

Advancing Women's Land Rights: A Call to Action through Ten Commitments for Surveyors and Other Land Professionals



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Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying

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Advancing Women's Land Rights:
A Call to Action through Ten Commitments
for Surveyors and Other Land Professionals

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INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SURVEYORS (FIG)

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ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFS	Committee on World Food Security (from FAO)
CLPA	Conference on Land and Policy in Africa
CORS	Continuously Operating Reference Station
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DANE	National Administrative Department of Statistics
EAP	East Asia Pacific
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMENA	Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa
F&G	Framework and Guidelines (on Land Policy in Africa)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FELA	Framework for Effective Land Administration
FFPLA	Fit-For-Purpose Land Administration
FIG	International Federation of Surveyors
GNSS	Global Navigation Satellite System
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
GLI	Global Land Initiative (G20)
GLRD	Gender and Land Rights Database (from FAO)
HIV/Aids	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGAC	Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority Development
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisations
ILC	International Land Coalition
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LADM	Land Administration Domain Model
LADM-COL	Land Administration Domain Model - Colombia
LAT	Legal Assessment Tool (FAO)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MENA	The Middle East and North Africa
MPSI	Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index
MRLG	Mekong Region Land Governance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDO	Social Development Officer
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STDM	Social Tenure Domain Model
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSSC	United Nations System Staff College
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UN WOMEN	United Nations Agency for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum
W4W	Women for Women (W4W) Mentoring Programme



FOREWORD

Advancing women’s land rights is essential to building more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies. Beyond a productive asset, land is a source of identity, security, and opportunity. Yet, despite progress in legal and policy frameworks, women worldwide continue to face barriers to accessing, using, and controlling land, rooted in legal, institutional, and socio-cultural constraints.

The International Federation of Surveyors has long promoted equity in land governance. This publication builds on that commitment and on FIG Publication No. 24, while responding to evolving challenges. It emphasises that securing women’s land rights requires more than legal reform, calling for integrated approaches that strengthen institutions, improve access to services, promote participation, address social norms, and foster partnerships across sectors.

Surveyors and other land professionals play a critical role in the recognition, documentation, and protection of land rights. Positioned at the intersection of technical practice and social reality, their work can either reinforce inequalities or support more inclusive outcomes. This publication translates that role into ten practical commitments to guide gender-responsive professional practice.

I commend the work of FIG’s Working Group 7.5 on Women’s Land Rights and Women in Surveying and its partners in bringing this publication forward. I encourage surveyors, policymakers, and practitioners to engage with its recommendations and contribute to land governance systems that recognise and advance women’s land rights in practice.

Diane Dumashie

President, International Federation of Surveyors (2023–2026)

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Marisa Balas

Chair,

Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying (2023–2026)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Secure land rights for women are fundamental to achieving sustainable development, gender equality, and inclusive economic growth. Yet, across many regions, women continue to face persistent, often overlapping barriers to accessing, controlling, and benefiting from land. These barriers are not only legal, but also institutional, socio-cultural, and economic, embedded in both formal and informal land governance systems.

This publication, ***Advancing Women's Land Rights: A Call to Action through Ten Commitments for Surveyors and Other Land Professionals***, builds on the legacy of *Publication No. 24: Women's Access to Land – FIG Guidelines* and responds to the growing recognition that legal reform alone is insufficient. It highlights the critical role of surveyors and other land professionals in shaping how land rights are recognised, recorded, and protected in practice, and in bridging the gap between global commitments and implementation.

The report is structured around four main parts. First, it situates women's land rights within the evolving international policy landscape and highlights the International Federation of Surveyors' efforts over recent decades, including the establishment of a dedicated working group to strengthen guidance, foster professional engagement, and translate commitments into practice across the land sector.

Second, it examines regional dynamics across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, the Mekong region, and the Pacific islands, highlighting persistent inequalities alongside emerging good practices. While legal frameworks increasingly recognise women's rights, significant gaps remain between *de jure* provisions and *de facto* access, often reinforced by social norms, weak implementation, and limited institutional capacity.

Third, the publication underscores the importance of partnerships and coordinated action. International organisations, development partners, civil society, and the private sector play complementary roles through advocacy, policy reform, capacity development, data production, and field-level implementation, demonstrating that progress depends on integrated, multi-sectoral approaches.

At its core, the publication focuses on surveyors and other land professionals as key actors in advancing women's land rights. Through their roles in land administration, cadastral processes, and spatial data management, they influence whose rights are recognised and made visible. Their work is therefore not only technical but also inherently social and political, with direct implications for equity and inclusion. Advancing women's land rights requires more than technical solutions; it demands engagement with power relations, institutional reform, and social change.

