



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.



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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