needs of the diversified members.
- Lack of diversified methods of disseminating information that would satisfy both urban and rural women.
- Lack of technical skills to address problems such as computer break down and maintenance.

Following the 2003 evaluation, WOUGNET's overall objective was revised to strengthen the use of ICTs among women and women's organisations, to build capacities in ICT use and application, and to expand activities to reach out to women in the rural areas. Currently, WOUGNET's activities are conducted under the guidance of the 2008-2010 Strategic Plan with the overall goal to enable women and women's organisations to strategically and innovatively use ICTs for sustainable development. There are three major programme areas: Information-sharing and Networking; Technical Support; and Gender and ICT Policy Advocacy.

Under the Information-sharing and Networking programme, a project on "Enhancing Access to Agricultural Information using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Apac District" (EAAI) was initiated in 2005 to develop and improve information and communication systems so as to enable easy access to agricultural information for rural women farmers. According to a research study<sup>2</sup> undertaken in 2003, findings revealed lack of information as a key limiting factor to increased productivity in Apac District. The rural farmers lacked information on how to improve quality of their products, improved seeds and crop varieties, source of inputs/implements, plant diseases,

pests and their control, soil management and conservation, and improved skills. Lack of such information had limited the production levels of the rural farmers, hence limited incomes and increased poverty.

The EAAI project is implemented in 12 parishes/villages of Apac District.<sup>3</sup> The project was initiated with financial support from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA), and targets grassroots women farmers as the main beneficiaries while not excluding men or the youth in the project activities. Located in Apac town, the Kubere Information Centre (KIC) was established to act both as an Information Resource Point as well as to support project implementation and two-way linkages with the women farmers. Local agricultural content has been produced and disseminated via radio and SMS messages as well as on audiotapes, video tapes and CD-ROMs. The content is made available in the local language, Luo, and disseminated to farmers.

In order to ensure timely dissemination of relevant information to farmers, the EAAI project has applied a number of collaborative strategies. WOUGNET has teamed up with a community radio in Apac to ensure delivery of information that is packaged, transcribed and formatted into a series of weekly radio programmes. Established in 1999, Radio Apac serves the target district and has got a good listenership in the community. In addition, WOUGNET has partnered with existing sources of agricultural information including the Agency for Sustainable Development Initiatives (ASDI<sup>4</sup>) and Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns (VEDCO) – both NGOs based in Apac – and the Apac District Agricultural Office. Furthermore, a question and answer service is also available to assist farmers in providing a technical back-up. This has been done in collaboration with the National Agriculture Research Organisation (NARO), the local coordinator of CTA's Question and Answer Service and with the FAO/NARO Agricultural Research and Extension Network (ARENET) project that seeks to use the Internet to bridge the gap between researchers, extension workers and farmers.

At regional level, WOUGNET has also addressed the concerns of rural women as the Dimitra Project's partner for the Eastern Africa region, covering the five countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda. In line with the project's main vision of consolidating and extending



its network in Africa, promoting information exchange by strengthening information and communication skills and updating and disseminating information on gender and rural development issues, WOUGNET established National Dimitra partnerships in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, and developed potential relationships in Somalia.

However, in all these initiatives WOUGNET is yet to specifically address gender inequalities in access to land and their impact on rural populations in Africa.

### 3. Information and communication strategies – the way forward

Gender is widely recognized as a critical development issue in the area of ICTs. It determines the access, use and application of ICTs among men and women. In Uganda, women's awareness and use of ICTs is nearly three times less than that of men.<sup>5</sup> The National ICT Policy has 14 objectives that

include ensuring gender mainstreaming in information and communication programmes and in ICT development. The strategies for gender mainstreaming are to:

- take into account gender information needs and interests of both men and women in all information and communication programmes;
- develop mechanisms for increasing women's access to information (especially in rural areas), so as to reduce the gender information gap;
- use non-discriminative gender sensitive language in information and communication programmes;
- ensure equal participation in all aspects of ICT development.

As an information and communication strategy to address gender inequities and their impact for rural populations in Africa, the WOUGNET April 2008 research indicated above



recommends radio to be the most relevant medium for reaching out to rural women.

Further recommendations include to provide rural women with relevant information at appropriate times of the day when they have diminished most of their day's chores; to provide the women with functional adult literacy programmes; to strengthen communication channels between rural women and their leaders; and to facilitate the coordination of stakeholders including civil society organisations, local government leaders and civil servants to meet and agree on shared strategies to reach out to people at grassroots level and to get their views.

In order to consolidate the already existing information and communication strategies, WOUGNET recommends the use of participatory development communication (PDC). This would facilitate key stakeholders to jointly reflect on a common community problem and come up with their dif-

ferent ways of addressing the problem and to achieve a common goal. The participatory process would involve women to reflect on their development objectives and on the definition of the related information and communication needs. It would provide a chance for rural women to indicate how ICTs may facilitate their development process.

The PDC approach is opposed to a situation where outsiders define the information needs of women and how to communicate information to the women. PDC has been proved to facilitate the empowerment of beneficiaries in addition to facilitating them to adopt improved technologies which they make use of for their development. PDC also gives a chance to beneficiaries to actively participate in the communication process while making use of communication technologies they have identified. As part of the strategy, women beneficiaries will be trained in operating different ICTs so that they are enabled to later work in areas of their interest and concern.

1. 'Working in Gender and Development in the Ugandan context' by Mary Ssonko Nabachwa, PhD Student. Full paper can be retrieved from [http://www.wougnet.org/Documents/working\\_in\\_Gender\\_and\\_Development.doc](http://www.wougnet.org/Documents/working_in_Gender_and_Development.doc)
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## Åke Olofsson

*Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance Service*

FAO

With a background in small-scale agriculture and forestry from the north of Sweden, and after several years of working in the Swedish Banking Sector, Åke Olofsson joined FAO in 1987 as an Associate Professional Officer. He holds since 1991 the position of Rural Finance Officer in the Agricultural Support Systems Division of the organisation. In this capacity, he works mainly towards the French-speaking countries in Africa and has travelled extensively to the region throughout the years. In recent years, he has also started working towards the Central European and Asian countries. In addition to covering in a broad manner the topic of agricultural and rural finance, he is also the technical officer for Crop and Agricultural Insurance issues in FAO. Åke also is the current manager of the Rural Finance Learning Centre (RFLC), a website that provides materials for capacity building in the field of rural finance.

# Financial services and rural development



Money matters to all. It makes exchanging goods easier and it is a convenient means of storing up wealth for future use. Throughout the world, as people engage in commercial transactions, their need to manage money increases. Sometimes they have surpluses, sometimes they do not have enough and sometimes they need large amounts all at once. They may also need help from outside to manage their money. This is what we normally would call need for a financial service. The most common financial services are savings and deposits, loans, credits and money transfer facilities. Providers of such services may range from village moneylenders to multinational banks. Very few people who run a business – farmers, blacksmiths, hairdressers, merchants – can do so without access to financial services.

## Rural finance

Many countries today have a variety of financial service providers also in rural areas, including public and privately owned banks, cooperatives and credit unions, village savings and loan associations, village banks and other types of self help groups, NGOs and microfinance organisations. Although they may on paper offer a wide range of products, in reality the availability and quality of the services as well as the requirements to access them vary largely from area to area and between the different service providers.

Despite the increasing presence of financial institutions in rural areas, many people still have, as a matter of fact, problems to find a bank or any other financial institution nearby and, if they do, they have difficulties in accessing them. Perceptions of high costs and high risk, but also the general inability of rural populations to offer real guarantees for loans, divert financial institutions from operating at a large scale in rural areas and particularly from lending to small-scale farmers and other rural entrepreneurs. Women, having on average lower levels of literacy and education than

men and fewer formal property rights, usually experience larger problems in accessing financial services.

Rural finance, as a field of work, is concerned with redressing this imbalance and ensuring that people living in rural areas do have gender equal access to financial services that are tailored to their needs.

## Financial services

A variety of financial service providers that are able to serve efficiently a wide range of clients, most of whom without prior access to financial services, are among those institutions that are essential for the development of rural areas. However, one needs to bear in mind that financial services, and in particular credits and loans, are not to be considered poverty reduction tools in the first instance. Financial services are, by their nature, unable to alone trigger development. In order to improve their living conditions, poor people need to be able to generate additional income and build up assets. Loans cannot directly multiply the net assets of poor people, but they can multiply their working assets. Access to financial services, in particular loans, can thus provide access to the production means and investments that are required to increase, for example, the production levels and agricultural productivity that, in turn, lead to higher incomes and assets.

Equally, if not more, important are deposit facilities. They are vehicles for people to invest excess liquidity capital and reserves into savings in order to earn additional income from the interest paid and to build up reserves for future needs, including risk reserves to better cope with risks and shocks. The saver must however first perceive that this is both a safe and remunerative way of depositing the surplus. Numerous are the cases around the world where people's deposits have not generated income or, worse even, been put at risk due to poor management of the deposit taking institution and sometimes also due to outright fraud.

## Generating income

In addition to working assets, income generation also requires opportunities, skills and access to resources. The majority of people in rural areas of most developing countries depend on agriculture for their living. Their opportunities therefore primarily lie in the areas of increasing the agricultural production and/or processing the produce in order to add value, and secondly in diversifying into other, non-agricultural activities.

In all cases, a market for what is being produced must exist and people need to have access to that market. Understanding the market and market mechanisms are fundamental for any income generating activity. In agriculture, understanding and using market information is crucial to enable farmers and traders to make decisions about what to grow, when to harvest, to which markets produce should be sent and whether or not to store it.

For a farmer, skills include good agricultural practices and the use of improved technologies, tools and inputs, mainly quality seeds and fertilizers. Good practices could mean the use of resistant varieties, the application of correct crop sequences, practices that maximize biological prevention of pests and diseases, reducing erosion by wind and water through hedging and ditching, application of fertilizers at appropriate moments and in adequate doses, etc. The application of good agricultural practices depends mainly on farmers' knowledge of such practices, their access to and capacity to pay for the means, and the government's ability to offer quality services in a timely manner.

Access to resources normally means access to natural resources such as land and water. It also means access to labour and financial resources for investments that will increase productivity and production. Financial resources can be either own resources or resources borrowed from somebody else. For many small-scale farmers and other rural entrepreneurs, self-finance is often insufficient to acquire optimal levels of inputs and, more importantly, to invest in their business.

## Risk and risk management

Despite the many efforts in the past, most financial institutions have not been successful in addressing the specific needs of small farm households. However, it is important to point out that provision of financial services is not necessarily a task for financial institutions only. Much of the finance

in the agricultural production chain is actually taken care of by other actors such as traders, processors and input supply companies. It is essential though that whoever provides financial services understands and responds to the needs of the smallholders and focuses on a demand-driven approach that cultivates durable relations and pays special attention to the various specific risks associated with agriculture and lending to farmers. Systemic, market and credit risks and low and slow return on investments are among the most significant risks. To this we need to add geographical dispersion of the clients, which increases the cost for both accessing and delivering financial services

Initiatives to address the risks associated with agriculture and with lending to agriculture have to be directed at several levels simultaneously. For example, risks at the farm-level can be lowered by irrigation, improved farming practices, off-farm income and business skills development. Agribusiness firms, who depend on regular and good quality products, can provide technical guidance to smallholders and therefore also play an important role in reducing farmer level risks. Risks at the financial institution level can best be addressed by portfolio diversification and by servicing clients in different geographical areas. Financial institutions can also adapt their practices and simplify procedures as well as form partnerships with for instance specialised NGOs in order to support capacity building among small scale farmers. Constraints such as the low management and business development capacity of small scale farmers require long-term investment and commitment of governments, development agencies and others.

## Impact

Several attempts have been made to measure the impact of access to credit, loans and other financial services on the income and living conditions of rural people. Although one can rightly argue that there is a strong positive correlation, it is nearly impossible to quantify this impact since there are many other factors, such as access to education, health services, infrastructure, etc. that would also need to be taken into consideration. The direct contribution of financial services to increasing incomes depends to a large extent on how well the delivery of a loan or a credit is adapted to the economic activities being financed, that is to say to the capacity of the borrower to repay the loan.

Studies have shown that especially rural women can be





come economically empowered by greater access to financial services. Women can increase their understanding of and control over household finances and promote their own economic activities, create and protect assets, enter markets, and diversify their economic activities. By strengthening women's economic roles and enhancing respect for women's decision-making, access to financial services may also increase women's own share of the benefits from greater household well-being. The combination of women's increased economic activity and increased decision-making in the household can spur wider social and political empowerment. Even bank products that are gender inclusive may bring about change by developing women's confidence in negotiating with male staff and initiating wider impacts in their relations with men in other arenas.

#### Way forward

Building diversified rural financial institutions that are gender-sensitive and able to respond to local conditions, enhancing institutional sustainability with outreach to small and dispersed clients, and fostering a supporting policy and regulatory environment are all vital for the development of rural areas.

Being gender sensitive means that financial service providers need to pay attention to the individual client and to the extent possible adapt their products and services to the needs of this type or group of clients. For loans and credits, it means to adapt application procedures, eligibility and collateral requirements, repayment schedules and, if and when possible, interest rates, and size and terms of loans and credit. For savings and deposits, service providers would



have to pay attention to compulsory (often used as a condition for granting a loan) versus voluntary savings, minimum entry-levels of savings, flexibility with regard to saving and withdrawal of savings, confidentiality and attractive returns on savings.