The report identifies four key areas of intervention: (i) supporting legal recognition and reform; (ii) strengthening land administration institutions and professional practice; (iii) transforming socio-cultural norms through inclusive approaches; and (iv) leveraging finance, data, and technology to make women's land rights visible and actionable.

Building on these areas, the publication proposes a set of ten commitments to guide surveyors and other land professionals in their daily practice. These commitments call for recognising women as legitimate land rights holders; addressing legal pluralism with care and responsibility; ensuring that land formalisation and development processes do no harm; making land procedures accessible and understandable; upholding

ethical conduct and professional accountability; and ensuring that women’s rights are visible in land information systems. They further emphasise the importance of gender-responsive and inclusive land administration; supporting women’s participation and leadership in land governance; strengthening the link between land rights and women’s economic empowerment; and using technology responsibly and inclusively. Together, they provide a practical framework for translating principles into action (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Ten professional commitments for surveyors and other land professionals.
Source: Illustrated by Marisa Balas

1 INTRODUCTION

Secure and equitable access to, use of, ownership of, and control over land and its productive resources is essential for the socio-economic development of both women and men (Agarwal, 2018; Durokifa, 2019). Land rights contribute to poverty reduction, increased food security, gender equality and social inclusion, and reduced land degradation (Ali et al., 2014; FAO et al., 2019; UN-GGIM, 2020; World Bank, 2015). Beyond its economic value, land holds deep social, cultural, and spiritual significance and constitutes a key source of political power and participation in decision-making over land and natural resources (Djurfeldt, 2020; Errico, 2021).

Within this broader context, secure and equitable access to land is particularly critical for advancing women's land rights. For women, security of tenure is not only a safeguard against displacement, but also a foundation for investing in livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and climate resilience (Bizoza, 2019; Khan et al., 2021; Tsige et al., 2020). It further enables more equitable land taxation systems by ensuring that women are visible within land records and included in fiscal frameworks that shape resource distribution and public accountability (Paradza et al., 2020). In spatial planning, the recognition of women's land rights promotes more inclusive decision-making and helps prevent patterns of marginalisation in land allocation and use (Daley et al., 2013). Moreover, secure land tenure enhances women's access to credit and financial services, as documented land rights can serve as collateral and strengthen their economic agency. From the perspective of surveyors and other land professionals, strengthening women's access to land is therefore not only a matter of rights and justice, but also a prerequisite for effective, inclusive, and sustainable land governance (Dijkstra et al., 2024).

However, despite these benefits, the available evidence highlights substantial gender gaps and shows that, in many countries, women's access to and control over land and productive resources remain affected by gender discrimination (Bizoza, 2019; OECD, 2019, 2021; UNCCD, 2022). Women's rights are often limited to the use of land, not to control or own it, and even less to alienate and transfer it (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Women are more likely than men to be landless, hold weaker rights, and experience their erosion; when they do own land, it is often smaller and less fertile (Paradza et al., 2020; UNCCD, 2022).

Although data are limited due to reporting gaps, estimates indicate that women's land ownership rates vary across studies, ranging from less than 15 per cent (FAO, 2018; OECD, 2019; Treinen & Elstraeten, 2018) to 40 per cent (Prindex, 2024). Considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to the UN 2025 SDG Report, in 80 per cent of countries with available data, fewer than half of women hold ownership or secure rights to agricultural land, and in nearly half of these countries, men's landownership rates are at least twice as high as those of women (UNDESA, 2025). Of the 39 countries reporting on SDG 5.a.1, the gender gap is particularly pronounced in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, and Togo (SDG Land Momentum Group, 2025).

The reasons behind gender inequality in land access and tenure security are complex and shaped by interrelated barriers. These include legal constraints, such as discriminatory provisions or gaps in statutory and customary law; institutional barriers, reflected in weak implementation mechanisms, limited administrative capacity, and gender-blind land governance systems; cultural and social norms that influence inheritance

practices, decision-making power, and women’s ability to claim and exercise their rights; and socio-economic factors, including limited access to financial resources, information, and education (Balas et al., 2022).

Together, these barriers reinforce structural inequalities and help explain the persistent gap between formal recognition of women’s land rights and their realisation in practice. These constraints have intensified in recent decades due to growing pressure on land resulting from population growth (FAO et al., 2019), climate change and conflicts (Mabikke, 2016), unplanned urbanisation (Facio, 2017), increasing demand for food, water and energy (Balas et al., 2021; Mabikke, 2016; Taylor & Bending, 2009), and expanding commercial and large-scale land acquisitions (Facio, 2017; Hausermann et al., 2018; Macuane et al., 2018; Ndi, 2019b; Paradza et al., 2020).

