

# EMPOWERING DRYLAND WOMEN:

## CAPTURING OPPORTUNITIES IN LAND RIGHTS, GOVERNANCE AND RESILIENCE

*A synthesis of thematic papers from the series 'Women's empowerment in the drylands'*



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## Context

Dryland peoples and areas face significant challenges from environmental change, demographic and socio-economic trends, and the added threat of climate change. The marginalization of dryland zones have resulted from persistent misconceptions and a history of highly inappropriate policies, creating under-investment, poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation.

Women play an important role in drylands development, managing land, crops, forestry and water resources. However, women not only experience the marginalization of the dryland zone where they live, but they also face specific forms of discrimination related to gender and other kinds of social difference. Dryland women experience worse outcomes on core development indicators, compared to national averages. Widespread discrimination, inequality and stereotypes are preventing women's participation in decision making and the realization of their human rights. Gender equality rooted in human rights is an essential development goal and vital to achieving sustainable and inclusive drylands development.

The UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification (GPC-Nairobi) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) have commissioned three new studies exploring the issues of gender justice with respect to dryland land rights, governance and resilience.

Women's **land rights** and their importance for women's empowerment and wider development goals have gained increased attention in recent years. However, gender inequality in land rights in dryland countries and across the developing world more broadly remains pervasive. This is related to discriminatory socio-cultural norms that are found in customary and statutory institutions and practices that differ according to local contexts. In addition, women often lack representation and the authority to make decisions in land management and governance.



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- **Thematic study 1: ‘Strengthening dryland women’s land rights: local contexts, global change’** found that significant opportunities exist for facilitating dryland women’s empowerment with respect to land, in international research, policy, dialogue and practical action. There is increased international attention on women’s land rights amongst global institutions and in international development debates. There is growing pressure for progressive legislation on women’s land rights, with increasing examples of practical implementation of such laws across the world, including in dryland countries, where action is being led by women’s movements. Greater recognition of the value of dryland systems, along with more enabling statutory frameworks, presents opportunities to build upon customary and local systems to increase gender equality for land rights in the drylands.

Dryland **governance** is characterized by customary systems which often manage resource sharing and mobility between groups, but also by a diverse array of hybrid and often very localized forms of governance, involving modified customary systems, state institutions, and a range of civil society and development organizations. Spatial marginalization and inappropriate dryland policies are associated with the regular exclusion of dryland communities from state governance processes. Common ideas and practices of state citizenship and of community membership in customary systems often reflect a male bias, where the recognition of women’s rights and their right to participation is limited.

- **Thematic study 2: Gender and drylands governance: empowering women for change** found that significant opportunities exist for facilitating dryland women’s empowerment in governance, in the context of wider support for processes seeking greater democracy in dryland governance and values. There is a need to tackle the inadequate representation and recognition of women’s rights in the drylands, and to consider the redistribution of resources to more equitable ends. Effective channels that can be used to support gender justice are: increased investment in dryland governance, building upon contemporary trends in the drylands towards democratization and decentralization, supporting current processes for greater dryland citizen engagement and ownership, and opening up new spaces for participation of women in dryland governance specifically.



**Resilience**, a key concept adopted by research communities and by many international agencies and donors, encourages thinking on how drylands and the people who live there can, in the short term, be more able to recover from shocks, and in the long term be transformed for the better.

- **Thematic study 3: ‘Achieving Dryland Women’s Empowerment: Environmental resilience and social transformation’** found that there are major opportunities to strengthen the resilience of dryland environments and for women to actively contribute to and benefit from sustainable drylands development. For example, investment is needed in climate adaptation, livestock development, education and health services, and social protection programmes, amongst others. Such approaches should build upon the structural variability of drylands, value local knowledge and adaptive pastoral systems and improve the recognition of women – their knowledge, roles, contributions and interests, increase women’s representation in decision making and redistribute resources in more equitable ways.



## Key Measures

A wide range of measures focusing on land rights, governance and resilience is required to achieve dryland resilience and to transform gender relations.