Several problems continue nevertheless to exist. For example, higher interest rates may be needed in rural than in urban areas to cover costs and risks. Policy makers are sometimes tempted to reject market determined rates and rationalize interest subsidies and controls because of high degrees of rural poverty. Such policies may, however, have serious negative repercussions on the sustainability and viability of the financial institutions. Secondly, the rates of return on farm investments are perceived to be low and highly variable. The length of rural loans need therefore to be longer to fit rural production and cash flow patterns. Lastly, the heterogeneity of farming and the rural economy has increased as new opportunities have emerged and as farm-households have adopted complex survival strategies. This increases the complexity that financial institutions face in evaluating the credit worthiness of diverse potential clients and in analysing their capacity to repay loans.

Increased competition in the banking sector is prompting financial institutions to reconsider business opportunities also in the agricultural and rural economy. In order to be successful, rural finance service providers will need to invest in institution building. In addition to paying attention to client demand and to the design of their products and services, they will also have to carefully control costs, develop strong management and information systems, remunerate staff incentives, use professional management, and implement strong governance. It also calls for greater transparency in operations and more systematic accounting for costs, revenues, loan recovery, efficiency and productivity measures in order to facilitate the comparative analysis of performance between institutions and the establishment of best practices.

### **Rural Finance Learning Centre (RFLC)**

“Capacity building” implies the existence of a stated goal, measurement in performance in relation to this goal and consequent identification of weaknesses, followed by “action” (the capacity building) to overcome these limitations and move closer to the goal.

Building capacity is essential to all development initia-



tives and also to the development of rural finance. The **Rural Finance Learning Centre, RFLC**, is a website ([www.rural.finance.org](http://www.rural.finance.org)) managed by FAO. The Centre hosts an evolving collection of quality resources suitable for capacity building in rural finance, targeted at practitioners, policy-makers, trainers and researchers working in this field. The goal of the site is to help people find materials which suit their purpose and enable them to improve their own knowledge and that of others. In doing so, the RFLC purposely searches for gender specific material.

The RFLC was established on the well-founded assumptions that i) financial services are important to facili-

tate livelihood development of the poor in rural communities and that ii) currently these services are not adequate, iii) that capacity building would help improve rural finance service provision and is needed at a number of levels, iv) that effective capacity building requires the delivery of suitable methods and materials as well as the motivation and desire of people or organisations to use them and, v) that an Internet-based resource, housing training materials and a library of documents and publications that are organised within a logical framework, would provide the target audience with an effective and efficient tool to access these methods and materials.





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## Lucia Palombi

*Land Tenure and Management Unit*

FAO

Lucia Palombi works as consultant for the Land Tenure and Management Unit (NRLA) of FAO. Before that, she has worked with women's groups in Chad, Ecuador and Niger. In Chad, she conducted field research in the area of Djouman (Mayo Kebbi) on the role of women in village development organisations. She studied the role of women in socio-economic change processes and the relation the different ethnic groups of the region have with organisational practices, which have led to new solidarity mechanisms. In Niger, she coordinated a project of the Italian development cooperation which involved scores of women's groups in the Tahoua region. The project was particularly revealing when it came to the role of women in the fight against desertification and showed the importance of access of women to natural resources. At present, she participates in an FAO project to support the initiative of the African Consortium for the elaboration of a plan and directives for a land tenure policy in Africa. She also collaborates in the work of NRLA on the legal empowerment of the poor to safeguard their land tenure rights.

# Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality as regards land access in Africa – Experiences and approaches of FAO’s Land Tenure and Management Unit



For women in rural areas of Africa to meet their religious, cultural, social and production needs, it is crucial that they have access to land. However, women’s access to land is an extremely complicated issue that changes according to national contexts, social groups and legal systems. FAO’s Land Tenure and Management Unit (NRLA) recognises how important it is that men and women have equal access to land. In this context, this article gives an overview of some NRLA activities aiming to improve women’s access to land, with a few ideas for implementing approaches linked to new information and communication strategies.

From a production point of view, land access is vital for farming, breeding and collecting wood, fruit, medicinal plants and other essential products. Land access is a source of social security that can contribute to major reductions in poverty among women. Having access to land under good conditions increases women’s motivation to invest and allows them to enhance their productivity and guarantee a better diet for their families.

In most African countries, women’s legal status regarding access to natural resources is governed by a situation of legal pluralism wherein formal legislation, local law and often religious law are all equally applicable. Different legal systems can have very different views of rights to natural resources and the way these systems relate depends on the context in which they arise.

Almost everywhere in Africa, women’s rights are more vulnerable than men’s rights. In some countries, women do not have the legal right to own land. In most African countries, women’s land rights are protected by the law, but tradition sets down that women’s claims to land depend on their relationship with the men in their families. In addition to this, divorced, separated or widowed women can lose their

land and become homeless and destitute. Since women are economically dependent and lack the necessary resources to take their cases to court, they are unable to contest infringements on their land rights by their families or by local institutions.

In many areas, according to tradition women are seen as ‘temporary’ members of the family. All of the property acquired by a married couple, apart from personal property, belongs to the husband, who is entitled to keep everything if the marriage breaks up. Although women often do not have the right to control or transfer land, they are traditionally granted the right to use the land, which is also very important from an economic and social point of view.

However, given the pressure caused by demographic growth, the commercialisation of land and agriculture and mounting competition for land, even the right to use land can often no longer be guaranteed by customary systems and formal legislation. The shortage of fields can make it very difficult for women to participate in farming and this can lead to women lacking control over agricultural production, which in turn causes them to be excluded from accessing land. Growing global demand for biofuels should also be taken into account, as this encourages people to convert their land and can mean that women’s agricultural activities are partially or completely displaced to marginal land.

In these circumstances, women’s rights are evolving quickly, and are deteriorating in many cases. The significant social, economic and demographic changes affecting Africa’s urban and rural communities tend to marginalise women as they are one of the most vulnerable groups in view of these changes. Generally speaking, women have to overcome the following obstacles to gain access to land:







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#### ❁ **Incomplete land rights**

In several countries, land reform and the division of community land has meant that land rights are transferred to men, as heads of the family, disregarding the existence of households headed by women and the right of married women to be joint property owners. In such a framework, even taking into account all the efforts made to obtain land ownership certificates, women risk being stripped of any formal recognition of their claims to land. Individual property can sometimes give women a certain degree of protection in the long-term. Alternatively, they can also benefit from *collective rights* as part of a grassroots organisation and they can exercise collective pressure by forming interest groups. As a result, it is becoming increasingly important to step up efforts to ensure title deeds are awarded to land users rather than just landowners.

#### ❁ **Poor knowledge of the law**

People living in urban areas (mainly men) are most likely to be familiar with the law. Moreover, legal rules and procedures are difficult to use and understand and are not accessible to poor women because access to justice is complex and expensive.

#### ❁ **The lack or weakness of governmental institutions**

Land administration services are often short-staffed and not open to discuss women's problems.

#### ❁ **The AIDS epidemic**

When a man dies, his widow risks losing the land she has always cultivated and the house she lives in with her children to her dead husband's family.



### **NRLA's activities in the field of women's access to land**

Promoting gender equality in access to land is a key theme of FAO's work. In 2003, NRLA began publishing a series of studies on land tenure systems concerning land access and management. The fourth study in the series, 'Gender equity and access to land', is a guide for government stakeholders and civil society and sets out recommendations for incorporating gender issues into land administration projects. FAO has published another guide on the same topic – this one being aimed at NGOs working to promote fairer access to land for men and women in rural communities.<sup>1</sup> It presents strategies for improving gender equity by evaluating the current situation, informing people of their rights and giving responsibility to marginalised groups.

In 2004, at the request of FAO's Land Tenure Service, Françoise Ki-Zerbo conducted a study titled *Les femmes rurales et l'accès à l'information et aux institutions pour la sécurisation des droits fonciers. Etude de cas au Burkina Faso* (Rural women's access to information and to institutions to secure their land rights in Burkina Faso). Her work examined modern and traditional land tenure systems in Burkina Faso, as well as local initiatives to improve women's access to land and legal information. On the one hand, the study highlights the importance of social communication and dialogue at all levels of the population, while on the other hand it confirms that a more efficient administrative structure must be created to ensure that legislation is enforced and citizens' rights are secured.

FAO is currently preparing an Integrated Learning Tool (ILT)<sup>2</sup> for women and girls in rural areas. It is based on two existing tools that have been developed by FAO – the Socio-Economic Gender Analysis Programme (SEAGA), which concentrates on socio-economic and gender analysis in project cycles at micro, meso and macro level, and Participatory Negotiated Territorial Development (PNTD), which aims to provide tools that will allow a negotiated social agreement to be reached, while reducing power imbalances and inequality as regards capacity for negotiation. The goal of this integrated learning tool is to support development actors and stakeholders in order to gain an overview of the cultural, political, economic, social and environmental consequences affecting men and women's view of a 'territory'. It emphasises the involvement and capacity to negotiate of women and girls, who are most frequently excluded from development policies and programmes.

Based on the experience of the International Conference

on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD), which was held in Porto Alegre in March 2006, three pan-African institutions (AU, ABD and ECA) launched an initiative aiming to draw up a plan and some directives on Land Policy in Africa. FAO, with technical supervision from NRLA, is following up on this initiative through a Technical Cooperation Project. The overall goal of this support project, which began in February 2008 and will be concluded in April 2009, is to help to secure land rights, increase productivity and implement sustainable development in Africa. One of its objectives is to enable farmers' organisations and civil society to ensure participation in preparing a major contribution to the process of defining land policies.

NRLA is also promoting access to information and legal institutions as a key factor in guaranteeing the rights of poor rural populations, including women. The different processes and activities allowing poor people to become more qualified, more empowered and eventually more capable of using land procedures and institutions can be summed up by the general term 'legal empowerment'. Important aims include promoting institutional changes, making legal procedures simpler and less expensive and making the relevant government departments more responsible and more accessible. FAO included this issue in its Programme of Work for 2006-2009 and is currently preparing a publication that will be part of its Land Tenure Studies series. FAO has also worked with various organisations in Africa, Latin America and Asia and has commissioned a number of studies (which will soon be published on CD). The aim of these studies is to identify lessons that could lead to processes for increasing legal responsibility with a view to ensuring more effective and more sustainable land rights for poor people.<sup>3</sup>

### **NRLA approaches to improve women's access to land through information and communication strategies**

With a view to improving women's access to land and securing their land rights, NRLA would like to support capacity building for poor rural women. In this context, it is important that women have enough support in defending their rights – improving their legal knowledge makes them capable of exercising their rights, whether individually or collectively.

First of all, an action-oriented research project should be launched to identify women's needs as regards legal information and build their capacity for negotiation. The

success of strategies to enhance women's land rights must be based on detailed analysis comprising the study of local governments and religious laws. The first step would be to consult women to establish what their problems are and what training they need.

In this context, it is essential to support local institutions, contact NGOs and farmers' organisations and encourage women's groups and cooperatives to work on gathering information and promoting the development of partnerships between women. Women's groups have a vital role in helping women to be less dependent on men and have a stronger position for negotiation.

Once women's needs have been identified, steps must be taken to improve the legal knowledge of all relevant stakeholders: women, grassroots organisations, NGOs, religious leaders, community leaders and civil servants. Anyone who can make access to information easier should be involved in the capacity building process. Furthermore, training judicial and administrative staff could help to make them aware of the legal obstacles faced by women.

It is of fundamental importance that obstacles to accessing information are removed. Repackaging and dissemination of laws is vital, and it must be done in a diversified, accessible way. The message should be adapted



according to the target group and various different means of communication should be used. Once the legal texts have been simplified and translated into local languages, it would also be useful to develop local-language training programmes that explain the complex nature of legal pluralism and to incorporate training on land rights into functional literacy programmes for adults. In this context, the key role that can be played by legal assistants specialising in land law should be recognised. Since these people can make it easier for poor and illiterate women to access legal information, their skills in terms of legal knowledge and teaching should be enhanced.

When dealing with populations with a high illiteracy rate, it is crucial to communicate legal information in a dynamic and varied way – not only in writing, but also orally and visually. Visual materials could include billboards, comic books or brochures illustrating different situations for defending land rights. Tools such as audio or video cassettes, which are understandable and accessible for the majority of the population, could be used; alternatively, information could also be communicated via local radio stations. Young people can play a key role in their communities, since they are often more open and more capable of communicating dynamically. Drama groups could also organise plays on land disputes. After the play is performed, the actors – or the members of a legal association linked to the drama group – could lead a community dialogue on the subject covered by the play. And if the performance is taped, the play could be transmitted again as a video or over the radio.

Changes to reduce the gap between legislation and reality and secure women's land rights should be made gradually. Furthermore, negotiation between stakeholders and a new information strategy are becoming necessary. FAO would like to continue working with organisations and

NGOs aiming to use sustainable and appropriate information and communication strategies to improve women's access to land in rural Africa.

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## Mabika Dakeini Phuna

FAO-RDC

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Mabika Dakeini Phuna, communicator for development, is communication officer at FAO in the DRC. He has worked at the National Congolese Radio & Television (RTNC) from 1976 to 2000 as producer, and as a trainer at the Congolese Institute for Audiovisuals. FAO, concerned with the setting up of local radios in order to bring farmers closer and to respond to their needs and questions with regard to food security, supports the emergence of local community radios in the DRC. Phuna is specialised in the development, establishment and organisation of empowerment strategies for community radios.

*“Communication ultimately means listening to others, in order to work together for progress”.*



# Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequalities in access to land in Africa – the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo

In Africa, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in particular, women have an important position, even if this is not always recognised in the rights that they are granted. Gender issues are an important concern of the ruling power. The creation of a ministry for gender, the family and children within the DRC's national and provincial governments is proof of this.

From a social point of view, women have a crucial role, especially given the current situation. In many urban households, it is women who ensure their families' survival via small-scale commercial activities, as their husbands do not have paid employment or their wages are irregular or inadequate.