Although many countries have adopted legal frameworks that recognise equal land rights for women and men, implementation gaps remain widespread, and progress remains limited. Currently, women hold only about two-thirds of the legal rights afforded to men, reflecting persistent gaps in formal legal frameworks (World Bank, 2026).

These disparities are further compounded in practice. Systems and mechanisms intended to implement and enforce women’s land rights remain weak, while discriminatory norms and power structures embedded in customary practices continue to prevail (Balas et al., 2022). As a result, contradictions persist between formal laws and the lived realities of women on the ground (**Figure 2**), and the gap between *de jure* provisions and *de facto* outcomes continues to undermine the realisation of gender equality in practice.

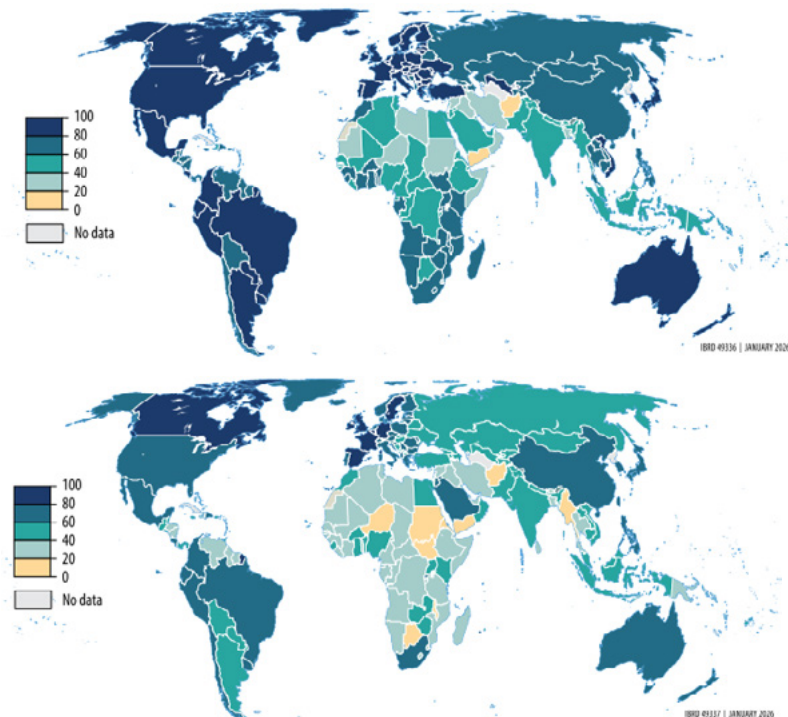


Figure 2: Gender equality legal framework index scores (top) and supportive frameworks index scores (bottom).

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2026 report (World Bank, 2026)

Gender inequality in land access and land tenure security has far-reaching consequences. It constrains women's economic opportunities, increases workloads, undermines resilience, and exacerbates social vulnerability, including exposure to gender-based violence (Bizoza, 2019; FAO, 2021). At the societal level, unequal land rights reduce economic efficiency and impede progress toward poverty eradication, food security, and sustainable development (Agarwal, 1994; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020; Ndi, 2019a; Paradza et al., 2020). Estimates suggest that achieving gender equality across key sectors will require substantial investment - up to \$6.4 trillion annually in developing countries (UN Women, 2023).

With only five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, addressing these challenges requires coordinated, sustained collective action grounded in a shared vision for inclusive and equitable land governance. While the evidence on women's land rights has grown, important gaps remain in understanding the structural and context-specific drivers of inequality, reinforcing the need for more grounded, practice-oriented, and context-sensitive approaches. Progress will depend on strong political will, adequate financing, and sustained international cooperation (UNDESA, 2025). Land professionals, including surveyors, planners, registrars, valuers, and land administrators, play a critical role in this process. Through their responsibilities for land measurement, mapping, valuation, titling, registration, data management, and the design and implementation of land administration systems, they are uniquely positioned to influence how women's land rights are recognised, recorded, protected, and enforced in practice.

1.1 International Policy Environment

Gender inequality in land access and land tenure security is widely recognised within the international development agenda as a major constraint to poverty reduction, food security, and women's empowerment. Over the past decades, this issue has been addressed through a growing body of international conventions, policy frameworks, and normative instruments that establish gender equality in land rights as a core development and human rights objective.