### **Ensuring the full recognition of women's rights means achieving widespread acceptance of women as equal members of dryland communities and citizens of the state.**

- As citizens, women should have equal rights to participate actively in all kinds of decision making from the community to the international level. Women should receive high-quality government basic services, and have equitable access to appropriate resources, networks and markets. Full recognition of women's rights must be achieved, by communities and their leaders, central and local governments and other stakeholders such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. Women must be recognized as equal members of dryland communities and citizens of the state in order to achieve independent land rights.
- Recognition of women's rights requires challenging socio-cultural norms and practices that devalue women and undermine their participation in decision making, their ability to realize their rights to land, and neglects their indigenous knowledge and roles in household livelihood systems. Action is required to change customary norms that are less positive for women, especially specific practices that undermine women's health, wellbeing and dignity. Similarly, action is required where women are not recognized as value chain actors. Women should be equally able to influence decision making, and to access education and health services.
- It is necessary to raise awareness among both women and men about the importance of tackling gender inequalities, in order for women to realize their human rights. The value of adaptive pastoral livelihood systems, particularly the element of mobility, should also be recognized.
- All policies and programmes should take into account the fact that women have more limited influence in decision making, higher work burdens, and less secure rights to resources, and should seek to change this for the benefit of women themselves, their households and their communities.
- Women's land rights need to exist independently from men's and other social relationships. Rights should be understood as existing within different dryland tenure systems, which may differentially emphasize rights to own, control, inherit and dispose of land, in order to address differences in land rights for dryland communities and dryland women.
- The recognition of women's land rights requires working within an enabling statutory framework to support customary and government institutions at the local level for women's land rights – working with one tenure system alone cannot bring about greater gender equality in land rights.
- New spaces and opportunities within political processes are required to secure women's human rights and social transformation in ways that recognize the overall marginalization of communities in governance processes, dryland communities' need for greater self-determination and the frequent dual or triple marginalization experienced by women and other excluded social groups.



**Women's representation must be improved in decision making in dryland customary and statutory systems, including land governance systems and development programming.**

- Women's underrepresentation in community and land-related governance and decision making in the drylands needs to be addressed. This involves the recognition of women's roles and rights as individual community members and citizens, within household decision making and in the design and delivery of more effective services and development interventions. As well as extending the coverage of social and agricultural services, it is necessary to build upon the strengths of dryland people's adaptive livelihood systems. Such systems must fit with the structural variability of dryland climates by working with pastoralists' mobility, and draw upon new approaches to social learning to develop locally tailored solutions.
- The generic lessons of resilience thinking should inform social protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, market development and livelihood development schemes. These lessons should also provide potential insights about how social change may occur or be encouraged, such as the importance of social learning and multi-stakeholder processes to develop locally tailored solutions, action across multiple scales, and recognizing where variability is the norm. Managing resources and organizations adaptively is important in responding to uncertainty.
- Capacity strengthening is needed to increase the number of women delivering key services to dryland women, such as community animal health work, crop and livestock extension, and programming and policy design so that they are more gender equitable.
- Targeted measures are required to increase women's representation in dryland governance institutions and processes, including in customary and state institutions. Development interventions such as social protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes, and agricultural investments should build women's participation, ensure high quality understanding of gender relations and how different forms of discrimination interact, and build upon promising household approaches in gender action planning. Women's representation should be increased and efforts made to ensure women's interests are better represented in land and natural resource planning, management and negotiations.
- Where resilience assessments are conducted, steps need to be taken to ensure high quality representation by diverse groups of women and marginal groups, and to ensure recognition of women's strategic interests.
- In order for the perspectives of dryland communities and dryland women to be addressed, land rights need to be reframed politically, moving away from conceptions that view land primarily as a commodity.
- Barriers to women's representation in more formal positions need to be removed on a short-, medium- and long-term basis, including injustices such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of education and poor health.
- Capacity strengthening of female leaders is a priority. Working with women's movements and organizations and opening up new spaces for political participation are effective pathways for improving women's representation in the drylands.



**Measures are needed to ensure a redistribution of resources, to achieve equitable development.**

- Social protection measures are important means of moving beyond short-term disaster relief. Where they are climate sensitive, there is evidence that they can support longer-term resilience in ways that benefit women.
- Improvements are needed in a range of areas, including access for women to appropriate basic social services and decision making regarding these services (health, education, animal health, appropriate research and advisory services, and social protection), access to resilient crop and livestock markets, livestock development, financial services, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable land management. An improved distribution of resources will ultimately benefit men, as well as women.
- The distribution of land and natural resource rights in dryland areas needs to include group rights over open spaces, and women's rights within this, which recognize the ways of life and the needs of dryland communities and women.