In the rural areas of the DRC, the situation of women is rather precarious. The poverty they suffer is not only financial – it is also due to undernourishment, a shortage of primary healthcare, illiteracy and a lack of access to land.

Access to land should not only be viewed as a temporary means of relief; it is also a guarantee of security in the long term. In rural environments, land ownership indicates how rich or poor a farmer is. A farmer who does not own land must work for others and usually earns a very low wage, which leads to poverty.

It is beyond doubt that women are at a disadvantage as regards land access. Although 70 to 85% of the agricultural workforce is female, as are 75% of workers in agricultural production, women only have indirect access to land. This type of access is connected to their families – they can access land through their fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, nephews or husbands, any of whom may be landowners. This is a cultural phenomenon, since in Bantu culture (and 80% of the population in the DRC is Bantu) women are viewed as being inferior to men. As it is generally men who hold power, women end up in a position of dependence.

Given that Bantu culture is primarily based on agriculture, land is the most important production factor in rural

areas. Access to land is therefore a key element in the fight to reduce poverty. Anyone who owns a plot of land can develop it, work it and sell the agricultural products it bears. On the other hand, farmers who do not own land are forced to work for others. This way, women are often in a situation of dependence.

It can, therefore, be said that there is a direct connection between poverty and securing the right to benefit from the land. Secure access to land is the sine qua non of investments in any given space. Land access often favours the most affluent and excludes poor farmers. Women cannot control or access land, so they do not make long-term investments in their land or become involved in promising projects. It goes without saying that this situation has a considerable impact on the food security of individual households and the country as a whole.

It is widely acknowledged that women are responsible for the food chain from the production stage right up to the meals on our tables. This is why we say that “women feed the world”.

## Consequences on people's lives

In Bantu society, land used to be the property of the community. It was collective property that belonged to a clan, a tribe, a bloodline or a kingdom. It was very rarely the property of an individual.

Now, however, land is a commodity that must be negotiated for. With the complicity of some greedy civil servants and chiefs, wealthy people are able to buy up huge areas of land by expropriating poor farmers, who are powerless to stop them. The worst thing about this situation is that the rich buyers do not exploit or develop their land. They only want it to prove their position in society. The result of this is that vast expanses of land have been given over to nature, while farmers need the land to survive.

In the DRC, land that is not allocated by the state within





the framework of industrial, forestry or agricultural leases and is not on a nature reserve, is governed according customary rules. The law on land ownership asserts that it has unified all land rights systems in the DRC. It stipulates that all land, whether above or below ground, is the exclusive, undeniable and inalienable property of the state. It appears that the main conflict has arisen from the co-existence of customary rules and official law. This conflict is also manifest in the lack of a rural code, the marginalisation of vulnerable people (such as women and young people) and the absence of a map indicating land use. As a result, good land is becoming a rare commodity.

We could say that two diametrically opposed ways of thinking are applied. On the one hand, from a legal point of view, the land ownership system is based on the law governing land ownership. On the other hand, from a practical point of view, land is subject to customary law. This means it is up to the chief to allocate land to farmers for a certain price. This is the case in Kasai, Maniema, Katanga as well as other provinces.

It is clear that this contradiction between law and practice makes it even more difficult for farmers to have access to land. Women in particular do not have the necessary assets to invest in the agricultural sector in rural areas. The two levels of authority make accessing land even more complex, since the process must be started with traditional authorities and concluded with administrative formalities.

### **The concept of gender or gender equality**

Rather than the traditional division of tasks, which set out who did what tasks based on sex alone, it is now important to work in terms of complementarity and gender equality, using competence as the sole criterion and leaving behind any prejudices, complexes and taboos.

The standards applied in traditional societies dictate that women should be viewed as completely separate, along with all the discriminations, taboos and restrictions that this entails. Unmarried women live under the supervision of their parents or the chief of their clan until they marry, depending on whether it concerns a patrilineal or matrilineal system. Women therefore never own property as individuals. Married women merely work their husbands' land without laying claim to any property whatsoever. Because of this, they are wary about making any long-term investments in the land. Modern law also requires that women ask their husbands' permission before performing any type of activity, which weakens their position even further.

### **Information and communication strategies**

Living conditions in Africa, and in the DRC in particular, are difficult. And yet the DRC is home to the second-largest forest in the world, after the Amazonian rainforest! But while the Amazon rainforest is over-exploited, the DRC's forests are still unimaginably rich in natural resources.

To escape from this paradox, all farmers, both male and female, must be considered equal, that is, gender-based discrimination between farmers must be eradicated. Since these inequalities are rooted in culture, raising awareness of





the current situation's disastrous consequences and the benefits of granting women access to land is, in our opinion, the only way to transform mentalities as regards land access.

One strategy that could be useful in doing this is the organisation of awareness-raising campaigns in rural areas. This could be done by holding information and awareness-raising workshops in villages aimed at traditional chiefs, politicians and even legal authorities. The workshop's modules will concentrate on the need to change mentalities as regards rural women's access to land, on civic education and on strategies for fighting poverty. The aim is to change the mentalities of those responsible for allocating land. At the end of the session, participants should cast off their age-old, irrational prejudices.

Another possible strategy, which follows on from the first one, is to support farmers' initiatives. It will be necessary to identify village leaders (both male and female) as relay points for this, as they are able to communicate and persuade people. They will have a key role in passing on the messages they receive. It will be important to also design a follow-up programme to ensure that the relevant provisions for granting women access to land are being applied in practice.

Another way of fighting gender inequality consists in encouraging rural people to listen to rural community radio stations on a regular basis. The schedules of these stations should include programmes on eliminating prejudices and stereotypes about women, thus promoting equality between men and women.





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## **Vololomihaja Rasamimanana**

*ONE, Office National pour l'Environnement  
(National Office for the Environment)*

MADAGASCAR

Vololomihaja Rasamimanana is Gender Focal Point and Information Officer at the Quality and Communication Department of ONE in Antananarivo, Madagascar. As communicator in this department, her main tasks consist of promoting environmental education and communication, using different media according to the target group, one of them being rural women: information kits, pedagogic kits, telecentres, training of trainers, etc. ONE is Dimitra's partner organisation for Madagascar.

# Reflections on gender inequality in access to land and its effects on rural women in Madagascar

## 1. Introduction

We know that **land** is at the origin of all human activity, particularly for rural populations in Africa, who are often **farmers or livestock breeders**. Our ancestors developed rules to guarantee that any person who needs land can have land to grow crops, breed animals and build a home.

Access to land is an essential condition for producing food and generating an income. To promote sustainable development, gender inequality in land access should be eradicated. By ensuring that men and women have equal access to land, we create more economic prospects, we encourage investment in land and food production, we improve families' security during economic and social transition periods and we promote better land management.

Land is the basis for food production and the main source of income in rural areas. When land ownership is not secure, farmers, both male and female, have difficulty obtaining loans. It is also hard for them to have access to rural organisations and to different agricultural inputs and seeds.

In most municipalities near Madagascar's major towns, all of the above has become difficult in view of the importance the state attaches to involving large national and international firms in the country's landowning systems and the speed with which these companies are granted land. Large numbers of investors come to buy land, and farmers have problems keeping the plots they have tended for many years. It is even hard for them to keep their homes or find new land to operate in the future. As a consequence, rural people have a general feeling of not having any formal rights as regards the land (insecurity related to national heritage).

## 2. Status report on gender inequality in access to land

Despite efforts and commitments to reduce gender inequality, and despite all the progress that has been made, there is still inequality between men and women in Madagascar. The index in the Global Gender Gap Report ranked the country 84th out of 128 countries in 2006, and 89th in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

### 1) Crisis situation regarding land ownership

As in other African countries, Madagascar initially used land ownership structures that had existed since before its independence. There are different types of **land ownership practices**, some of which are connected to **traditional authorities**, leading to the development of **local land ownership rights** recorded on "**little written notes**". All too often, these are not recognised by the central administration, which only accepts title deeds.

Later, land was secured through registration, which has caused a crisis situation as regards land ownership since farmers are not familiar with the wording of the relevant laws, the procedures are complicated and the state's land services, with their outdated equipment, are being overloaded, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, the process for acquiring property in land (i.e. registration) is very costly for rural households. It must be concluded that the system is unsuitable, as only 10% of agricultural producers hold title deeds.

### 2) Women's rights and land ownership

Over 80% of the rural population is poor, and there is a great deal of discrimination when traditional laws from some cultures are applied, particularly as regards access to land and the distribution of a couple's property. Patriarchal practices and values are often an obstacle in achieving equal access to land, and women are rarely landowners.



The issue of gender inequality is present in several aspects of life:

- In the **status of women** themselves: their social and personal status and the extent to which they are integrated into society. When a conversation begins on land ownership, most Malagasy people immediately think of “the land of our ancestors”, whose exploitation is automatically the preserve of men. They believe it is completely normal for women to be unable to exercise their land ownership rights fully, and it seems that

women are supposed to accept the situation, which has been imposed on them by society. There can be no real progress in this area because there is so much obvious discrimination between men and women, yet the word ‘firena’ (country) comes from the word ‘reny’, which means ‘mother’. Malagasy women are therefore the foundations on which the country was built, and as such, they deserve special attention.

- In **socio-economic structures**: social efficiency and effectiveness, tradition.



- In **legislation**: statute laws (women's rights as set out in the constitution of the Republic of Madagascar) and traditional laws contradict one another. Indeed, the constitution incorporates human rights, including women's rights. And in addition to these fundamental laws, there are other types of law defending women's rights and land access, guaranteeing equal rights for individuals, the right to own property (land, etc.) and so on. There is also a special method of legal defence to protect married women from any schemes by their husbands relating to land deeds in the woman's name and the man's refusal to sell any of the couple's joint property to the woman.
- In **inheritance**: As in other African countries, succession is through the male line. According to the Malagasy civil code, women cannot inherit the land of their ancestors. If they are married, they are eighth in line to receive an inheritance from their husbands – the man's brothers and father take priority in managing the land if he dies.
- In **education**: most women, especially rural women, are illiterate or poorly educated, so they do not know much about land ownership, especially not the procedures related to it (taxes).

In brief, tradition, legislation and market rules are all factors influencing Malagasy women's access to land. Just like women in other African countries, they are faced with legal obstacles in terms of land access.

### 3) **Raising awareness on gender and land ownership issues**

Land services do not usually communicate very much on user rights as regards access to land. This has contributed to several law suits over land: more than half of the court cases are related to disputes over land. And even though a major awareness-raising campaign has meant that gender promotion and the fight against HIV/AIDS have been gaining ground in the country, the media have still only made a very small contribution as regards land ownership. It has been proven that the rural community has little knowledge of land ownership issues – a particularly striking example of this is that women do not understand their position in terms of inheritance.

### 4) **Recommendations**

Land laws must be reformed to ensure that men and women have equal rights. However, it is obvious that reforms alone

will not be enough, since women's access to land is also connected to other criteria.

This is why the state of Madagascar launched a land reform in 2005 with the aim of combining the legal with the rightful and incorporating unrecognised laws. The reform also aims to decentralise land management with a view to bringing it closer to grassroots farmers and giving them ways to improve their working methods. Finally, this reform of land laws will allow legal knowledge on the situation of rural women to be updated.

### 3. **Information and communication strategies for fighting inequality**

#### 1) **Awareness-raising programme: training of trainers**

There have been several information and training campaigns on legal aspects of women's rights.

One notable example is the *Soratako Ny Taniko* (*Registering your land*) project, which was launched in 2002 by the Fédération des Femmes Rurales Malgaches (FVTM – Federation of Rural Women in Madagascar), with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES). As part of the project, 25 rural women, who are leaders in six different provinces, followed training to become trainers. The aim was to familiarise them with their land ownership rights and to teach them lobbying techniques so they could raise the awareness of the traditional legal authorities on the rights of rural women.

During the training course, the participants produced a great number of didactic tools dealing with the subject – 980 leaflets and 220 audio cassettes. They dealt with four main issues: land ownership in general, women and land rights, land ownership in married life and disputes over land. Unfortunately, the programme could not be continued due to a lack of funding.

#### 2) **Partnerships between the state and civil society**

This is a useful approach because civil society is present in the field with farmers, who make up 80% of Madagascar's population. An example of this is the platform *Sehatra Iombonana hoan'ny Fanan-tany* (SIF), which has a vital role in repackaging and disseminating the new national policy on land. Grassroots farmers' organisations are members of the platform and receive training on extension work in rural areas. The training courses are organised to make it easier to carry out extension work and awareness-raising activi-

ties related to land ownership and to promote involvement in social and land maintenance work, which is performed each year by SIF.

### **3) *Establishing a platform at grassroots level to ensure rural women's voices are heard by collecting information***

This was done in cooperation with the Association des Femmes-Maires (Association of Women Mayors), whose members were elected to lobby decision-makers about the benefits of gender equality.

### **4) *Classic awareness-raising campaign***

This involves setting up radio listeners' clubs using local and national radio stations and traditional communication methods, *fokonolona*, which are the main source of information in villages. An audience survey conducted by UNICEF in 2004 showed that 76.6% of Malagasy people listen to the radio and that over 70% of households own a radio.

*Kabary* (plenary discussions) and *tsena* (markets) are also important ways of communicating messages in rural areas, as are regional open days to raise farmers' awareness of the different dimensions of the new policy on land.

### **5) *Forum of communicators on land issues***

A joint communication policy on land (platform of communicators) is currently being developed by communicators who meet every two months and form a group of lobbyists aiming to ensure that women's rights are incorporated in new legislation on land.