At the global level, the United Nations ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Resolution 34/180, 1979) (CEDAW), which establishes the principle of equality between women and men. It prohibited discrimination in all areas of life, including land ownership and property rights. Subsequent global commitments, notably the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BpFA) in 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, further consolidated gender equality as a central development priority while highlighting persistent structural barriers affecting women's access to and control over productive resources, including land.

A major milestone in the international land governance agenda was the Committee on World Food Security's endorsement in 2012 of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs) (FAO, 2012). Grounded in human rights principles, the VGGTs provide internationally agreed guidance for equitable and responsible tenure governance and explicitly call on states to ensure equal tenure rights and access to land for women and men, irrespective of civil or marital status. They also include measures to prevent the loss of legitimate tenure rights, including in contexts of large-scale land acquisitions, and remain highly relevant in addressing emerging challenges such as climate change, conflict, and digitalisation.

The adoption, in 2015, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further elevated gender equality within the global development framework (UN General Assembly, 2015). Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5) cut across the entire agenda, reflecting strong evidence of the multiplier effects of women's rights on poverty reduction, food security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Women's land rights are explicitly referenced in several SDG targets and indicators (such as 1.4.2, 5.a.1, and 5.a.2), reinforcing land tenure security as a critical pathway for achieving multiple development outcomes.

The SDGs and the VGGTs are mutually reinforcing. While the VGGTs provide detailed guidance on land tenure governance principles and implementation, the SDGs offer a global political commitment and monitoring framework to track progress. Together, they promote a people-centred and rights-based approach to land governance.

The UN System-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, launched in 2024, aims to accelerate progress on gender equality and advance the rights of women and girls. In March 2025, marking the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, member states adopted the Beijing+30 Political Declaration, reaffirming their commitment to fully and effectively implement the BpFA.

Complementing these global policy frameworks, a range of technical and diagnostic initiatives has been developed to support their implementation. These tools aim to strengthen land governance systems, improve tenure security, and provide evidence for policy reform. Notable examples include the World Bank's Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation Legal Assessment Tool, which help countries assess legal and institutional gaps in land governance.

In parallel, significant advances have been made in developing technical standards and approaches to improve land administration systems, making them more inclusive and better suited to diverse tenure contexts. These include the Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration (FFPLA) approach (Enemark et al., 2014), the Framework for Effective Land Administration (FELA) (UN-GGIM, 2020), and internationally recognised models such as the Land Administration Domain Model (LADM) (Lemmen et al., 2025) and the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) (Lemmen, 2010). These initiatives provide practical tools for recording, managing, and securing land rights, including those of women and vulnerable groups.

The International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) has played a key role in advancing several of these approaches and standards, as further discussed in the following section.

1.2 Regional Policy Environment

Building on these global frameworks, regional organisations and initiatives have played an important role in translating international principles into context-specific policy instruments that reflect diverse tenure systems, legal traditions, and development priorities.

At the African regional level, the African Union (AU) has developed a comprehensive legal and policy framework to advance women's land rights. These include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. Together, these instruments recognise land as central to socio-economic development and explicitly call for the elimination of gender-based discrimination in land access and tenure security. More recent initiatives, such as Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015) and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018–2028

(African Union, 2018), further reinforce commitments to gender-responsive land governance through targets, monitoring mechanisms, and implementation frameworks.

In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has developed regional guidelines addressing land governance in contexts characterised by legal pluralism and the prevalence of customary tenure systems. The ASEAN Guidelines on Recognising Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes provide a framework for identifying, recognising, and formalising legitimate tenure rights, including informal and customary rights, to reduce land conflicts and improve tenure security. Complementing these, the ASEAN Guidelines for Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry promote sustainable and inclusive investment practices, with particular attention to tenure rights, environmental sustainability, and community participation. Across both instruments, gender equality is addressed as a cross-cutting principle, with measures to strengthen women's land rights through documentation, joint titling, sex-disaggregated data, and inclusive decision-making processes.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), land governance has evolved through a combination of national reforms and regional initiatives rather than a single overarching framework. A central role is played by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), particularly through the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and the Arab Land Initiative (ALI), which supports countries in addressing tenure insecurity, informal settlements, and land administration challenges through FFPLA approaches. Regional policy frameworks, such as those developed by the League of Arab States, primarily address land through housing and urban development strategies, while global instruments, such as the VGGTs, provide key normative guidance. Gender equality is increasingly recognised, particularly in relation to women's access to housing and property, although progress remains uneven due to persistent legal and socio-cultural constraints.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), land governance is shaped by a combination of regional policy dialogue, global normative frameworks, and a strong human rights system. The VGGTs serve as a central reference point, widely adopted to guide reforms in land tenure governance, including the recognition of customary and collective land rights. Regional organisations such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture promote responsible agricultural investment and inclusive rural development. At the same time, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) supports regional cooperation on land, environment, and development. A defining feature of the region is the influence of the inter-American human rights system, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, whose jurisprudence has advanced the recognition of collective land rights, particularly for Indigenous peoples. Gender equality is addressed through a rights-based approach that emphasises legal protection, access to justice, and the inclusion of women - especially rural and Indigenous women - in land governance processes.

