

## Policy pointers

**Enabling women to have a meaningful say in agribusiness investments** requires addressing discrimination in land tenure systems and lack of representation in land governance.

**Investors should take account of local gender and power dynamics** when designing and implementing agribusiness projects, including in initial consultation processes.

**NGOs and civil society** should help women to participate more effectively in land-related decision making processes and to hold governments accountable for implementing gender-sensitive laws.

**Governments should legislate to ensure women's participation in decision making, allocate sufficient funds for implementation and demand best practice from investors.**

## When investors come knocking: ensuring African women have a say

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, women have little say in decisions over land. Unless proactive steps are taken to enable women to have a stronger voice, large-scale agribusiness projects will leave them even more marginalised. Though there has been little research in this area, an emerging body of thinking and practice provides clear pointers as to how governments, NGOs and investors might mitigate such risks in future, particularly by explicitly addressing gender issues head-on from the very outset.

Investor interest in large-scale land deals for agribusiness has increased commercial pressures on land and livelihoods across sub-Saharan Africa. While such projects can potentially benefit local communities, research suggests that investments can often have negative consequences and that vulnerable groups, in particular women, tend to suffer disproportionately. Although the impacts on men and women are varied and context-specific, women tend to face a number of common challenges: losing access to land they have traditionally used; working longer hours, including to provide food and water for the household; and losing out to men in terms of new employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Practical experience with tackling these issues remains limited, since action and research on agribusiness investments have tended to neglect gender. There is therefore a limited amount of evidence available from which to draw lessons and a need to document best practice and innovation in this area.

This briefing starts filling the knowledge gap by presenting some initial findings from IIED's

Gender, Land and Accountability Project, which includes four local partners in sub-Saharan Africa — particularly research and experience shared at an international workshop held in December 2015.

### Marginalisation of women in traditional land governance

Although African governments have introduced a growing number of laws and policies to promote gender equality, discrimination against women remains prevalent in customary practice in many rural areas. This is especially true when it comes to land. While discussions over women and land mostly centre on land rights, in reality one of the biggest problems women face is discrimination in decision making.<sup>2</sup> This is partly a matter of practicalities: women's farm work, childcare and household duties often make it difficult for them to travel to meetings held in distant villages — which can be time-consuming, expensive and pose safety concerns. However, cultural norms shaping perceptions of women's traditional roles are often even more significant factors in limiting their influence. The entry of large-scale

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agribusiness into a particular area risks leaving women even more disadvantaged, given the higher economic stakes, bigger long-term

implications for livelihoods and greater pressures on all community members.

The sorts of cultural barriers to participation that rural African women may face

have been documented in Mozambique, where the law requires government and investors to consult local communities over decisions on land allocation. Research by Centro Terra Viva, a non-governmental organisation, suggests that, while most of the community members participating in the consultations were women, they only spoke for about 5 to 10 per cent of the duration of the meetings, typically to support points made by men. The researchers put this down to socio-cultural norms internalised by women, including a perception that they should not oppose men or propose different ideas.<sup>3</sup>

This sort of marginalisation is often exacerbated by a perception among women that decision making over land is the legitimate preserve of men. For example, a survey of four communities across Ghana by NETRIGHT, a non-governmental organisation and IIED partner, found that women themselves often prefer men to take the leadership roles in land issues.

Indeed, some women described land as a 'life and death' matter, which they considered to be better handled by men. In some cases, women prefer to have the names of male relatives on official land documents, even for their own plots.<sup>4</sup> Similar perceptions were documented in Tanzania in research conducted by the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) in Kisarawe district.<sup>5</sup>

In many parts of Africa, community-level land governance structures are primarily male led, making it harder for women to ensure their voices are heard. Even in situations where the law requires a minimum number of women to sit on village-level bodies, participation is often limited. For example, in Tanzania, the law states that a minimum of three out of seven members of Village Land Councils must be women. However, TAWLA notes that social and cultural factors mean that the women's influence on decisions is often limited. Furthermore, in Tanzania women often find themselves sitting on such councils in their husbands' villages, where they are viewed as 'strangers' and only have derivative rights to the land.<sup>5</sup>

The cultural norms undermining legislative efforts to give women a greater say on land are also visible in Kenya.<sup>6</sup> The act that established the National Land Commission, which manages public and community land, states that not more than two-thirds of the membership of the NLC should be of the same gender.<sup>7</sup> The same act also established County Land Management Boards (CLMBs) in every county in Kenya, which receive land-related complaints and address them through customary methods of dispute resolution. The CLMBs are constituted by members drawn from the community and they provide an avenue for women's active participation in the resolution of land-related conflicts at county level. However, despite the legal stipulations on gender, there is no guarantee that women's interests in land and property will be served in the execution of the Commission's mandate, as women representatives do not always act to protect women's needs and interests.