### **6) *Study visits and pan-African alliances***

This involves organising study visits so experiences can be exchanged between African countries that have the same agenda regarding land and aim to improve women's access

to land through legal reforms. For example, Madagascar and Burkina Faso have established a platform of civil society organisations. In the framework of this platform, a delegation of technicians from Burkina Faso visited Madagascar for a week to visit the new regional land offices and to conduct surveys of women holding title deeds or land ownership certificates.

Also, a pan-African workshop on implementing a land ownership programme that supports Africa's poor was organised in Nairobi in October 2007. Following this meeting, a platform was established with a view to encouraging African decision-makers to launch research and training programmes for civil society organisations. An international alliance was also created so people could work together to achieve these aims. A second meeting took place in South Africa in April 2008 to follow up on the resolutions made in 2007.

## **4. Conclusion**

The Malagasy government is organising intensive campaigns to raise awareness among the population (especially the rural population) of gender promotion and the national policy on land. The vast majority of households are not indifferent to the messages communicated over the radio. Yet we must acknowledge that changing ingrained habits is a long and complex process. It is therefore necessary to invest resources and make efforts to design long-term, continuous, integrated programmes to make community members and civil servants aware of women's role in production and their involvement in rural development. Moreover, human and financial resources should be channelled into promoting and using suitable methods with a view to implementing programmes and strategies that will reform land ownership and respect the principle of gender equality.

1. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2007.pdf>







## Najat Sarhani

*AMSED, Association Marocaine de Solidarité et de Développement (Moroccan Association for Solidarity and Development)*

MOROCCO

Najat Sarhani has been working in the field of development for over 24 years. She has supplied management support to social programmes such as water supply in rural areas, support to small children in orphanages, education and rehabilitation of people with special needs, etc. She provided follow-up for community-based projects developed by Peace Corps volunteers and supported them in the implementation of the transversal “gender and development” component. Since 1990 she has specialised in health issues, in particular hygiene and sanitation and mother and child health.

Najat was member of the Board of AMSED from 2000 to 2006, and became its Executive Director in 2007. AMSED is an NGO which specialises in organisational capacity building and manages a large national programme for the fight against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. “Gender and development” is an important transversal component of AMSED’s work.

AMSED is Dimitra’s partner organisation for Morocco.

# Women's role in sustainable food production and preserving natural resources, both land and water

## Summary of a study on women's access to water management

In Morocco, as in other developing countries, women have a close relationship with both land and water. Water is present in many aspects of rural women's lives, since they collect water and manage its use in the household and they grow irrigated and unirrigated crops. This is also true of land. Female farmers tend to use and improve traditional farming methods that have been developed over many years with a view to protecting precious natural resources.

### Moroccan women and access to property

The proportion of Moroccan women who have access to property in land is no higher than 7% in urban areas and 1% in rural communities. In terms of area, only 4.4% of national-level agricultural operations are run by women, and women only own 2.5% of the country's useful agricultural surface.<sup>1</sup>

Agricultural production could increase by 20% if women had the same access as men to resources like land, seeds and fertilisers.<sup>2</sup>

The current situation has its origins in various cultural factors. Although Morocco's laws and religion grant women the right to own and inherit land, tradition forces them to renounce their claim on the land to which they are entitled in favour of their brothers. This is supposed to avoid a stranger being able to lay claim to the family's heritage (since it is sons who carry on the family name). Women's access to land is reduced even further by the difficulties they have in accessing collective land (owned by ethnic communities, under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior) and especially land that forms part of Morocco's national property (the state's private property, composed of land that has been confiscated, expropriated or, most importantly, recovered following the colonial period). Women are also unlikely to own land allocated by the state because it is usually men who receive such allocations.

The relationship between land and water serves to in-

tensify this phenomenon. Rights relating to water depend on land rights. The right to use water is granted to those who own irrigable land and can only be given to people who have agricultural funds, which rules out people who have no land or who have little land compared to others.

In this article, we will discuss the results of a field study conducted by AMSED in southern Morocco, in the regions of Dadès, in Ouarzazate, and Taroudant. The study aimed to analyse knowledge and practices as regards the relationship between gender and water, bearing in mind particular aspects of the local situation in terms of climatic, social and cultural conditions. The study focused on women's groups, organisations of agricultural water users (AUEAs), organisations of drinking water users (AUEPs) and women's organisations.

In the rural areas of Ouarzazate and Taroudant, women make up more than half of the population of the *douars*. As the men have migrated to other Moroccan towns or even moved abroad, the women assume the role of head of household. This means they are stakeholders in the local development of the region and in the social and economic changes taking place in their households. They are therefore very much affected by issues relating to water, particularly irrigation water.

The status of women in rural Morocco is generally defined in relation to men. Women go from living under their fathers' authority to living under their husbands' authority, and, by extension, the authority of their mothers-in-law. They hold no economic or decision-making power. This subordinated position leads to women being excluded from public life – instead, they are normally dedicated to bringing up their children and doing housework and other work related to water and agriculture.

This situation was particularly noticeable in Ouarzazate and Dadès – many men have left these areas, so women do



agricultural work and look after the livestock. Women therefore represent a major potential workforce, bearing in mind the small size of the agricultural enterprises they run and the fact that they farm to produce food.

### Women in water management bodies in southern Morocco

Since women are viewed as subordinate, they are easily excluded from processes giving access to water management. And yet efforts for sustainable development and increased gender equality require women's full participation and involvement so they can express their needs and defend their interests.

Women's situation in this region is generally characterised by the following:

- They help to ensure their families' food security (preparing and storing basic products);
- They make up the majority of the workforce in the area and play a key role in food-producing agriculture (market gardening and animal breeding);
- They contribute increasing amounts to their households' incomes by selling produce in local markets (market gardening products, dairy products, prepared products, handicraft products and pottery).

Women therefore make a significant contribution to their family's income, but this does not reflect on their status within the family and the community as a whole.

The climate conditions in the area are often very difficult and have caused the men to leave for other Moroccan towns or even foreign countries, so women are responsible for various tasks both at home and outside the home.

The field study highlighted contradictions regarding women's role in the region. When a woman is the head of the household in her husband's stead, she is entitled to water for irrigation. She can work the land, irrigate it and take part in protecting, maintaining and cleaning irrigation canals, provided she pays a contribution to the AUEA. However, this does not grant her any privileges as she cannot take part in the AUEA's board meetings, and women seldom attend the AUEA's general assemblies. Around ten female members of the Afra Dadès AUEA attended the organisation's general assembly for 2006-2007, and even then, they sat in a separate area from the men. Women, who are seen as being inferior, have great difficulty in accessing management or decision-making positions in AUEAs or AUEPs.

Based on AMSED's initial analysis of the study, the following can be concluded:

1. Women's access to water and use of water is different depending on whether it is for irrigation or drinking;
2. Controlling and managing water remains the preserve of men;
3. 80% of the women involved in the study are familiar with the irrigation methods used in their areas: a traditional system for allocating and distributing water rights, the influence water has on agricultural development;
4. Most women have an unclear view of the body that manages water for farming (AUEA);
5. Women are familiar with the role, prerogatives and operation of the traditional organisation (jemâa);
6. Women are not familiar with the local AUEA's status, the way it works or the reasons it was created;
7. The way a household is supplied with drinking water (well, standpipe or individual connection) determines how a woman can access information and whether or not she is involved in the community.

Of the 40 organisations examined in this study, only one had a female member on its executive board. This shows that women are generally excluded from groups managing drinking and irrigation water. Keeping women in the background in this way disadvantages village communities because women make up the majority of the population in over half of the douars, given that the men have emigrated.

If a woman's husband has not emigrated, he is solely responsible for activities related to irrigation water. Men are the only ones allowed to use this water, clean irrigation canals, request and find information on the restoration project and be involved with activities run by the AUEA's executive board. They represent the women in the household, whether they are wives, sisters or friends of the family.

In addition to tradition, the social and cultural context in the two areas in the study limits women's access to using irrigation water and, as a result, prevents women from managing this vital resource.

Women participating in various meetings all expressed their need for support and guidance on the following matters:

- the collection, use, conservation and recovery of water;
- the creation, organisation, and operation of action groups;

- women’s rights and responsibilities as regards access to managing drinking and irrigation water;
- relations with water management organisations (AUEAs/AUEPs);
- the fight against pollution of irrigation water and methods to maintain the quality and hygienic standard of drinking water;
- farming techniques, animal breeding and profitable production;
- literacy and training for certain jobs.

#### Some obstacles to women’s access to water management

- The influence of tradition and customs;
- The failure to recognise women’s rights;
- Women’s heavy workload;
- Inadequate information;
- Women’s low level of education.

“We want to take part in everything that is related to water and we demand the right to access information”, said the members of the women’s group of Afra douar in Dadès, Ouarzazate province.

Consequently, it is important to drive the change that these women hope for with a view to allowing them to become full members of the community.

It is therefore urgent to take rural women’s hopes and needs into account by setting clear, well-defined objectives:

1. Inform women and the general public of women’s role in food production and the preservation of natural resources;
2. Build the capacities of rural women through awareness-raising and training in rights and resource management techniques;
3. Promote women’s involvement in the operation of community-based management bodies and structures;
4. Boost rural women’s incomes by developing gainful activities adapted to their local expertise;
5. Conduct more detailed research and analysis on the problems women have accessing resources and implement appropriate solutions.

#### Conclusion

- Whether water is used for agriculture or consumption, its management is the preserve of men;
- Women have an important role in collecting and using water, yet they remain users rather than managers;
- Access to water management is connected to land ownership, and since men (fathers, brothers or husbands) own the land, they are entitled to use the land and manage the water.

1. General agricultural census, 1996.

2. Comment by Ms Nouzha Skalli, Minister for Social Development, Families and Solidarity in the newspaper *L’Opinion*, 19 May 2008.





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## Fatou Sow NDiaye

*Enda-PRONAT, Protection naturelle des Ressources  
(Natural Resource Protection)*

SÉNÉGAL

Fatou Sow Ndiaye is very involved in the work on gender and development, grassroots communication and ICTs, sustainable agriculture and the management and analysis of information.

ENDA-PRONAT is dedicated to protecting natural resources by using appropriate technologies which allow the transformation of local plants in natural pesticides and for organic agriculture. All its programmes and activities are adapted to local resources and constraints.

ENDA-PRONAT is Dimitra's partner for West-Africa – Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal. Fatou is coordinating this partnership. She is also the Coordinator of the Réseau National des Femmes Rurales du Sénégal (RNFRS – National Network of Rural Women in Senegal).

# Strategies to minimise the impact of women's lack of access to land in Senegal



## 1. The issue

The management of land resources has always been a key element in community-based activities, and will remain so in the years to come. According to the period and the political options available, land resource management can be dependent on political and cultural traditions.

The theme chosen for World Food Day in 1998, "Women Feed the World", showed the importance of the contributions women make to agriculture and food security. In West Africa, women are involved throughout the food production process – female farmers and workers account for over 70% of food production in the poorest regions.

For some years now, however, development partners (international institutions, NGOs, etc.), pressure groups and women's organisations have been demanding that governments do more to tackle the real issues preventing women from having fair access to land and other natural resources, since any such problems will have further detrimental effects on women's health, safety and ability to take action.

This was the reason behind Senegal's adoption of constitutional reforms and a new legislation guaranteeing men and women's equal rights as regards land ownership. But many women are unaware of the existence of these laws that could help them exercise their rights. And if they do know about the laws, they do not dare to challenge social norms, particularly not the power balance between men and women.

Information and communication strategies must be implemented at different levels to minimise gender inequality in terms of access to land and production methods.

## 2. Access to and control of land

Owning land is one of the pillars of environmentally friendly agriculture, which is why Enda-PRONAT has incorporated gender issues in its approach, bearing in mind the role of women in the rural economy. When conducting research and working with organisations in the field, Enda-PRONAT has paid close attention to land ownership issues in its areas of activity.

Enda-PRONAT notes that:

- Legal texts guaranteeing equal rights to men and women do exist, but in spite of this, traditional allocation methods are still dominant. Laws have been enacted and voted upon, but that is no guarantee that they will be applied. In practice, men are still responsible for managing and allocating land. And yet we can see considerable improvements when land is developed and managed by women.
- The issue of access to land seems more closely linked to sociology than to legal principles.

For this reason, better management of land ownership has been the subject of training courses and information campaigns by all stakeholders in Enda-PRONAT's areas of intervention, particularly in the Niayes, where demand for land far outstrips availability.

Despite activities to raise awareness of the devastating effects of land speculation in the process of sustainable land development, land continues to be sold to Dakar-based civil servants. Following an evaluation of activities that had been carried out, people living in Keur Moussa (Niayes) reaffirmed their concerns about the management of their land. Both men and women are threatened by land speculation. This situation can be explained by the lack of resources for working land and the poverty that forces some producers to sell their land to feed themselves or to pay for their children to go abroad.

Given the current trend towards the commoditisation of land, many men and a few women use inheritance systems or their own financial position to acquire land.

#### **a. Constraints**

Access to land is far from being fair – women still have fewer land ownership rights than men, who are considered to be the heads of households and families and therefore the main breadwinners. This inequality exists in all areas of life, just as much in religion as in the application of traditional principles, not to mention the discrepancy between the existence of laws and their application.

In practice, men are in charge of the land. They are given the best land and they manage it, divide it between family members and protect it on behalf of the family to which it has been allocated.

The words of Papa Guèye, the President of the Fédération des Agro-pasteurs (Agropastoralists' Federation), are a good illustration of this phenomenon: "Land is power, and since men are naturally driven by power, it is not easy for them to give up land to women". Women must therefore be committed, determined, and extremely motivated to gradually find a solution to the issue of land ownership.