## Recommendations

The study details a range of strategic actions to build an enabling environment for achieving resilient drylands and women's empowerment, including their rights to land and to participation in governance. The strategic actions cover recommendations with respect to policy, institutional change and capacity-strengthening priorities.

### *Policy actions*

#### **National governments should:**

- support a policy and implementation review to ensure women are represented in governance across all policies, including economic and poverty reduction, environment and agro-ecology, marital and family law, with attention to territorial and agro-ecological differences and intersecting inequalities.
- adopt redistributive policies, including social protection measures, such as cash and asset transfers and livestock index-based insurance, to improve dryland resilience, taking steps to ensure they are gender equitable.
- take up policies, funded if necessary through progressive taxation, which enable improved health and education service provision in dryland areas, improved access to these services for dryland women, and more appropriate approaches and forms of delivery.
- develop policies which enable improved animal health service provision in dryland areas, improved access for dryland women to these services, and more appropriate approaches and forms of delivery; opportunities to combine animal and human health service delivery to mobile populations should be taken up in government policy.
- formulate policies which deliver improvements in dryland women's access to climate change adaptation and mitigation opportunities, sustainable land management programming and development initiatives, including women's economic empowerment.
- adopt policies to promote private sector sourcing from women producers, while finding ways of protecting women and marginal groups from market risks, and to undertake studies to assess the potential for sustainable procurement programmes, including those that favour women producers.
- recognize communal land rights in the drylands, and women's rights, both within groups and independent of them, in policy and practice.
- promote democratic and decentralized governance of natural resources with full participation of dryland communities and marginalized groups, particularly women.
- institute a quota for women's representation in land governance bodies from local to national level, supported by capacity strengthening.
- work to adopt safeguards for women's land rights protection while supporting legal empowerment approaches to advance women's land rights.
- institute a land redistribution policy that includes land grants for communities and women who are identified as experiencing substantial land inequalities.
- mainstream gender equality policies within democratization and decentralization initiatives in the drylands.



- ratify and implement international conventions and agreements for women's rights and empowerment, good governance and environment in national policy.
- introduce policies to cap electoral expenditure and overcome other barriers to women's participation (e.g. education requirements), with campaigns to encourage women's participation in the drylands.

### ***Institutional actions***

- Governments, with support from international donors, should support funding lines for gender-equitable climate change and rural development policy implementation and programming for dryland areas.
- Governments, donors and researchers to fund and facilitate more fine-grained, regional or national studies on dryland resilience and women's empowerment, engaging with all key stakeholders and ensuring gender equity in the process of assessment and identification of priorities.
- Ministries and departments of education, animal and human health, agricultural and livestock extension, with donor support, to review gender issues in service delivery, developing strategies in a participatory fashion with users, and identifying approaches that tackle problematic gender norms and work with structural variability and mobility. Investment is needed to extend coverage in dryland regions.
- Academic institutions to seek support for research on gender and resilience in the drylands, to inform policy and programming. This research should generate context-specific analyses on how gender relations and outcomes are changing with respect to dryland dynamics and resilience, and to help identify new opportunities and appropriate policies and strategies. Specific research gaps include evaluation of what works in different contexts for women's empowerment in social protection, human and animal health, education, livestock livelihoods and diversification strategies, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Action research should be a priority, as well as support for South-South learning, particularly peer-learning processes.
- National governments to facilitate high level policy dialogues with academics, civil society organizations and journalists to increase the demand, uptake and use of evidence on resilience and gender in policy making. In particular, fora are recommended on dryland women's climate-resilient, economic empowerment to capture the opportunities that exist and to find ways to reduce risks.
- National governments, supported by international donors, to develop inter-ministerial working groups, in parallel with high-level policy dialogues among national stakeholders, to undertake a review of policy and practice on women's land rights in the drylands, and women's participation in governance in the drylands, and design effective, context-specific programmes to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in land and broader governance systems. Working groups should address territorial representation and representation of women.
- Local authorities and CSOs, particularly women's organizations, to forge local-level partnerships in dryland communities. This can include support to new and existing women's groups, and combined with investment in women leaders to strengthen their awareness on land and environmental governance.
- Research institutes and CSOs to conduct assessments on land customs and practices, including their gendered nature, to be encouraged in all dryland development projects and investments.