It should be emphasised that although women in many parts of Africa are marginalised in decisions over land, perceptions and patterns of behaviour are context-specific, and women do manage to exert considerable influence in some instances. For example, in the Iringa and Mvomero districts of Tanzania, TAWLA reported that women were actively involved in meetings concerning land, even though they believed that land belonged to and was controlled by their husbands or male relatives.<sup>5</sup>

### **Box 1. Women's exclusion in local land governance: An example from Ghana**

Research by NETRIGHT found that community land development committees in four regions of Ghana<sup>9</sup> had very low female participation in two of the study areas, Dodowa (Greater Accra Region) and Apemanim (Ashanti Region). Members justified excluding women due to a widespread perception that female members had performed unsatisfactorily in other community committees or due to interpretations of leadership based on cultural norms and beliefs based on certain biblical interpretations. In other areas, such as the community of Wamale, however, women were active participants in their community land development committee.

Such findings underline the need to avoid generalisation and recognise the importance of context. For example, Ghana has patrilineal and matrilineal societies, which influence gender roles in different ways. The findings also provide pointers on how the processes by which land committees are established can make a real difference to the extent and quality of women's participation. Indeed, women seemed to play a bigger role in areas where the committee was set up with the support of an NGO that specifically addressed gender issues. Where the committee emerged in the context of community structures organised along traditional patriarchal lines, women's participation was lower or absent altogether.<sup>4</sup>

## Gender differences in a Tanzanian outgrowers' scheme

Agribusiness investors differ in their commitment to include local populations in their projects, with some paying little heed to community concerns and others conferring more widely. However, even when project managers do adopt a more inclusive strategy, the marginalisation women faced before they arrived often persists. This dynamic was evident in recent field research analysing the impact of a new sugar cane production venture in the Kilombero district of Tanzania. The project included a nucleus estate and an outgrowers' scheme, with proceeds from the latter being divided between the company and outgrowers' associations.<sup>9</sup>

The study showed that women were under-represented in the outgrowers' associations, partly because they rarely owned enough land to reach the minimum acreage required to qualify for a leadership position. Of 15 such bodies studied, only one had a female chair – and she had attained her position by virtue of inheriting a substantial landholding. This finding showed that gender dynamics can only be properly understood in the context of other socio-economic factors, and that women's influence in their communities is by no means homogeneous.

The study also suggested that women were more likely to enjoy favourable outcomes when agribusiness projects were established in a context where more equitable practices over land were already well established. In one area of the study, it was customary for men and women to be allocated plots of equal size. This set the stage for women to reap greater benefits from the agribusiness venture, since their control over land afforded them greater participation in decision-making bodies relative to other areas of the study. There was also evidence to suggest that this also produced better gender outcomes overall.

## Strengthening women's participation

In addition to taking stock of the issues, the workshop provided an opportunity for participants to share ideas on how best to strengthen women's participation in land governance, especially in the context of agribusiness investments. The following points provide suggestions for developing such approaches:

- **Understanding the local context:** since local dynamics will invariably be unique, it is crucial to develop a thorough understanding of the socio-cultural context before designing any intervention. This includes understanding the

local culture and traditions, the customary role of women and the power dynamics at play among community members, as well as analysing formal legal and policy frameworks. It is also important to identify potential obstacles or opportunities for fostering greater women's participation – including by cultivating potential allies who can provide support in terms of experience and technical expertise, or in developing relationships.

