**Women’s Rights to Own, Access and Control Land in Africa**

“From gender analysis, the international development community also learned that women face significant barriers in agriculture, especially inequalities in access to and control over crucial resources and inputs such as land, labour, fertilizer and formal finance. Women also face barriers to membership in rural organizations and cooperatives, agricultural inputs such as improved seedlings, training and extension and marketing services.” [Women, Food Security and Agriculture in a Global Market Place, International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) - 2008, page 10].

**Background**

Women’s right to property includes the right to acquire and dispose of any movable or immovable property obtained by their own labour or through inheritance. Hence, the right to property is a broad notion that has bearing on several legislative frameworks including marriage and inheritance laws.

Women’s right to land is a critical factor in social status, economic well-being and empowerment. It is also a social asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in local decision-making processes. Moreover, land is a basic source of livelihood as it provides employment, it is the key agricultural input and it is a major determinant of women farmers’ access to other productive resources and services.

Various international and regional instruments such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol in 2000, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BDPA), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights in 2003, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in 2004 have provided for the protection, respect and promotion of women’s property rights in Africa, including land rights.

Following the adoption and coming into force of these significant global and regional instruments, many African countries have taken various measures to meet the requirements of their international commitments. Such measures include revision of constitutions and existing laws to be more gender-sensitive, and revision of land reform approaches and land development policies.

The Land Policy Initiative (LPI), established in 2006 by the African Union/Economic Commission for Africa and African Development Bank (AU-ECA-AfDB), has developed a Framework and Guidelines for land policy in Africa. The Framework’s suggested benchmarks and indicators on land policy provide guidance on how to track progress in reform with a view to address related issues such as gender inequality in land ownership and tenure security for women.
At the regional level, the Sixth African Development Forum (ADF-VI), which was organized by the ECA, AU and AfDB and took place on 19-21 November 2008, has given special emphasis to women and land right issues. ADF-VI identified the major obstacles to women’s land rights, highlighted select best practices and recommended critical actions that should be taken by various stakeholders at different levels.

Similarly, a joint consultation meeting was organized by Action Aid International-Africa (AAIA), the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Urgent Action Fund (UAF), African Union Commission (AUC), the AfDB and the ECA in November 2008. This important meeting reviewed the AU-ECA-AfDB Draft Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa from a women’s land rights perspective. Participants explored remaining challenges to women and reviewed the progress of existing commitments on women and land rights. The meeting provided concrete and detailed inputs for revision of the LPI.

The status of women’s land rights in Africa

Despite multi-dimensional effort at various levels and the crucial contribution of women to agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa (women contribute 60-80% of the labour used to produce food for both household consumption and sale), women’s access to and control over land in Africa remains minimal.\(^1\) The 2004 African Gender and Development Index (AGDI) findings from 12 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Uganda) revealed that women’s access to land was, on average, less than half of that enjoyed by men.

This section of the website provides information on women’s land and property rights. The section is organized into two parts. The first section deals with monitoring and contains quantitative data on selected indicators for individual African countries where such information is available. The second section focuses on the experiences of African countries in terms of dealing with the land and property rights of women. This includes best practices in legislative and policy environments, plans of action developed and programmes designed, institutional mechanisms established, monitoring and evaluating efforts exerted, outcomes achieved and the issues and challenges faced in advocating for and realizing women’s equal right to land.

The website contains a common section where comparative qualitative data are presented to assess the progress of African countries. The resources section of the website provides links to regional and global frameworks as well as to new and current research studies on land.

\(^1\) [http://www.fao.org/docrep/X0250E/x0250e03.htm#TopOfPage](http://www.fao.org/docrep/X0250E/x0250e03.htm#TopOfPage)