Across regions, different institutional pathways have emerged to advance gender equality in land governance. SSA is characterised by a comprehensive continental policy and legal architecture; ASEAN by the development of practical regional guidelines; Latin America and the Caribbean by a strong rights-based and jurisprudence-driven approach; and MENA by programmatic, initiative-driven reforms supported by global frameworks. Despite these differences, there is a clear convergence around recognising women's land rights as central to sustainable development, tenure security, and social equity, reflecting the growing influence of global frameworks such as the VGGTs and the SDGs.

1.3 *The International Federation of Surveyors and Women's Land Rights*

It was within this evolving international context that the International Federation of Surveyors published Publication No. 24: Women's Access to Land – FIG Guidelines in 2001 (Komjathy & Nichols, 2001). At a time when gender equality remained marginal within mainstream land administration discourse, the publication was a pioneering effort that articulated the links between land rights, gender equality, professional practice, and sustainable development.

FIG recognised that legal reform alone would be insufficient and highlighted the critical role of surveyors and other land professionals in shaping how women's land rights are recognised, recorded, and protected in practice. Many of the challenges it identified, such as the differentiated impacts of land titling, the complexities of customary tenure systems, and barriers to women's meaningful participation, remain highly relevant today, underscoring the enduring value of this contribution.

Building on this foundation, FIG has progressively strengthened its institutional engagement with gender equality in land governance, moving from conceptual advocacy towards more structured and operational approaches. A key milestone has been the establishment of a dedicated working group on women's land rights.

The Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying aims to (i) advance the legacy of Publication 24 by translating its foundational principles into updated, practice-oriented guidance that reflects contemporary challenges, technological developments, and evolving global commitments, and supports surveyors and other land professionals in implementation, an objective reflected in the development of the present publication; (ii) foster partnerships and synergies with international organisations and networks advancing women's land rights, including engagement with initiatives such as the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign and other key actors in the women's land rights ecosystem, contributing to initiatives such as "Clinic Days," where surveyors and other land professionals engage with communities to raise awareness and promote equitable land rights; and (iii) mainstream gender considerations across all International Federation of Surveyors commissions, task forces, networks, and national member associations, as demonstrated through collaboration with the FIG SDG Task Force, contributions to the revision of the Model Code of Conduct (Commission 1), efforts to integrate gender equality into land-related curricula (Commission 2), and engagement with regional networks, including the African Regional Network (ARN).

This evolution reflects a growing recognition that advancing women's land rights requires not only normative frameworks, but also changes in professional practice, organisational culture, and technical standards. By integrating gender equality into professional guidelines, capacity development, and knowledge exchange, FIG helps bridge the gap between global commitments, such as the Committee on World Food Security and the Sustainable Development Goals, and their implementation on the ground.

1.4 *Scope and Outline of this Document*

The present publication builds on the foundations established by FIG Publication No. 24, expanding its scope to reflect evolving global commitments, emerging challenges, and the need for more practice-oriented guidance. It maintains continuity with FIG's

Table 1: Comparative overview of FIG Publication No. 24 and the present publication.

Dimension	FIG Publication No. 24	This Publication
Overall focus	Women's access to land	Women's land rights (access, use, and control), including recognition of rights where ownership is not feasible
Objective	Raise awareness and establish foundational principles	Translate principles into concrete, practice-oriented commitments for land professionals
Approach	Normative and advocacy-oriented	Operational and action-oriented
Target audience	Broad (policymakers, institutions, professionals)	Surveyors and other land professionals in their day-to-day functions
Treatment of tenure	Emphasis on access and inclusion	Recognition and documentation of diverse tenure forms (joint, secondary, customary, informal)
Use of evidence	Conceptual and experience-based	Grounded in literature, global evidence, and documented good practices
Role of professionals	Highlighted as important actors	Positioned as key agents of change with defined responsibilities
Data and systems	Limited emphasis	Strong focus on land information systems, sex-disaggregated data, and indicators
Implementation focus	General recommendations	Structured commitments linked to field practice, tools, and processes

commitment to gender equality while responding to changing land governance dynamics, including increasing pressure on land, climate change, and the digital transformation. With a focus on surveyors and other land professionals, it emphasises translating international frameworks into actionable, practice-oriented approaches, articulated as ten commitments..