Women's work within their families means that they have more problems and less time than men when it comes to accessing technology, training, information, know-how and agricultural inputs.

Unequal access to production factors is a major obstacle to increasing rural women's food production and income. In the cotton basin in eastern Senegal, a general lack of equipment and extremely limited access to land are a significant constraint in asserting women's role in agriculture. In areas where rain-fed crops are grown, men's land is weeded and sown before women's land. This has repercussions on crop yields, especially in view of the country's dry climate.

In some regions of Senegal, traditional systems of land ownership and traditional laws are still applied, despite the existence of modern legislation. Women are not entitled to inherit land from their husbands or fathers and widows are excluded from land ownership and cannot provide the necessary guarantees.

#### **b. Real-life experiences**

The issue of women accessing and controlling land is very complicated because it challenges social norms and is closely linked to individual opinions. Women's status as social regulators works against them when discussing land ownership matters. To ensure that women have improved access to land, it is therefore necessary to adopt a very diplomatic multi-stakeholder approach supporting both men and women. This could act as an impetus for changes by individuals, families and society as a whole.

Enda-PRONAT and the agropastoralists from Diender worked together on a very positive scheme comprising activities for information, communication, awareness-raising and training at all levels, involving all stakeholders (leaders, women, young people and eminent religious or political figures) and using all the appropriate methods (such as meetings, workshops and the media).

The Fédération des Agro-pasteurs de Diender, a partner of Enda-PRONAT, cooperated with the Rural Council, the Cayar town authorities and the sub-prefecture of Pout to find solutions to the problem of access to land. They implemented joint strategies for improving land management. One of these was the local land occupation plan drawn up by the Federation for the rural community in which it is based. This should lead to the local development plan being updated. The two plans will help local people to consolidate and develop their skills with a view to finding systems to establish rules for fair occupation and management of the community's natural resources.

A follow-up to the 2003 international workshop on "Rural Women and Land", supported by a documentary titled "Femme et foncier, Entre lois et réalités" (Women and land – between laws and reality), allowed the community to express its opinion on the issue of land ownership in different environmental areas in Senegal. In the documentary, members of parliament, members of civil society and other development partners shared their opinions and supported the views of rural women. The film, which was in Wolof, the main language of Senegal, with French subtitles for external audiences, helped to communicate the message to high-level politicians.

The Ministry of the Family and National Solidarity showed the film as part of its activities for International Women's Day 2004, which were based around the theme "Land ownership reform in Senegal – what issues do women

face?” The film was also used to launch discussions at one of the sessions organised in 2005 by the Swiss development cooperation agency in Senegal, Enda-GRAF and other NGOs in the “Circle of Interest on Rural Development”.

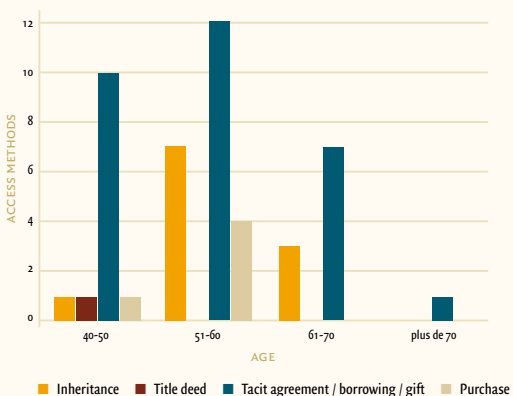
Going beyond these strategies for information, participative research, with results shown in figures, has also highlighted a model for raising awareness of the issue of land ownership. In 2008, a survey was conducted on the

way women acquire land. Responses were collected from 100 households in two rural communities (Diender and Keur Moussa). The survey’s results showed that communities often manage to bypass the law and even tradition to improve their access to land.

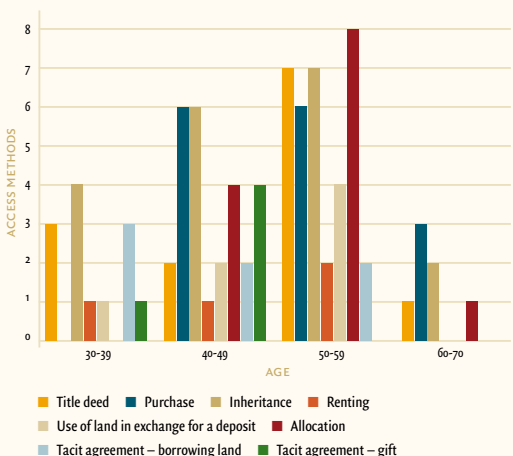
The law expressly forbids transactions involving land that has a particular status. In practice, however, very few people are concerned with what the law says, since it is extremely rare for the Rural Council (which manages land in the local community) to expropriate someone. The people who access land through allocation by the Rural Council are generally new arrivals or people who have been informed of the issues around land ownership law and who want to safeguard their land as it has particularly valuable characteristics (e.g. high-quality farmland, land with good access).

The survey covered purchases, gifts, borrowed land, inheritances, etc. held by women between the ages of 40 and 70. Most of the transactions were made by tacit agreement, but there were some that were formalised with written documentation (see graphs).

### Women’s access to land in Keur Moussa



### Women’s access to land in Diender



### 3. Recommendations

Land is a vital resource in rural women’s survival strategies. It is therefore crucial that laws are applied in practice and that there is a political drive for reforms, focusing on the following areas: implementation and improvement of rural land registers, local development plans and poverty reduction (illiteracy, lack of knowledge and malnutrition). The political and economic status of women as key stakeholders in their community’s development should also be enhanced, and considerable emphasis should be placed on boosting investments in rural development (health, water, hygiene and schools).

This must go hand-in-hand with:

- the introduction of credit instruments that are appropriate for the type of operation in question;
- the promotion and extension of access to agricultural equipment and production factors;
- efforts to strengthen professional organisations for women farmers;
- the involvement of grassroots farmers’ organisations in the decision-making process;
- the extension of action-oriented research on ways to improve land, with a special focus on irrigated land.



## Wilbert Tengey

*GDI, Gender Development Institute*

GHANA

Wilbert Tengey is a Rural Development Specialist with over 20 years experience in social policy development, programme planning, development and management, strategic planning, and institutional capacity building. Wilbert is the founder of the African Center for Human Development (ACHD), a growing development organisation in Ghana, and has been its Executive Director for the past 20 years. In the field of development consulting, Wilbert has provided professional advice and services to a wide variety of agencies and international organisations, as well as NGOs in Ghana and other African countries. Wilbert is also the founder of GDI, which advocates gender equity. He has worked in several African countries, and has a network of professional associates all over the world with whom he maintains strong contacts.

GDI is Dimitra's partner for Ghana.

# Gender relations, rural women and land tenure in Ghana: A communication nightmare

## Introduction

This article looks at the rural land tenure system in the forest zone of Ghana, the negative effect it has on the livelihoods of rural women and what can be done to fight this injustice in view of the communication blackout.

In an agrarian economy such as exists in Ghana, one of the main factors which creates and sustains poverty is insecure access to land and other productive resources. Poverty trends and patterns in many parts of the country point to a “feminization of poverty”. In other words, the largest group of society affected by extreme and severe poverty is women. Feminization of poverty has been attributed mainly to the unequal access of women to productive resources and economic opportunities and its consequences.<sup>1</sup>

However, there are many other factors which together work to give women a glaring disadvantage within a male dominated and controlled social set up. Studies have shown that women’s experience of greater levels of poverty can be related to their heavier time burdens and high illiteracy rates (54.3%). Studies carried out on women’s workload show that women work harder and during longer hours, both in and outside the home, than men. They are also obliged to spend a great deal of time not only working in the family enterprise but in the nurture and rearing of children and in important household tasks such as cooking and fetching water and fire wood.

Women’s life cycle changes also lead to accentuate their vulnerability to poverty. In particular, women with limited access to labour, such as widows, aged women, childless women and those with young disabled children, are more likely to be looked down upon by society and thus more likely to experience extreme levels of poverty. Increasing numbers of female-headed households, especially in the rural areas, are classified in the lowest levels of poverty groups. These are self-employed women with little or no education and with low access to credit, health care and the decision-making process.

Women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of being poor. All the above factors contribute to limit the ability of women to effectively access their land rights, so as to enhance their productivity and their livelihoods. As if this social situation is not bad enough, rural women especially become victims of a complex traditional and legal system, developed within a male-dominated patriarchal system, which controls and dominates land, normally intended for the benefit of all in society.

## Land tenure defined

Land tenure systems, in broad terms, define the relation of man to man in the **use** and **occupancy** of land. In more specific terms, land tenure systems are the customary, legal or otherwise institutionalized relationships between government, society groups and individuals regulating the ownership and control of land, and the rights and duties accompanying such relationship.

In Ghana, gender and kinship relations play a central role in the way in which land rights and productive relations are determined. Under the customary land tenure system, control over resources follow clearly defined gender-segregated patterns based on traditional norms which operate in such a way as to limit the rights of women as compared to men. To a large extent, women’s access and control over productive resources including land are determined by male-centred kinship institutions and authority structures which tend very much to restrict women’s land rights in favour of men. In principle, customary norms in both matrilineal and patrilineal kinships are designed to ensure that women are not arbitrarily deprived of basic resources for their productive activities. However, the lopsided control that men exercise over decisions concerning the allocation of resources at home and in the public sphere, give room for bias.

Almost everywhere in Ghana, modes of land acquisi-



tion and tenure arrangements are founded on the customary right of men to inherit and control land, according to which they may inherit land directly from male relatives of either their father or mother. Women, in contrast, have to look to their husbands or to their own families for farmland, although women from matrilineal lineages are able to inherit land from a wide range of relations.

Ghana maintains a plural system of land tenure. The complexity of land rights and tenure systems is the result of the co-existence of different systems (customary laws, statutory laws, constitutional provisions and religious laws). The co-existence of these plural systems regulating land in Ghana has presented special difficulties for the more vulnerable sections of society, including rural women and the urban poor. The majority of rural women rarely have access to formal legal procedures due to the complexity and cost involved and their lack of awareness of where to seek help from.

As a result, their rights exist in a state of “legal limbo”, which places them in a position of considerable insecurity with regards to their land rights. Lack of access to relevant information and the extremely complicated land documentation procedures leave women little chance to assert their land rights.

### Women’s access to land

Even though both women and men can gain various categories of land rights through their membership of land-holding groups, rights so gained have to be exercised through processes and practices such as clearing land and paying customary obligations. Often rural women are less able to fulfil these conditions. For example, the clearing of virgin land which gives the use-right is a role traditionally assigned to men, thus precluding the majority of women from acquiring the usufruct of virgin land belonging to their lineage. Thus women are deprived from having access to land because of factors including the gender division of labour and customary norms.

Experiences from the field have shown many reasons (customary and social), why women do not enjoy equal access to stool (clan / lineage) land as men. These include:

- Marriage, and its related domestic obligations, in practice reduce the chances of women to acquire land. Under customary law, a woman is under an obligation to assist her husband on his own farm. This, coupled

with her excessive domestic obligations, effectively reduces the amount of time and effort she can spend developing her own farm. After some time she loses control and use of the land.

- Traditional gender patterns in Ghana associated with the division of labour place land clearance in the hands of men, thus giving them priority in the original possession and acquisitions of the usufructuary interest. The men clear the virgin land, and the amount they are able to clear becomes their own to use and farm on. Women have little such opportunities.
- Land is normally allocated on the basis of ability and means to develop, such as financial resources, which women tend not to have. Since women tend to have a relatively lower ability and means to develop land, allocation of land tends to favour men as compared to women.
- The emergence of permanent cash crops, such as cocoa, timber, palm fruits and coffee, which require longer use of land as a profitable and dominant enterprise, equally gave preference to men, who tend to be economically more empowered to engage in it. Thus women’s access to cash crop agriculture becomes limited.
- Although traditionally land is not a saleable commodity, in some communities in the forest zone stool and lineage members have been replaced by rich farmers and multinational corporations, who are able to pay stool occupants large sums of money for vast portions of land. The women do not benefit from the lost land, nor from the revenue accruing from the farm. Here too, women become “double losers”.
- Constraints on women’s access to land and the insecurity of women’s land rights also tend to be heightened when land becomes increasingly scarce and men’s land holding come under pressure. Under these circumstances, men appropriate the lands given to women, because there is hardly any record to prove the women’s transaction in the first place. This is a bullying tactic used by men to enrich themselves.

### Insecurity of women’s land rights

- The stability of a marriage and good relations with male relatives are critical factors in the maintenance of women’s land rights. A married woman may gain access to land with the permission of her husband, but she may lose her land and crops after a divorce or upon the death



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of her husband. This may also apply to young widows who fail to cooperate with their in-laws after the death of their husbands.

- Women's rights to land obtained through marriage may also change if the husband remarries under a polygamous arrangement.
- Contractual arrangements of land for women give them no security either. Share-cropping as a source of land for women is largely problematic. Many women share-croppers complain about the arbitrariness of male landlords to change the terms of the tenancy at will, in

a situation made easy for them by the verbal nature of many of the arrangements.

- Share-cropping arrangements where a tenant (usually a woman) works on the land and shares the produce with the land owner (a man) have been found disadvantageous to the women. The increasing farm practice is turning over half of the crop to the landlord, as opposed to the former one-third and one-fourth practice.
- One important traditional channel for women to own land is the transfer of land as gifts from family or





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spouse, which usually requires the person making the offer to get some people to witness the gift transfer. The donor then accepts a “drink” of thanks from the beneficiary to conclude the deal. The important point is that women have rights of disposal over such land. But this practice is commonly associated with export cash crop or other cash crop areas. In most cases, men have challenged the existence of such a deal and the woman becomes the loser.