- **Developing a holistic approach:** it is important to raise awareness about gender issues with the whole community, and in particular with elders and other local and religious leaders. It is also important to involve men – and in particular husbands and brothers – through demonstrating how women's participation in decision making can be an opportunity for the household rather than a threat. Workshop participants recommended using existing formal and informal structures as vehicles for advocating greater gender equality at community level. Opportunities could arise at cultural or religious events, which can provide important avenues for women to speak and gain confidence, or more formal channels such as the Village Land Councils in Tanzania (See also Box 2 for an example from Ghana).
- **Developing more targeted women's empowerment initiatives:** traditional women's empowerment initiatives could be tailored to emphasise the kind of communication, leadership and public speaking skills that could give beneficiaries a greater voice in agribusiness projects. Women's land forums could provide venues to teach such skills as well as nurture motivation and inspiration born of shared experience.
- **Preparing and accompanying:** capacity building projects should support women to

### Box 2. Addressing the roots of discrimination

The Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation (GSF) in Ghana uses cultural practices, tradition and the constitution to confront the multiple discriminatory cultural practices that hinder women's participation in community-level decision-making processes. The organisation builds alliances with committed men and traditional leaders, who themselves have been sensitised to the importance of involving women in land governance and management bodies at the local level.

As land is a community-based concern, this approach encourages the entire community to reflect on the impact of women's exclusion and can generate positive responses from a wide range of people, not just a particular target group. However, it can take a considerable amount of time to build sufficient trust for the community to start considering a change in attitudes and this is not a quick-fix solution.

analyse the potential implications of an agribusiness investment on their livelihoods and how they might best exploit any opportunities it presents. This kind of preparation and accompaniment can be very effective in ensuring women can convey their points once they are consulted or reach the negotiating table.

- **Once women are at the table, ensure they have a voice:** given the risk that women may be given only a token role in consultations, steps must be taken to ensure they can speak freely. In addition to the leadership and communication skills proposed above, women's and youth focus groups could be created to ensure participants at risk of being marginalised are able to present clear proposals.
- **Package information clearly and carefully:** publicity campaigns to raise awareness around land acquisitions must be designed to address issues women care about and be easy to understand.
- **Make meetings easier to attend:** measures could include holding land consultations at more convenient places and times for women, providing childcare and taking steps to ensure protection where personal safety is a consideration.
- **Investors need to understand the benefits of gender equal processes:** investors must be proactive in ensuring that consultations with women are integral to their investment plans.

- **Role of the state:** governments must enshrine women's rights to participate in decisions over large-scale land investments in laws and budget sufficient resources for their implementation. Civil society organisations can play a role in holding government bodies to account if gender policies are not properly implemented.

## Conclusion

Guaranteeing women a meaningful say in agribusiness investment will require action to address discrimination in land tenure systems, not only in relation to land rights — but also in terms of representation and participation in land governance bodies, from local to national levels. In cases of large-scale land acquisitions for agribusiness, these contextual factors tend to disadvantage women. As a result, gender-neutral interventions by state and private investors are likely not only to replicate gender discriminatory patterns in land ownership, but to exaggerate them by excluding women from the consultation process. Targeted interventions by NGOs, governments and investors themselves will be necessary to avert this risk by ensuring that gender forms a key component of any investment strategy.

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## Knowledge Products

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Daley, E and Pallas, S (2014) Women and Land Deals in Africa and Asia: Weighing the Implications and Changing the Game. *Feminist Economics* 20:1, 178–201. / <sup>2</sup> Knapman, C and Sutz, P (2015) Reconsidering approaches to women's land rights in sub-Saharan Africa. IIED, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/17310IIED.html> / <sup>3</sup> Centro Terra Viva (2015) Gender Equity and Community Participation In the Process of Decision Making In The Attribution Of DUAT (Land Use And Tenure Document). / <sup>4</sup> NETRIGHT (2016) Country Report (2016 – draft paper). / <sup>5</sup> TAWLA (2016) Country Report (2016 – draft paper). / <sup>6</sup> KLA (2016) Country Report (2016 – draft paper). / <sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the amendments to the laws are currently being discussed in Kenya, which would remove the NLC from land administration. / <sup>8</sup> Dancer, H and Sulle, E (2015) Gender implications of agricultural commercialisation: case of sugar cane production in Kilombero District, Tanzania. Working Paper 118, Future Agriculture. / <sup>9</sup> The research was carried out in Dodowa (Greater Accra Region), Bawjiase (Central region), Apemenim (Ashanti Region) and Wamale (Northern Region).