- CSOs, academic institutions and media to increase awareness of gender issues and land rights in the drylands and how policies are implemented in practice.
- CSOs to promote women's rights, empowerment and participation in local, regional and national governance, including support to women's groups in civic awareness and voter registration.
- National governments to institute quotas for women's participation in community engagement processes and representation in governance structures, supported through a capacity-strengthening programme for women and awareness-raising initiatives with men.
- Local and national governments to review institutional barriers to women's participation at all levels of governance, such as education or literacy requirements to run for elections, funding for election campaigns, or the need for identification for voting rights.
- National governments and national statistics offices to direct a concerted effort to improve local governance administration systems, including land administration, to collect gender-disaggregated data on women's participation in governance processes, access to services, and land rights in the drylands in a systematic and comparative way.
- Ministries of education, with the support of donors, CSOs and research institutes to review gender issues in education (including adult education) and develop a targeted strategy in the drylands. Academic institutions to seek support for research on gender and governance in the drylands for local-level information to inform policy.
- National governments to facilitate high level policy dialogues with academics and CSOs to increase evidence-based policy making towards improving the recognition of gender issues and women's rights issues in the drylands.
- Media outlets to support the advancement of female journalists and provide greater exposure to issues of women's rights, particularly in the drylands.

### *Capacity-strengthening actions*

- National governments, donors and CSOs to support capacity-strengthening programmes to support resilient dryland development in ways that empower women and other marginal groups. Approaches which are participatory in nature and engage with stakeholders across different scales will be needed. Further, efforts should be made to support experimentation and social learning, given the growing uncertainties in dryland areas. Programmes are needed that tackle the gamut of important issues for dryland women, including education, health, social protection, livestock (especially small stock), cropping and non-livestock livelihoods.
- CSOs to support gender justice involving whole communities, in particular men and local leaders, to challenge discriminatory social norms and harmful practices.
- CSOs, academic institutions and the media to increase awareness of gender, pastoralist and environmental sustainability issues in the drylands, and how policies are implemented in practice. Awareness-raising activities should target decision makers in order to address issues of gender justice in these areas. Such efforts should seek to counter the negative stereotypes often attributed to dryland areas. These measures are needed to ensure that drylands are properly valued from a cultural perspective and so that women's knowledge and equal rights are recognized.
- Donors to direct investment and CSOs to support the strengthening of the capacity of local government with respect to resilience and gender justice.



- The international community, national governments, research institutions and CSOs to identify and share good practice (internationally and locally) on pathways for women's empowerment in resilient dryland development.
- Donors and national governments to fund awareness campaigns on women's land rights in dryland areas with leading women's organizations.
- National governments with the support of international donors, to direct investment, as a priority, to strengthening the capacity of local land governance structures, both state and customary, in equitable and gender-justice land governance, and governance more generally.
- National governments to support the development of multi-stakeholder local review panels which include female representatives to assess and approve development investment projects in dryland regions.
- CSOs to support gender justice through capacity strengthening for communities in gender awareness and addressing discriminatory practices, participatory dialogue, and civic engagement. This should be complemented by activities working with existing local leaders and supporting new female leaders to support women's land rights.
- National governments to establish quotas for women's representation, coupled with capacity strengthening on land rights governance, gender issues, and the intersection of these areas, targeting both men and women in activities.
- The international community, national governments, research institutions and CSOs to identify and share good practice (internationally and locally) on pathways for greater gender justice in governance in dryland areas.



## Conclusion

Ensuring and achieving greater environmental resilience is urgently needed – this will require measures to sustain the current state of dryland ecosystems or measures to enhance or restore them. In the inter-twined yet distinct social sphere, transformation may be needed to enable women to realize their human rights, including their rights to land and to participation in governance at all levels. Such social transformations will also help to strengthen the resilience of drylands now and for the challenging times ahead. Change is needed with more appropriate and enabling policies, measures to change societal attitudes and behaviour, and better development programming and research. Women's agency is key: ultimately, dryland women will drive the process of their own empowerment and can be successful more easily in the context of an enabling environment.



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