- Compulsory acquisitions of land by the State do not make any express provision with the people whose interests are affected by the acquisition. Women tend to bear a disproportionate burden of the impact of such indiscriminate compulsory acquisitions without the payment of adequate compensation. The law in its current state does not recognize usufructuary interest in land as compensatable interest. Usufruct holders are only entitled to be paid for the value of the crops on the land. This is totally unfair, particularly in the rural areas where women tend to be almost entirely dependent on land for their livelihoods and have few options when deprived of their land. Women also tend to have the lowest voice when it comes to issues of land management, allocation of compensation money and land alienation procedures generally.

### Information and communication strategies to tackle the problem

With poor information on the core problems and the inability of poor rural women to properly organize themselves, there is a lot of advocacy work to be done to tackle the issues at hand.

1. Initiation of pilot gender studies in major ethno-cultural communities. Customary principles and rules which regulate access to and control over land tend to vary from community to community. It is important that empirical evidence and gender disaggregated data are gathered through pilot studies, to ascertain and document the presence of gender biases on access to and ownership of land in Ghana.
2. Studies should be commissioned to investigate and ascertain the nature, incidence and variations of all kinds of customary law interests in land which exists in various communities. Innovative mechanisms for the documentation and recognition of such rights under customary law management systems must be derived.



This will enhance the security of tenure of such interest holders, especially women whose interests tend to be secondary.

3. Regarding compulsory land acquisition, the following should be done:
  - The State should consult all stakeholders before undertaking any compulsory acquisition.
  - Review the legal and administrative process for compulsory acquisition to make the women equitable beneficiaries.
  - Enforce the constitutional requirement of resettlement.
  - Recognise the rights of usufruct holders as interests worthy of compensation. Usufruct holders must be compensated for the value of their land and not the value of the crops on the land. This will ensure that community members are properly compensated and that whole communities are not dispossessed of their land and deprived of their means of livelihood, thus aggravating the poverty situation.
4. Free legal services should be established to help rural women assert their land rights within the existing legal and traditional structures.
5. Education campaigns should be organised to educate women leaders on the position of the various laws as regards their access to land. They in turn should organize different fora for their constituents.

6. National advocacy campaigns on radio, television and mass media should awaken the general public on the unequal access to and enjoyment of land rights by the rural poor, especially women.
7. Land issues should be discussed at all local, regional and national fora related to agriculture and socio-economic development of the people.

### Conclusion

From the above, it is quite clear that land use rights are very disadvantageous to rural women. They suffer a lot in this regard, and this has increased the phenomenon of the “feminization of poverty” in Ghana. Due to the lack of investment of resources, rural women continue to be deprived of long term solutions to their very poor economic situation. The recommendations suggested will lead to some relief for women in the medium and long term.

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1. GPRS, Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003 – 2005.
2. GLSS, Ghana Living Standard Survey.





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## Sophie Treinen

*Knowledge and Communication Department,  
Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building Division*

FAO

Sophie Treinen has more than 20 years' experience in communication and information. She is currently working as an Information Management Specialist for Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, providing assistance to projects which address the role of information and communication in rural areas. Her major responsibility is to develop approaches for building institutional and individual capacities to share knowledge and create information systems which make the most of digital and more conventional technologies to address stakeholders' needs. She is also applying participatory approaches and examining gender issues linked to the introduction of new digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Sophie joined FAO in 2000 as Information Officer for the Gender and Development Service. Before her assignment with FAO, she worked for international cooperation and development organisations (European Commission, NGOs and private sector) as a journalist, communication adviser, information officer, team leader, programme director and head of information and communication department.

# Knowledge management and gender: clarifying the concepts



The Dimitra project forms part of the programme “Knowledge Management and Gender”, which is financed by Belgium and which aims to integrate gender issues into the projects of the programme as well as to promote the exchange of knowledge between its different actors.

Knowledge management<sup>1</sup> (KM) consists in getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time, in an accessible and easily usable form. It also involves helping people share and put knowledge into action in ways that strive to improve organisational performance. KM needs to focus on creating a culture of knowledge-sharing and learning.

Why implement a programme linked specifically to KM? The answer is that when a project is completed, there is a substantial amount of knowledge which disappears with the departure of the persons who worked on the project. In the absence of an effective strategy to make the most of the knowledge acquired, the risks are that much of what has been learned, done, developed, discussed and negotiated in the course of the project will be lost because there has been no systematic documentation, no exchange, no sharing, and hence no knowledge implementation to improve existing practices.

The challenge facing a programme such as the “Knowledge Management and Gender” one lies in convincing all the parties involved that more can be gained by sharing what each knows than by keeping information to oneself. To put it in a nutshell, someone who is open to dialogue and sharing will gain more social recognition than someone who controls everything and represents a real bottleneck in information sharing. Everyone has knowledge and everyone can learn from others. The sharing will be all the more fruitful if it involves men and women, as well as young and older people. Because of their different backgrounds and roles and, more generally, because of the division of tasks and responsibilities, women and men have different ways of learning and specific forms of knowledge. It should also be

noted that not everyone has the same opportunities to apply knowledge, given that to implement what you have learned you must also have the means, skills, permission, courage and confidence to do so.

This article is an attempt to clarify a number of concepts that are used in the field of KM. It thus examines the notions of knowledge (“savoir” and “connaissance” in French), information, communication, experience capitalization and good practice and presents several tools and methods adapted to KM in the field.

## 1. Some historical and etymological aspects

The concept of KM appears in business management in the 1980s. In French, “knowledge management” can either be translated as “gestion des connaissances” or “gestion du savoir”.

In Roman languages “know” as two different meanings: “savoir” (French), “saber” (Spanish), “sapere” (Italian) and respectively “connaître”, “conocer” and “conoscere”.

“Know” and “knowledge” come from Old English “cnanan”, which is the Anglo-Saxon form of Proto-Germanic “knoeanan”, which in turn is the Germanic version of the prehistoric “gno-” root and is related to the Latin verb “cognoscere”. We use “know” to mean both “to know as a fact” and “to be acquainted with (something or someone). Knowledge is acquired through cognitive processes such as perception, learning, reasoning, memory, experience and records.

The word “communication” comes from Latin “communicare”, which means to share something or establish a relationship with someone, while “information” comes from Latin “informare” and means “to shape”, “describe”.

## 2. Some definitions

Much too often “knowledge”, “savoir” (in French), “information” and “communication” are considered interchange-

able terms when in actual fact they are not. Rather, they form part of a chain comprising several links, ranging from raw data to knowledge:

- **Data:** facts, raw elements of information.
- **Information:** a fact or judgment that we convey to another person or an audience by means of words, sounds or images. Information consists of data that have been interpreted, translated or converted to highlight their deeper significance. Information is a vehicle of knowledge.
- **Knowledge as “connaissance”:** what is known, what you know because you learned it. It can be the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject or the awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation.
- **Knowledge as “savoir”** is defined as the expertise and skills acquired by a person through experience or education that can be reproducible.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, for example, in order to improve farming practices, act effectively on the environment and make positive changes, we need the ability to turn information into knowledge, knowledge into know-how and, eventually, into expertise. Having information is not enough – we must also know how to make use of it in practice.

The following example will highlight the point. During a radio programme presented by an agricultural extension worker, a group of rural women heard him say that the local soil was suitable for growing sunflowers and that this was a profitable activity. When the advisor learned that the women had decided to follow his advice, he travelled to the area to see how they were getting along. He was surprised to find that the seeds had been sown haphazardly rather than in appropriately spaced rows, as is required for this crop. These women didn't know that they had made a mistake but, thanks to the visit of the extension worker, were able to improve their practices. Subsequently, they shared their knowledge with other women and men in their community, explaining the “do and don't” (good practice). They are now recognised by the community as innovators who are knowledgeable about farming methods.

In the above example, following the visit by the agricultural extension worker and subsequent exchanges with him, we moved from a linear communication or broadcast model (radio programme without questions from the audience being answered by a guest or panel of experts) to participatory communication, also known as “communication for development”.

**Communication** involves several elements, which includes: a sender, a receiver, a message (which conveys information from the sender to the receiver), the code or language used for the message and the channel or means of communication through which the message goes from the sender to the receiver.

**Information and communication** are indissolubly linked. In fact, information is only useful to people to the extent that it is communicated to them. Information which does not circulate, which someone keeps to himself or herself, is not information as far as other people are concerned.<sup>3</sup>

**Communication for development** highlights the importance of promoting participation by involving all stakeholders and giving a say to those who need information and whose voice is not always heard. Communication for development comprises numerous media and approaches, including local media and traditional social groupings, rural radios for community development, videos and multimedia modules for training farmers, and the Internet as a means of networking researchers, educators, extension agents and producer associations as well as of accessing global information. Whatever the means employed – whether a village is linked to the outside world through modern telecommunication networks or its inhabitants learn about healthcare practices through popular sayings and songs, whether they listen to radio broadcasts on the best agricultural practices or obtain information from some other source – the processes and results involved are the same: people communicate and learn together.<sup>4</sup>

In different eras and cultures, knowledge has been preserved and transmitted by different oral and/or written communication means. Libraries are typical examples of institutions established to preserve knowledge. Today, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide new forms of storing and conveying information, including e.g. Wikipedia, the free collaborative encyclopaedia on the web. As in the case of documents available in a library, digital information and documents must be classified and indexed so that they can be easily retrieved, consulted and exchanged.

**Information management** covers the various stages of the treatment of information: producing, collecting, processing, storing, classifying and disseminating information, which can originate from different sources and be made available in different formats.

Knowledge management systems are often mistakenly called information management systems. Companies and institutions use a lot new ICTs and related tools such as websites, wikis, blogs and intranets. These tools are not in themselves enough to manage knowledge efficiently. A technological system cannot be used to managed knowledge as such, which is something in people’s heads, though it can be used to manage information and documents (written records, audiovisual materials, etc.). In this connection, it is appropriate to draw a distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge.

**Tacit knowledge**, also called “implicit knowledge”, includes a person’s innate or acquired skills, as well as his or her know-how and experience.

**Explicit knowledge** is expressly and clearly able to be formulated in words and figures, documented, and substantive. It can more easily be shared than tacit knowledge, which is more individual in nature.\*

In order to record tacit knowledge and make it explicit and available by means of a document, it is necessary to develop a knowledge exchange culture, recognise the benefits of knowledge exchange and invest time in sharing and thinking. Numerous methods – which we will briefly review below – exist to achieve these aims. Documentation is only one particular stage in knowledge management. Good practice can be documented to serve as an example to others and a guide for implementation.

**Experience documentation**, in addition to its archiving and accountability functions, is directed at “learning in the future” and making information available to third parties. The objective is to establish a retrievable memory.

**Experience capitalization** aims at changing a practice or structure. It also differs from external evaluations which, being determined by an “outside agenda”, are not guided exclusively by the direct participants in the experience. Experience capitalization is the transformation of (individual and institutional) knowledge into capital by those involved in order to change a collective, institutional practice. Aimed at changing one’s own practices or structures, it can be described as a “learn now for the future” process. Experience capitalization is made up of learning processes that prepare change. Its output is lessons learnt, and good practices; its outcome is induced changes; a redesigned practice fulfils its purpose.<sup>5</sup>

**A good practice** is a tested process or methodology which has achieved good results in the past. It can therefore be rec-

ommended as an exemplary model. Identifying and sharing good practices involves, essentially, the ability to learn from others and reutilise existing knowledge. Thus the benefits of this process increase with the accumulation of experience.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Tools, methods and techniques

With the development of new ICTs, many open source and proprietary software applications (e.g. intranets and extranets, websites, wikis, blogs, chat rooms, SMS, photo sharing applications, networks, on-line communities, yellow pages, etc.) have been created to assist KM, but these are only technological tools.

As mentioned above, these tools cannot, by themselves, provide a comprehensive solution. Rather, they must be carefully selected on the basis of the needs, capabilities and skills of the users concerned, and also take into account their willingness to share the knowledge and information they possess. Mutual respect and trust are essential to the success of this process.

