

The role of gender equality & commons management in advancing SDGs

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SUMMARY

The paper aims at highlighting the gender dimension of the commons (collective tenure and management) in the land sector. Commons systems are very specific and the nexus with gender is a controversial but fascinating topic to explore, as it opens paths for discussing gender justice in the land sector in the framework of customary norms and of women's participation in land governance.

Although the 'theory of the commons' dates to Elinor Ostrom studies, both in academia and among activists and practitioners, the analysis of gender dynamics in the framework of commoning processes as well as the impact of commoning on gender roles tend to be neglected. Women are a significant constituency of the 2.5 billion people who depend upon common land for their lives and livelihoods, but they are disproportionately affected by internal and external threats. Women are affected by intersectional discrimination, and customary norms (that often apply to community land tenure) might negatively affect women's rights to land; however women's agency in protecting the commons can revert the dynamic and produce positive synergies that in return promotes both community land rights and gender justice. Although claims might seem competing, the case studies demonstrate convergence between the recognition of collective land (as resistance against expropriation and grabbing) and women's land rights within the community (often relying upon titling processes).

Discussing the commons from a gender dimension shed light on women's role in protecting the commons, either building upon and/or challenging customary norms. It also contributes to discussing gender-responsive collective tenure management in the perspective of SDG 5.a.

The International Land Coalition has been engaged in the topic since 2017 (IASC Conference); in 2025 ILC produced a dedicated toolkit and ILC members in Europe are currently relaunching a

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platform on the commons, with significant gender perspective.

The paper builds upon a theoretical framework, specific tools based on ILC's members' experience (in particular Pastoralist Women's Council-Tanzania) and research conducted by European ILC members (notably Entretantos Foundation - Spain).

Recognising the relevance of common land and common tenure for women, as well as the pertinence of the role played by women in protecting the commons, represents a crucial component, and a significant nexus about land management, security and access to land. The paper also includes a relevant capacity building component, as mutual learning has significant potential for change.

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