

## The Importance of Women's Rights and Securing Land Tenure in the Context of Climate Change

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### **Executive Summary**

*It is widely recognised that men and women are affected differently by climate change, particularly in rural communities where traditional gender roles are prominent, resulting in women relying more on natural resources than men. Therefore, women's relationships to the land and the natural resources that it provides differs to that of men. As a result of women's disproportionate reliance on natural resources, they often hold more knowledge about the land and the relationship between the environment and natural resources, and are therefore better placed to respond to temperature changes that affect crops. However, in many rural communities around the world, women do not have access to land rights, nor do they own land. This can result in poor land management. This brief calls for greater recognition of the relationship between women's land rights and*

*climate change resilience within rural communities. The Global Land Forum 2018, held by the International Land Coalition, presented a platform in which this issue could be discussed. The following report will examine whether this issue received adequate attention at the Forum, and the policies and tools that were raised which could contribute towards climate change resilience through securing women's land rights in rural communities.*

### **Context**

A recent [Food and Agriculture Organization report](#) that men and women in rural communities around the world are affected by climate change differently, partly because women have less access to 'financial, physical and human resources' than their male counterparts, and often 'rely more on natural resources'. Women are also less likely to own land; the [World Economic Forum reported](#) that women own less than 20% of land in the world, often relying on their husbands or male

relatives to provide land on which to live and work due to the customary law which takes place in many parts of the world, where land is passed down to the male members of the family and therefore bypasses women.

Women's [disproportionate reliance on natural resources](#), along with the lack of rights to and effective control over the land that produces such resources, can make women vulnerable both economically and socially, and as a result of this reality, women are more likely to be [less resilient and therefore more vulnerable](#) to climate change.

Importantly, access to land rights and secure tenure is about more than gender equality; it is about making the world resilient to climate change. In many countries, women assume the role of the primary caregiver within a family, spending a significant amount of time working within and around the home.

[According to the United Nations](#), '...women's responsibilities in household and communities, as stewards of natural and household resources, positions them well to contribute to livelihood strategies adapted to environmental realities.' Where climate change results in the depletion of natural resources, lack of effective land management means that such resources become harder to manage and increasingly scarce, making a

community vulnerable to climate change.

Thus, as climate change becomes an increasingly pressing global issue, women's robust knowledge and their importance and role in fighting the effects of climate change must be recognised, with their access and rights to land identified as a key means of enabling affected communities to deal more adequately with the effects climate change.

The UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) highlight the need for gender equal access to land rights, addressing why this issue is important in ensuring successful resilience against climate change. For example, Goal 1 aims to build the resilience of the poor to climate change, with other goals either explicitly or implicitly addressing the importance of the role of women in the process; Goal 5 strives for gender equality, aiming to give women equal rights to economic resources and their full and effective participation in government and their local community. Goal 15 claims that poor rural women depend on a common pool of natural resources and are especially affected if such resources become depleted. By sewing together other related targets and goals outlined in the SDGs, it becomes clear that women have an important role to play in the face of climate change; effective utilization of

land and its natural resources is key to climate change resilience, and [the body of knowledge](#) that many rural women possess means that they are best placed to do this. Women can also play an effective role in contributing to community participation and political decisions around natural resources, assisting or taking a leading role in the management of local land, thereby improving mechanisms for the adaptation of infrastructure and processes to provide community resilience to climate change.

***United for Land Rights: The ILC's women's land rights and climate change initiatives***

Like the SDGs, the International Land Coalition's (ILC) 10 Commitments recognise the importance of equal land rights and security of tenure for women. [Commitment 4](#) of their 10 commitments to reach their aim of 'People Centred Land Governance' is Equal Land Rights for Women,' claiming that without women's land rights there can be no SDGs. As the SDGs set-out to improve world's resilience to climate change, the ILC's mission can be extended therefore to mean that without women's land rights, there can be no resilience to climate change.