Knowledge managers have a special role to play as facilitators and providers of a link between people, their knowledge and the chosen (ICT-based or other) supports. Knowledge managers use methods and techniques which rely on interpersonal relations and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience. Among other such methods and techniques, the following may be mentioned:

French terms	English terms
la rétrovision	After Action Review
le soutien entre collègues	Peer Coaching
l’assistance par les pairs	peer review
les bonnes pratiques	good practice
les études de cas	case study
les histoires et récits	story telling
le forum ouvert	Open Space
SEPO : Succès- Echecs - Potentiels - Obstacles	SWOT: Strengths - Weaknesses- Opportunities -Threats
les foires au savoir	knowledge fairs
le remue-méninges	brainstorming
les cartes cognitives ou cartes mentales	cognitive mapping or mind mapping
les communautés de pratique	communities of practice
la modération ou animation de groupe - facilitation	facilitation

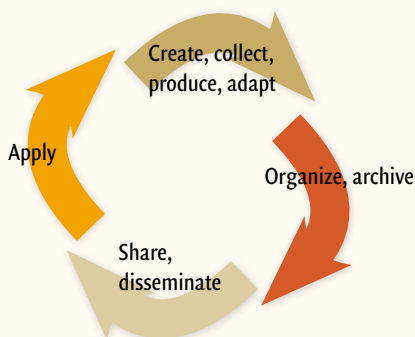


l'aquarium	fish bowl
le café du monde	world café

Detailed descriptions of these methods and techniques are available on the following websites:

- “Collaboration and Advocacy Techniques”, on the FAO-EU website “Food Security Information for Action”: [http://www.foodsec.org/tr\\_res\\_o7.htm](http://www.foodsec.org/tr_res_o7.htm), including a section on Distance Learning: [http://www.foodsec.org/DL/dlintro\\_en.asp](http://www.foodsec.org/DL/dlintro_en.asp) and on lessons: “Techniques for improving collaborative work” at <http://www.foodsec.org/DL/course/shortcourseFK/EN/pdf/lessons/lessono3o8.pdf>
- Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) – Knowledge Sharing Toolkit: [www.kstoolkit.org](http://www.kstoolkit.org)
- [www.daretoshare.ch](http://www.daretoshare.ch) and their toolkit: [http://www.daretoshare.ch/en/Dare\\_To\\_Share/Knowledge\\_Management\\_Toolkit](http://www.daretoshare.ch/en/Dare_To_Share/Knowledge_Management_Toolkit)
- CARE Knowledge Sharing Workshop: [www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/CARE\\_Knowledge\\_Sharing\\_Workshop](http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/CARE_Knowledge_Sharing_Workshop)
- Knowledge Management for Development: [www.km4dev.org](http://www.km4dev.org)

#### 4. Stages of knowledge management



Knowledge management comprises **several stages**:

1. The first consists in identifying and acquiring the relevant knowledge in order to document the existing experience/know-how, translate it into different languages, and adapt it to the intended audience.
2. Secondly, a system must be put in place to manage all the contents in accordance with appropriate informa-

tion management rules. It is essential to archive materials so as to be able to retrieve them easily.

3. The above tasks are pointless unless the data, information and knowledge are shared and disseminated through specific means of communication appropriate for each group of users.
4. Lastly, the shared knowledge must be effectively applied in order to ensure ownership by users and achieve the desired impact or change.

An effective KM strategy requires a great deal of flexibility as well as the ability to act and conceptualise at the same time. More specifically, the following actions have to be successfully implemented:

- Map out the existing information and materials: locate, collect, document, analyse, classify and process materials, starting with those already produced by the project;
- On the basis of the results of the training/action sessions and the support available in the field, fine-tune the methods and tools for identifying, collecting, capitalising and building on achievements;
- Translate, adapt, repackage and disseminate information in different forms and formats, depending on the target audiences;
- Collate, standardise, catalogue and classify the various products;
- Regularly review the materials developed and test them in the field;
- Develop databases to monitor which take into account the development of data/information over time, including lists of resource persons, partners, projects, etc.;
- Organise and support the sharing and dissemination of the available knowledge;
- Produce and publish appropriate training and technical materials and methodologies;
- Develop communication tools and supports (websites, CD-ROMs, videos, radio programmes, newspaper articles, brochures, etc.).

To **disseminate information, all means** whether **modern or traditional**, can be effectively used, bearing in mind that each tool has comparative advantages in terms of sharing with specific target groups according to the nature and scope of messages to be disseminated or exchanged.

Here are some examples:

- **Training and dissemination materials**: ranging from comprehensive guides, technical dossiers, datasheets

and specifications to posters, leaflets, etc., all of these materials must be produced taking into account the interests and learning needs of the target groups.

- **Written information** (articles, story telling, good practices, case studies, etc.): the project team and/or partners prepare written materials to be included in **newsletters** for distribution at regional or national level.
- **Digital films** on technical issues, for distribution in villages.
- **CD-ROMs and/or DVDs** with general information on the project, including its approach, aims, training syllabuses, guides, reports, etc. Every opportunity should be taken to present the CD-ROM (at meetings, workshops, training sessions, talks with project partners).
- **Media events**, including fairs, information caravans, agricultural exhibitions, etc. and other events which can be used to compare and share experiences and open up new prospects.
- **Radio programmes and radio drama/serials**: while ICTs are accelerating the development of the information society, older technologies such as the printed press and radio can also play a major role in this process.
- **Creation of a website** including a discussion forum (e.g. using SMS), enabling on line information open to participants and stakeholders in the project, and links to other relevant websites.
- **Provision of training** in the use of electronic media and IT, for participants in the project. This is now essential.
- **Exchange visits.**
- **Knowledge fairs.**
- **Networking.**
- **Community theatre, songs, story-telling, sayings and proverbs.**

During the implementation of action-oriented research projects, ATOL, a Belgian NGO, developed the so-called **DVDE** approach (“**D**écouvrir, **V**aloriser, **D**évelopper, **E**valuer” – discover, enhance value, develop, evaluate). The basis of this approach is the concept of “knowledge” explained in terms of “**ACCES**” (“**A**ttitude, **C**apacités et **C**ompétences, **E**xpériences et **S**avoir” – attitude, capacity and skills, experience and knowledge). The starting point of any learning process is attitude, and knowledge-acquisition necessarily implies moving through the four DVDE stages.

The first stage involves identifying the implicit knowledge of the target group in terms of ACCES. It is then necessary to make the most of this knowledge and enhance its value, and this means that facilitators must be able to recognise participants’ capacity, experiences and knowledge making them explicit and sharing them with others. The next stage consists in developing, strengthening and expanding existing abilities through training activities and support during implementation so that abilities/capacity become accomplished skills. In order to monitor knowledge-acquisition effectively, some form of evaluation is also necessary: What did the individual or group learn and implement? What is the project’s added value? Did men and women have equal opportunities to learn and put into practice what they had learned?

Clearly, KM in the field requires a relatively different approach from KM in an organisation, but the aim is the same in both cases: to collaborate, share and exchange knowledge in order to increase efficiency. The process is one of continuous learning which involves action, reflection, conceptualisation and planning for action (i.e. practice), and again reflection (documentation – after action review), conceptualisation (good practice), and planning for improved action with a greater impact – in other words, constant development.

1. This definition of knowledge management and implementation is derived from the one provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, “Dare to Share” : [http://www.daretoshare.ch/en/Dare\\_To\\_Share](http://www.daretoshare.ch/en/Dare_To_Share)
2. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skill> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge>
3. Frochet, 2000.
4. FAO.
- \* The following passage from the English Wikipedia article on knowledge management may usefully complement the author’s account of the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge: “The former is often subconscious, internalised, and the individual may or may not be aware of what he or she knows and how he or she accomplishes particular results. At the opposite end of the spectrum is conscious or explicit knowledge – knowledge that the individual holds explicitly and consciously in mental focus, and may communicate to others.” See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge\\_management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_management). – Translator’s note.
5. From the “Dare to Share” website.
6. This definition is freely adapted from those provided by CGIAR and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.



## Christine Tuyisenge

*Collectif Pro-Femmes /Twese Hamwe*

RWANDA

Christine Tuyisenge is a lawyer. She is first Vice-President of the Collectif Pro-Femme / Twese Hamwe, which unites more than 50 Rwandan organisations working for the promotion of the rights of women and children. She has a nine-year working experience defending the rights of women and children and lobbying for laws which are fair for all and their effective implementation.



# Gender inequality in access to land and its consequences for rural populations in Rwanda



## 1. Introduction

The right to property is acknowledged to be one of the fundamental human rights. It is enshrined in Article 29 of the Rwandan Constitution of 4 June 2003, which includes various revisions made following Rwanda's ratification of different international agreements on human rights, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The characteristics of property law include *usus*, *fructus* and *abusus*. *Usus* means the right to manage a property, *fructus* refers to the right to use what is produced on a property and *abusus* is the right to dispose of a property.

## 2. Gender inequality in land access

In Rwanda, it used to be the case that when a man died, his widow would become the usufructuary of all property acquired by the couple. Since law 22/99 governing prenuptial agreements, gifts and inheritance came into force in November 1999, when a man dies, his legal wife's entitlement to conjugal property depends on whether the couple's prenuptial agreement established a system where all property was jointly owned, a system where all acquisitions were jointly owned or a system where all property was kept separate.

These are some of the causes or sources of inequality in land access:

### a) Ignorance of human rights

In Rwanda, we are faced with the problem of ignorance of laws and human rights by the majority of the population and by local-level authorities responsible for handling the population's problems. This is despite the principle that "everyone should be familiar with the law".

This widespread ignorance of the law was highlighted in a study conducted by the Association HAGURUKA, a member organisation of the Collectif Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe. The study evaluated the application and impact of law no. 22/99 governing prenuptial agreements, gifts and inheritance and recommended that repackaging and dissemination campaigns for this law should be continued.

In this connection, the resigned attitude of the people, who do not demand their rights – women in particular – should also be mentioned.

### b) Laws not being implemented in practice

In addition to the Rwandan Constitution of 4 June 2003, which comprises all the revisions made to date and, in Article 190, recognises the supremacy of the international conventions on human rights ratified by Rwanda over organic and ordinary laws, the following laws have been adopted:

- The 2005 organic law on the Rwandan property ownership system;
- Law no. 42/88 establishing the preliminary title and book one of the civil code (family code);
- Law no. 22/99 completing law no. 42/88, creating a fifth part relating to prenuptial agreements, gifts and inheritance.

However, based on statistics for support cases handled by the Association HAGURUKA, 8,993 women did not have access to property and 5,636 did not have access to an inheritance.

The failure to implement these laws in practice often results from resistance to change by people who remain attached to customs and tradition, despite the existence of written laws on the subject.

### c) Unfair division of land and lack of land

The unfair division of land in some areas of the country is also a serious problem, as it restricts a number of people's



access to the land. This problem is exacerbated by the general lack of land – Rwanda has an area of 26,338 km<sup>2</sup>, yet 95% of the population (some 9 million people) depend on farming for their livelihood.

Furthermore, inequality in access to land stems from the way the land is acquired. As mentioned earlier, there is still inequality in terms of access to land through inheritance, primarily because of the patriarchal system that views women as second-class citizens. The situation regarding division of property between spouses is similar, particularly if the husband dies. As for acquiring land as a gift, both men and women are allowed to give and receive gifts in Rwanda. In reality, however, very few women receive land as a gift. Land can also be acquired through purchase, but given the phenomenon of the feminisation of poverty and the current cost of land, there are very few female land-owners.

### 3. The consequences for rural populations in Rwanda and for women in particular

There are a great many consequences linked to access to land, notably:

- Poverty of individuals, families and the country as a whole;
- Inability to meet basic needs: food, healthcare, education etc.;
- Hunger;
- Conflict at family level, country level or even regional level.

Consequences for women:

- No access to loans due to lack of guarantee or mortgage;
- Poverty;
- No access to education;
- Disrespect by spouse and family members;
- Heavy financial dependence on spouse or parents;

- Resignation to the situation as no-one is heard to condemn violence against women;
- Breakdown of families: divorce, disownment.

### 4. Existing or potential information and communication strategies for fighting gender inequality

Information and communication strategies for fighting gender inequality include:

- Adopting non-discriminatory laws and policies;
- Repackaging and disseminating these laws through the media, e.g. via the radio (especially community radio stations), popular newspapers, the television, and so on;
- Organising awareness-raising campaigns to change the population's behaviour, using traditional chiefs, community volunteers (such as legal assistants), women's organisations, youth organisations, religious structures, youth movements (e.g. scouts, guides) and so on as relay points;
- Organising awareness-raising activities in the form of plays, dance shows, concerts, sports, and so forth;
- Raise the population's awareness using posters, leaflets and legal guides, among other methods;
- Include classes on gender and human rights on the curriculum at primary, secondary and university level;
- Emphasise gender equality in political speeches;
- Organise mobile legal clinics;
- Advocate equal involvement of men and women in decision-making bodies, based on the results of research on gender inequality.

### 5. Conclusion

If we wish to achieve sustainable development, it is important to respect the principle that all people are equal – with no exceptions – in all areas of life and particularly as regards access to property.







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## Françoise Bibiane Yoda

*RECIF/ONG-BF, Réseau de communication, d'information et de formation des femmes dans les ONG au Burkina Faso*

BURKINA FASO

Françoise Bibiane Yoda has a degree in information and communication technologies. In 2002, she participated in the Young Apprentices for Development initiative, organised by UNV. In October 2003, she was recruited by RECIF/ONG as person in charge of the Documentation and Internet Centre, part of its Communication Department, where she is responsible for the following tasks: management of the documentary fund, the website and the IT network of RECIF/ONG; management of the RECIF membership list and of the internal competencies list; drafting of articles for the organisation's newsletter; organisation of ICT training sessions for the members of RECIF/ONG; on the ground follow-up of projects in the following areas: ICT training, promotion of rice from Burkina Faso, documentary film on Burkina milk, women's access to land, HIV/AIDS, etc.; participation in national and international discussion and exchange fora. Françoise is member of several women's and youth organisations in Burkina Faso and abroad.

# Gender inequalities in land access in Burkina Faso: a status report



Toziri Sambaré, who comes from the central-east region of Burkina Faso, moved to a village in Kéné Dougou province in 2005 to be a farmer. To do this, he went to see the village's land chief, accompanied by his tutor, who comes from the area, to ask for a plot of land. His request was accepted, but there was one condition: he is not allowed to plant a tree on the land. Doing so may cause him to lose his rights to work the plot. Before beginning his activities, Toziri was supposed to give the land chief a chicken, some kola nuts and some tobacco.

Denis Kaboré and his family decided to move to Kouritenga province in 2007. Mr Kaboré, who was being mentored by someone from the village, wanted a piece of land to build a house and do some farming for his family. The landowners demanded that he give them a goat, a cockerel, two chickens, some tobacco, some dolo and a range of other gifts that varied in size depending on the requester's status. The land is still only granted in the form of a permanent loan that gives the person working it extensive rights, excluding the right to plant (to be negotiated), give up the land or sell it to someone else unilaterally.