The document is structured in four main parts. The first part provides the broader context, outlining key developments in the international policy environment, regional dynamics, and FIG's institutional efforts to promote gender equality in land governance.

The second part examines regional contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, the Mekong region and the Pacific Island Countries in the East Asia Pacific. It highlights the main barriers affecting women's access to land and tenure security, while also showcasing emerging good practices and lessons learned.

The third part presents the contributions of FIG partners and other organisations actively engaged in advancing women's land rights, illustrating the importance of collaboration and multi-stakeholder approaches.

The fourth and core part of the publication focuses on the practical role of surveyors and other land professionals in advancing WLRs. It identifies key areas of intervention, including contributions to legal and regulatory frameworks, strengthening institutional capacity, navigating cultural and customary systems, and supporting women's empowerment.

2 GLOBAL STATUS OF WOMEN’S LAND RIGHTS

Across many regions of the world, land rights remain strongly gendered, with multiple obstacles preventing women from effectively enjoying the same rights as men (Bizoza, 2019; A. K. Kramer et al., 2021; Ndi, 2019b; Paradza et al., 2020). While some of these barriers are widespread, others are highly context-specific, shaped by factors such as geographic region, prevailing religious and cultural norms, and environmental conditions (Balas et al., 2022).

Despite growing recognition of these challenges, the underlying mechanisms, institutional structures, and social processes that drive women’s land rights vulnerability remain insufficiently understood and require stronger evidence from country and regional contexts (Santpoort et al., 2021). This gap is further compounded by the limited availability of sex-disaggregated data, which constrains the monitoring of gender-related land indicators (UNCCD, 2022).

Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to examine the current state of women’s access to land and tenure security across selected regions (**Figure 3**):¹ Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Mekong region and the Pacific Islands Countries in East Asia Pacific (EAP). Each section analyses gender inequalities in land access and tenure security, highlighting key barriers, emerging best practices, and opportunities to strengthen women’s land rights.

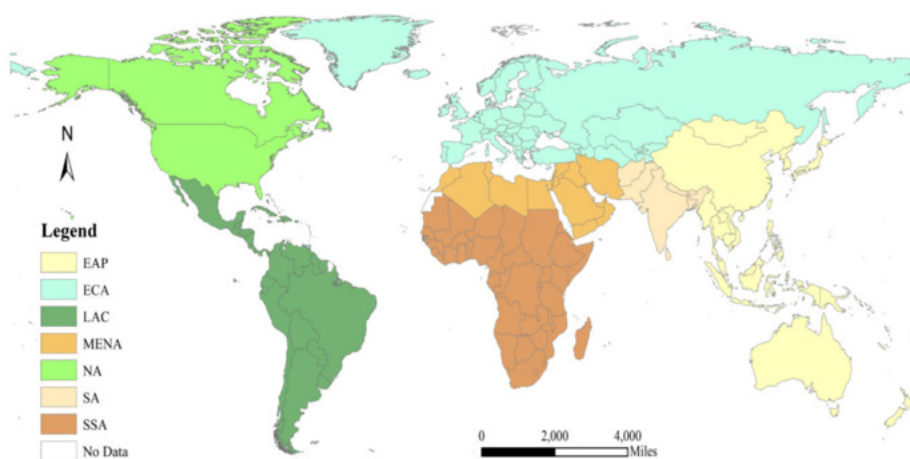


Figure 3: The different regions of the globe used in this report.

Source: Map extracted from Jia et al. (2021)

1 The initial idea of this publication was to cover the women’s land rights situation in the seven geographical regions illustrated in **Figure 3**. However, a decision was made to start with only some of them. The authors believe that additional regions could be added once more literature research is conducted.

2.1 Sub-Saharan Africa

Marisa Balas (Mozambique) and **Christiaan Lemmen** (The Netherlands)



Photograph courtesy of Anna Shnaidman and Sveta Kats

Context

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the region in Africa south of the Sahara Desert, is home to over a billion people and encompasses a remarkable diversity of countries, cultures, languages, and ecosystems, ranging from arid savannahs to tropical rainforests. Land plays a central role in the livelihoods of the majority of the population, particularly in rural areas where agriculture, pastoralism, and natural resource management remain the primary sources of income and food security (FAO & ITU, 2022; Gatundu et al., 2019; IFAD, 2025).