To begin to put this idea into action, the ILC, in conjunction with a series of other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Universities, and organisations have [produced a toolkit](#) to be used by relevant institutions to strengthen women's access to land rights. The tools range in nature, from authority-organised action to local community action in which women organise themselves to fight for land rights. One of the tools is a '[Family Land Rights and Lineage Tree](#)', defined as 'a method of conflict resolution aimed at identifying land tenure right by identify[ing] relevant facts and preventing future conflict including by planting actual trees.' This aims to combat gender inequalities raised by customary laws by the 'inclusion of women in land rights records' (Ibid). They also aim to plant trees to mark the agreed plot boundaries, to prevent any further conflict rising over the land (Ibid). The Land and Equity Movement of Uganda (LEMU) uses 'Family Rights and Lineage' tool in Uganda, where they 'independently analyse land rights and responsibilities' in order to resolve conflicts and establish who rights over the land belong to. This can lead to women securing land rights by verifying the woman as the rightful owner of the land. This gives women control over the land and therefore the natural resources that they own, thereby enabling them to manage their resources in such a way

that makes them and their communities more resilient to climate change.

### **Global Land Forum 2018**

The Global Land Forum did not address the relationship between women and climate change directly, although some land activists concerned with women's land rights did succeed in raising the issue and creating a dialogue about it between delegates. Throughout the forum, there was a consensus that in many cases women, due their 'rich biodiversity knowledge,' as one speaker phrased it, were best placed to manage and cultivate the lands. To these women, equitable land management meant that women would be able to plant seeds and sustainably grow crops and other natural resources.

One delegate recalled a tree planting project in Gambia, where an organisation introduced a tree planting project to a community. As the men were the landowners, the organisation placed the men in charge of planting the trees, which the women then helped to grow. However, the organisation did not realise that it was primarily the women of the community who gardened on that particular land plot

where the trees were planted. Although an increased number of trees may be a positive example of land restoration, in this case the process of tree planting led to an undermining of the work that women had been doing, and therefore food production was altered, resulting in negative impacts on crops. It can be assumed that over time, such change to food production could leave communities less resilient to climate change as there would be less land available for vital resources to be cultivated in the correct way.

Throughout the Global Land Forum, participants also often linked women to climate change resilience; the connection between women, their immense knowledge of the land, and protecting nature was made again and again. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Agencia de Noticias de Mujeres Indígenas y Afrodescendientes (NOTIMIA), and the International Indigenous Women's Forum [stated online](#) and in a Global Land Forum leaflet that women 'are the custodians of traditional knowledge [...] [they] hold an intimate connection with the territories they inhabit and consider themselves the first guardians of mother earth. As such, they are leading the protection of indigenous territories worldwide.' As well as improving resilience to climate change, there

was the implicit idea that because women were best placed to fight companies with high carbon footprints from their ancestral land, that they would also be tackling climate change from this angle.

The Global Land Forum also highlighted specific tools and strategies through which women's land rights can be achieved. One particularly interesting tool that was raised in one of the break out sessions by members from the Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGLWO) from India, as well as Groots from Kenya, was to train members of a community, in particular women, as paralegals; the aim was that these paralegals would subsequently educate women in the community about their rights to land. WGLWO then furthered this by equipping women who exercised their right to own land with sustainable agricultural practices and drudgery reduction tools, thereby enabling women to make the most out of their land.

To make communities more resilient to changing temperatures, it would also be beneficial to provide training to women about climate change and the ways in which they can manage their lands in response to changing temperatures and increasingly extreme weather events, which would complement

their already robust knowledge of their lands. This knowledge could then be passed through generations. This would make a real difference to rural communities; not only would it increase gender equality, through women playing an increasingly important role in land management, perceptions and attitudes towards women within their society may also begin to change. And, of course, the community would be more resilient to climate change. Land ownership, together with resilience against climate change would lessen the likelihood of the community being displaced or having to move from their land in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Climate change is an increasingly pressing issue, and the world must act now to limit its effects. This brief has highlighted the role of women in rural communities in helping to build resilience against changing temperatures through their extensive knowledge of the relationship between natural resources and the land. At the same time, the brief has also drawn attention to the multiple barriers that women face in helping their communities

respond to climate change – including a lack of control over land and resources that are needed to ensure resiliency.

A clear message emerging from the Global Land Forum is that these barriers need to be broken down. The Forum serves as a platform in which organisations and individuals can come together to share ideas and advocate for change. Some promising ideas and tools were presented at Global Land Forum that were resulting in real changes in communities, particularly when combined with further training on the management of land and natural

resources. Importantly though, more awareness about the relationship between women’s land rights and is still needed – until we reach a point where one cannot be discussed without the other.

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