## 1. Problems women face in accessing farming land

The issue of gender equality in rural land management seems to be a more specific manifestation of the general problem of land access. Creating conditions allowing disadvantaged groups (particularly women in rural areas) fair access to land is a real challenge. 52% of Burkina Faso's population is female, and most of these women live in rural areas. Women make significant contributions to production activities, but in some rural areas, they fall victim to harassment and looting when exploiting land and using natural resources. Now, with the advent of agribusiness, the situation regarding rural women's access to farming land threatens to become more complicated than ever.

In rural areas, women's access to land is governed by

customs in which the social relationship for women is unequal, dependent, unstable and full of negotiations. Women are not allowed to own land – they may only work on it.

In areas managed by the state, specifications do not always take account of women's particular characteristics. Women have very few opportunities for access to better-quality land and irrigated areas.

## 2. What do legal texts have to say on the subject?

Article 62 of law no. 14/96/ADP of 23 May 1996 on Agricultural and Land Reform (RAF) states that “urban and rural land forming part of Burkina Faso's national property is allocated to physical persons, regardless of their gender or marital status, and to legal entities, subject to the conditions set out in these texts”. One key aim of the Policy on safeguarding rural land ownership (PNSFMR), adopted by the government in October 2007, is to ensure that all rural stakeholders have fair access to land.

## 3. Despite the adoption of a range of legal texts aiming to grant fair access to land, women are still faced with injustice. Why is this?

### a) The influence of tradition

Since land is sacred, women cannot manage it. If women were to have access to the land, all records of land tenure would be lost. We would no longer know to which family a certain piece of land had belonged. It would be the death of tradition. Women's status means, for example, that they cannot trace their ancestry. These arguments, which were voiced by various communities, have been included in the guide on securing land ownership rights for rural women in Burkina Faso. The guide was produced by the Groupe de Recherche et d'Action sur le Foncier (GRAF – Tenure Action and Research Group) in 2006, and its target audience was extension workers for grassroots organisations and human rights NGOs.







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In a film on women's access to land, made by Franceline Oubda in 1992, Naba Sapilma, the chief of Koupela (in the central-east region of Burkina Faso), had a definite opinion: "A woman doesn't get married to meddle in land issues – she gets married to serve her husband's family. Throughout human history, women have never staked a claim on the land. They can suggest ways to use the land, but they can never apply their ideas directly. Land belongs to the family. Should we divide it up every time someone gets married? The situation is very difficult when a woman who has joined another family by marriage inherits a piece of land. I don't see how we can let women enjoy an inheritance that will simply end up in another family when she gets married. In Africa, succession is through the male line".

#### **b) Ignorance and non-promotion of women's rights to land ownership**

Almost 70% of Burkina Faso's population is illiterate, the majority of them women. This means that there is widespread ignorance of human rights, particularly women's rights. Because of this, women are unaware of land ownership laws that promote their rights.

Now that NGOs and rural groups have launched activities to boost literacy, train people and raise awareness, more women know their rights. However, they still have problems exercising them. Women often prefer to suffer injustice and have a peaceful life at home and in the community than to speak out against injustice and end up a laughing stock.

#### **c) Women's low economic power**

Nowadays, many rural women live in poverty, so they wonder why they should demand access to land when they do not possess the resources to work it.

In another respect, some men see women's economic independence as a reason for families breaking up – women have an important part to play in agricultural production, and men are aware of this. If women have free access to land, they will put everything into it and increase their production, which could give them economic independence. Men think that economically independent women no longer obey their husbands, and they believe that this would cause their families to break up.

#### **d) Access to modern production methods**

Not only are women unable to exercise their financial rights to the full, they also have problems (as do men) in accessing modern production methods. For instance, traditional methods are still used in Burkina Faso's two main rice-growing areas (Bagré and Sourou) by both rice producers and the women who process the rice (i.e. who steam it), and this has adverse effects on the quality of the end product. Steamed rice produced by women struggles to perform well on the market because of the debris it contains. This proves that women need access to modern production equipment, including tractors, threshers, shellers, mills, carts, drying areas, fertilisers and better seeds.

#### 4. Consequences of women's lack of access to land

The following are consequences of the fact that women have no access to land:

- The world food crisis: Burkina Faso has been severely affected by this global crisis because the country imports most of its food;
- Though women are the main stakeholders in agricultural production, they have been kept out of land management. This slows production growth and jeopardises food sovereignty;
- Mounting poverty: Burkina Faso came second-last in the UNDP's latest rankings on sustainable development – the issue of land ownership seems to be one of the reasons behind this performance;
- Poverty in families, violence, malnutrition;
- Lack of access to basic social services, such as health-care, education (particularly for girls) and food.

#### 5. Existing or potential information and communication strategies for fighting gender inequality

##### a) Existing strategies

- Activities to inform, train and raise awareness;
- Human rights training, leading to legal recognition of marriages in some areas;
- Involvement in consultation structures;
- Advocacy;
- Social dialogue.

##### b) Different experiences have shown:

- The need to make religious, political and traditional authorities more aware of rural women's role and contribution as regards agricultural production and fighting poverty;
- The need to involve women in decisions on land management;
- Not only should women have secure access to land, they should also be able to benefit from capacity building activities helping them to make the most of it;
- Grassroots organisations and groups must develop information, communication and training activities in rural areas. These activities should focus on land legislation and should be based on simplified versions of the applicable legal texts (RAF, PNSEMR, etc.).

##### c) Potential strategies

- Take women's particular characteristics into account when drafting laws on managing natural resources;
- Adapt procedures for accessing and managing land to the needs of the poorest women, such as widows and divorcees;
- Strengthen projects which provide equipment and training for women farmers;
- Recognise and take into account the profession of women farmers (which concerns most women);
- Advocate dissemination of information through state channels;
- Bear in mind that networks are an appropriate framework for social communication and ensure that they work to improve women's access to land (they are currently more focused on raising awareness of family rights – i.e. the Family Code). There are currently very few projects focused on the repackaging and dissemination of land ownership laws;
- Pay attention to agribusiness;
- Make legal information on land ownership rights available through both traditional (talks, community radio stations) and modern (Internet platforms, CD-ROMs) communication channels. In this connection, old and new technology should be combined to ensure information is passed on right to grassroots level;
- Launch awareness-raising activities aiming to legally recognise marriages with a view to safeguarding land ownership rights;
- Train women who have managed to gain access to land despite the problems they face and provide them with high-performance agricultural equipment to help them serve as positive examples;
- Create local frameworks for building upon experiences and exchanging views on activities for promoting women's access to land;
- Conduct more in-depth research to identify effective social communication strategies to promote women's access to land.



# Contact details of the participants

## **ALIN-EA, Arid Lands Information Network-Eastern Africa** ✨

Noah Lusaka, Projet Officer  
P.O. Box 10098  
00100 G.P.O. Nairobi  
Kenya  
Tel: +254 20 2731557  
Fax: +254 20 2737813  
Noah@alin.or.ke  
www.alin.or.ke

## **AMSED, Association Marocaine de Solidarité et de Développement** ✨

Najat Sarhani, Executive Director  
65, Avenue John Kennedy  
Route de Zair  
Rabat  
Morocco  
Tel: +212 37 759352 / 53  
Fax: +212 37 750098  
sarhaninajat@yahoo.fr  
www.amsed.org.ma

## **Bureau de la Coopération Suisse au Niger** ✨

Catherine Belemsigri, Programme Officer  
B.P. 728  
Niamey  
Niger  
Tel: +227 733916  
Fax: +227 733313  
catherine.belemsigri@sdc.net  
www.ddc-niger.ch

## **CAFOB, Collectif des Associations et ONG Féminines du Burundi** ✨

Concilie Gahungere, Coordinator  
P.O.Box 561  
Bujumbura  
Burundi  
Tel: +257 217758 / 0831526  
Fax: +257 218409  
cafob@cbinf.com

## **Collectif PRO-FEMMES/TWESE HAMWE** ✨

Christine Tuyisenge, Vice-President  
B.P. 2758  
Kigali  
Rwanda  
Tel: +250 511180  
Fax: +250 578432  
profemme@rwanda.r.com  
www.profemmes.org

## **CONAFED, Comité National Femme et Développement** ✨

Elise Muhimuzi, Coordinator  
B.P. 5-744  
Kinshasa - Gombe  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 99 9918406  
conafed@ic.cd

## **ENDA-Pronat, Protection naturelle des Ressources** ✨

Fatou Sow Ndiaye, Dimitra Coordinator  
B.P. 3370  
Dakar  
Senegal  
Tel: +221 33 8893439  
Fax: +221 33 8428681  
dimitra@enda.sn  
www.enda.sn/pronat

## **FAO – Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance Service (AGSF)** ✨

Åke Olofsson, Rural Finance Officer  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00100 Rome  
Italy  
Tel: +39 06 57052268  
Ake.Olofsson@fao.org



### **FAO – Horticultural Crops Group, Plant Production and Protection Division (AGPC) \***

Alison Hodder, Senior Officer  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00153 Rome  
Italy  
Tel: +39 06 57054846  
hortivar@fao.org - Alison.Hodder@fao.org  
www.fao.org/hortivar

### **FAO – Knowledge and Communication Department, Knowledge Exchange & Capacity Building Division (KCE) \***

Sophie Treinen, Information Management Specialist  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00100 Rome  
Italy  
Tel: +39 06 57054297  
Sophie.Treinen@fao.org

### **FAO – Land Tenure and Management Unit (NRLA) \***

Lucia Palombi, Consultant  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00100 Rome  
Italy  
Tel: +39 06 57053194  
Lucia.Palombi@fao.org

### **FAO-RDC \***

Mabika Dakeini Phuna, Information Officer  
Boulevard du 30 juin, no. 936  
Kinshasa – Gombe  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 815100923  
Mabika.Phuna@fao.org

### **GTZ Health \***

Aster Bashige Ndjuzi, Provincial Coordinator South Kivu  
Avenue du Gouverneur 52  
Commune d'Ibanda,  
Bukavu, South Kivu  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 99 8090333 / +243 85 3720939  
gtzsante\_kivu@yahoo.com / asterbash@yahoo.fr

### **Inputs Project, Promotion of the use of agricultural inputs by producer organisations, FAO-Niger \***

Adamou Mahaman, National Communication Expert  
B.P. 11246  
Niamey  
Niger  
Tel: +227 20373236 / 96991453  
pintrant@intnet.ne

### **Le Monde selon les Femmes \***

Sophie Charlier, Officer in charge of South Projets  
18 rue de la Sablonnière  
1000 Brussels  
Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 2230512  
Fax: +32 2 2231512  
www.mondefemmes.org

### **ONE, Office National pour l'Environnement \***

Haja Rasamimanana, Information Officer  
B.P. 822  
Antananarivo 101  
Madagascar  
Tel: +261 20 2225999  
Fax: +261 20 2230693  
mihaja@pnae.mg  
www.pnae.org

### **ONG-Vie Kande Ni Bayra** ✨

Ali Abdoulaye, Coordinator  
B.P. 349  
Niamey  
Niger  
Tel: +227 20 752560  
Tel/Fax: +227 20 755448  
viebayra@intnet.ne

### **Projet HUP (FAO-RDC) – National Service for urban and peri-urban horticulture** ✨

Grégoire Mutshail Mutomb, Provincial Coordinator  
1100, Avenue Kabalo  
Lubumbashi, Katanga  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 99 8517490 / +243 81 0511145  
mutshailaro@yahoo.fr - huprdc@yahoo.fr

### **RECIF-ONG/BF, Réseau de communication, d'information et de formation des femmes dans les ONG au Burkina Faso** ✨

Françoise Bibiane, Person in charge of ICTs and documentation  
01 BP 6473  
Ouagadougou 01  
Burkina Faso  
Tel: +226 50 31 22 25  
recif@fasonet.bf  
www.recif.bf

### **REFED-Katanga, Réseau Femme et Développement** ✨

Bernadette Kapend Mwambu, President  
Bâtiment Grand Labo  
491, Avenue Likasi  
Lubumbashi, Katanga  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 818152771  
b\_m\_kapend@yahoo.fr

### **SAMWAKI, Sauti ya Mwanamke Kijijini** ✨

Adeline Nsimire Balika, Coordinator  
161/00 Avenue P.E. Lubumba  
Commune d'Ibanda  
Bukavu, South Kivu  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 81 4740077  
samwakiasbl@yahoo.fr

### **UAP, Canadian Cooperation in the DRC** ✨

Marie-Antoinette Saya, Advisor on gender and microfinance  
B.P. 8394  
Kinshasa 1, Gombe  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Tel: +243 81 5028686  
Fax: +243 81 3016515  
mantoINETte.saya@uaprdc.org

### **WOUNGET, Women of Uganda Network** ✨

Dorothy Okello, Coordinator  
P.O.Box 4411  
Kampala  
Uganda  
Tel: +256 41 4532035  
Fax: +256 41 4530474  
info@woungnet.org - dokello@woungnet.org  
www.woungnet.org

## Dimitra Project



21 rue Brederode  
B-1000 Brussels  
Belgium  
tel : +32 2 549 03 10  
fax : +32 2 549 03 14  
dimitra@dimitra.org  
www.fao.org/dimitra



In September 2008, the FAO-Dimitra project organised its third workshop with all its partners in Brussels, on the theme: “Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality as regards land access and its consequences for rural populations in Africa”.

This document presents a synthesis of the workshop’s activities as well as the different articles which were prepared for the workshop by the participants – the partners of the network and FAO colleagues.

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Responsible Editor: Eliane Najros  
Consultant for Editing: Seydou Sarr  
Translations: Linguanet  
Graphic design: Filip Erkens

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