In the vast majority of SSA countries, women play a critical role in agricultural production, especially in supporting household and community food security (Bizoza, 2019; Ndi, 2019b). Despite this, women's rights are often limited to the use of land and its resources (Grisgsby, 2004), but not to control or own land, and even less to alienate and transfer land (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Nearly one in two women in sub-Saharan Africa feels insecure about her land and property rights, especially when faced with the prospect of widowhood (50 per cent) or divorce (44 per cent) (Prindex, 2024).

The challenges women face in securing their land rights are multifaceted and stem from a combination of legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and socio-economic factors (Balas et al., 2022). Understanding these barriers is critical for surveyors and other land professionals aiming to support equitable land access and tenure security across SSA.

Legal Framework Barriers

Despite significant progress, gaps remain. Laws are often fragmented, outdated, or misaligned with constitutional guarantees and international standards (OECD, 2019). Most reforms and post-independence legislation often adopted a patriarchal mindset, assuming that land controlled by men would automatically benefit households (Ravnborg et al., 2016; Razavi, 2007). Furthermore, Most land reforms have overlooked women's specific needs, adopting gender-neutral approaches that fail to address existing inequalities and often reinforce their marginalisation (Chigbu et al., 2019; OECD, 2019).

Legal pluralism adds another layer of complexity. In SSA, 75–78 per cent of land is governed by traditional norms (Alden Wily, 2018; Odeny, 2013). Half of SSA countries

formally recognise customary law in their constitutions, while others provide limited acknowledgement through subordinate legislation (Lahoti et al., 2018). The coexistence of statutory, customary, and religious laws creates contradictions that often disadvantage women (Cooper, 2012; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020).

Institutional Barriers

Even where laws exist, institutional weaknesses limit their impact. Many countries face insufficient resources, limited technical capacity, and low political will to enforce legal protections for women (Belay & Abza, 2020; Khuzwayo et al., 2019). Rural women, in particular, encounter obstacles accessing formal institutions due to physical distance, financial constraints, and social norms that discourage them from filing claims (Chigbu, 2019b; Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014).

Corruption and abuse of power by the elite exacerbate these challenges. Cases have been documented where local chiefs and government officials expropriated women's land for commercial projects without consent (A. M. Collins, 2019; Ndi, 2019b). Furthermore, only a small proportion of land in SSA is formally registered, estimated at 14 per cent of rural parcels, which limits women's ability to assert ownership and access credit (Byamugisha & Dubosse, 2023; Djurfeldt, 2020).

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Patriarchy remains pervasive, shaping the rules around who can access, inherit, and control land. Cultural expectations often assign women secondary or dependent land rights through husbands or male relatives (Chigbu et al., 2019; Kameri-Mbote, 2008). Inheritance systems are a central mechanism of exclusion. While matrilineal societies exist in certain parts of central and southern Africa, patrilineal practices dominate, favouring male heirs and dispossessing widows or daughters who marry outside their lineage (Berge et al., 2014; Djurfeldt et al., 2018). In many patrilineal societies, daughters may only use the land of their birth family until marriage, widows may have conditional rights depending on their children, and single women often cannot inherit from their kin (Kingwill, 2016; Ndi, 2019b).

Polygamy and informal marriages further weaken women's land tenure security. In the "polygamy belt" of West and Central Africa, women and children in polygamous unions often lack legal recognition for their land claims (Belay & Abza, 2020; S. Kramer, 2020). Informal marriages, common in rural areas, leave women vulnerable in cases of separation or the death of a spouse (Dugasseh et al., 2021; Hennings, 2022).

Social stigma and pandemic impacts exacerbate these inequalities. Widows affected by HIV/AIDS, for example, have often been forced to leave their homes or were accused of wrongdoing to justify dispossession (Chapoto et al., 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2021). During COVID-19, land conflicts intensified, disproportionately affecting rural women with limited institutional recourse (USAID, 2020).

Interestingly, women themselves may reinforce gendered norms. Cultural practices, sometimes described as the "brother complex" or "good-sister complex," encourage women to prioritise male relatives in land inheritance or discourage asserting land claims (Agarwal, 2003; Chigbu, 2019a).

