

# LAND TENURE, LAND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND FOOD SECURITY

More than 2.5 billion rural people around the world rely on land and natural resources (such as water, forests, and rangelands) for their livelihoods and well-being (Alden Wily 2019). Of this number, more than half are women. Women play important roles in rural communities; they are the backbone of agriculture and guardians of household food security. They often grow most of the crops for household consumption and are primarily responsible for preparing and processing food. In many settings, they are almost exclusively responsible for the nutrition of their children. Women also handle livestock; gather food, fodder, and fuelwood; and manage the domestic water supply (FAO 1996).

Land is the literal bedrock of agricultural production (FAO 2011) and food availability: the type and diversity of food on offer are affected by food production systems reliant on land and water access (HLPE 2017). Smallholder farms continue to play a vital role in the supply of food (income) and perform a key role in giving poor and marginal groups access to their food requirements (income). The governance of tenure<sup>1</sup>—or the ways society manages access to, control over, and use of land and natural resources (Jansen 2020)—is therefore a fundamental pillar of any food system, in particular for low-income people.

Barriers within food systems, which restrict access to healthy and affordable food, often result in nutrition inequities<sup>2</sup> for the vulnerable and marginalised: women and children; the poor (rural and remote); minority and indigenous groups; and those in crisis and conflict areas (Global Nutrition Report 2020). Pre-pandemic, healthy diets were unaffordable for roughly three billion people (SOFI 2020); a dangerous mix of COVID-19, conflict, and climate change may push 150 million into extreme poverty in 2021, the first rise in extreme poverty in 20 years. To meet their goals, SDGs 2 and 10 must be supported by scalable interventions focused on women's land rights—a crucial enabler and foundational factor to many parts of food systems.

## How this solution will address that problem?

Case studies of five collective communities conducted by the World Resources Institute and Resource Equity show that where women possess tenure security in collectively held lands, two sets of enabling conditions are present. The first is the formal recognition of women's tenure rights under the rules governing collective land rights, while the second is the mix of interventions on the ground by external and internal actors that catalyse rights in practice. Formal recognition confers legitimacy and allows women to claim rights, while operational interventions, particularly interventions to economically and socially empower women, pave the way to the exercise of rights in practice.

<sup>1</sup> Land tenure systems range from informal to formal and can include customary, group, collective, leasehold, and freehold; See [Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources for a comprehensive overview](#).

<sup>2</sup> The [Global Nutrition Report 2020](#) provides a comprehensive overview of the links between food systems and health systems for nutrition equity.

Advocacy for women's land rights is rooted in significant evidence of the benefits. Studies have shown a direct correlation between secure land rights for women and improvements in household food security. When women have access to farmland and income, adequate consumption becomes steadier, diets become more diverse, and children's health and nutrition improve (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2017; Larson, Castellanos, and Jensen 2019; Agarwal 1994; Doss 2006). In fact, when women have land, the prevalence of childhood stunting is reduced (Rehman, Ping, and Razzaq 2019). Finally, agricultural programs that focus on gender, women's empowerment, behaviour change, and nutrition more often result in improved nutritional outcomes (see Ragasa, Aberman, and Alvarez Mingote 2019 for an overview).

## References

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Source:

Annex 1: Supporting information for land tenure and land rights solutions (Solutions 10-11). United Nations Food Systems Summit. Action Track 1: Ensure Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for All. Potential Game Changing and Systemic Solutions: A Second Compilation. 10 May 2021. <https://foodsystems.community/members/anoukdevries/activity/5298/>