Socio-Economic Barriers

Economic inequalities further compound legal and cultural barriers. Limited access to education restricts women's awareness of their rights and constrains their employment opportunities (Njoh & Ananga, 2016; WEF, 2022). In many contexts, rural women's labour is concentrated in informal agriculture and unpaid domestic work, limiting their access to stable income and, consequently, to credit, often a prerequisite for acquiring or securing land (Asfaw & Satterfield, 2010; Brixiová et al., 2020).

Women are also underrepresented in decision-making forums for land governance. Customary councils and local land administration institutions are typically male-dominated, preventing women from influencing policies or dispute resolutions (Chigbu, 2015; Santpoort et al., 2021). Digital and technical resources remain largely inaccessible, reinforcing information gaps (OECD, 2019; Treinen & Elstraeten, 2018).

Strategies, Advocacy, and Good Practices

Countries across Sub-Saharan Africa have undertaken a range of measures to promote gender equality in land access and tenure security, as detailed by Balas et al. (2023).

Legal and Policy Reforms

Over the past decades, several SSA countries have adopted reforms to strengthen women's land rights, though gaps remain between legislation and implementation. Key measures include:

- **Assess existing gaps and concerns:** Evaluating the effectiveness of legal reforms and land programs ensures lessons are learned and best practices scaled. Countries such as Sierra Leone and Madagascar are using tools like the FAO Legal Assessment Tool (LAT) to assess and reform land tenure frameworks, integrating gender equality principles to address discriminatory practices and promote more equitable and gender-sensitive legal systems (Kenney & Campos, 2016).
- **Reform and Harmonise different legal systems and instruments:** Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Malawi have proposed documenting or registering customary land rights as part of the development of national land policies (Komjathy & Nichols, 2001). Mozambique is reformulating its land policy and land law to ensure women's land rights are protected and that customary norms are respected; however, there is still a gap in harmonising the land, family and succession laws (Balas et al., 2024). Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo have enacted multiple gender-equality measures in land and inheritance laws (World Bank, 2024c).
- **Develop gender-responsive legal frameworks:** Ghana considered extending recognition of marital property rights to people in unregistered marriages (Cooper, 2012). Namibia's Communal Land Reform Act of 2002 gives surviving spouses who reside in rural areas the right to remain on land allocated to their deceased spouses (OHCHR & UN Women, 2013). Ghana and Rwanda included in their legislation the women's right to land and other property during and after marriage (Abbott et al., 2018; Cooper, 2012). In Mozambique, family and succession legal reforms have aimed to protect widows and women in informal marriage arrangements (Balas et al., 2024). Uganda's 1998 Land Act and 2004 Land Policy similarly seek to protect women's inheritance rights and provide statutory recognition of customary tenure (Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014).

- **Join efforts for better advocacy:** In Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, legal reforms have been supported by strong advocacy from women's rights groups, which both drive national reform processes (Djurfeldt, 2020) and facilitate inclusive consultations (Komjathy & Nichols, 2001).

Despite these efforts, it became evident that legislation alone is insufficient. Without adequate policies, institutional capacity, and effective enforcement, legal provisions risk remaining symbolic and failing to deliver their intended impact. Translating *de jure* rights into *de facto* rights requires governments to invest in robust institutions and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that legal equality for women translates into real and tangible opportunities in practice (World Bank, 2026).

Strengthening Institutions

Institutional reforms are crucial to improving women's access to land. Key measures include:

- **Promote gender-responsive land administration systems and land registration campaigns:** Governments can mandate that both spouses' names appear on land titles and registration documents, as successfully implemented in Rwanda (Abbott et al., 2018). Ethiopia, South Africa, and Mozambique are implementing gender-responsive land registration programs (Balas et al., 2021; Belay & Abza, 2020; Khuzwayo et al., 2019). Some countries, like Benin and Mozambique, are also adopting land registration approaches that are inclusive and participatory (Balas et al., 2021)
- **Build capacity and Assign Responsibility and Accountability:** Training customary leaders, surveyors, and land officers in gender-responsive approaches strengthens the recognition of women's land rights, as evidenced in Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, and Malawi (Santpoort et al., 2021). Complementary measures include setting up a code of conduct and building the capacity of local officials (Mengesha et al., 2021) and establishing a reporting system to address abuse of power and influence and embedding it in the formal legal system (Cooper, 2012; Khuzwayo et al., 2019; Mengesha et al., 2021).
- **Integrate a gender perspective at all levels:** Leveraging women's associations, women's development departments, or ministries can facilitate advocacy and mediation, ensuring women's needs are represented in local land governance (Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014). Ethiopia established Social Development Officers (SDOs) within land administration institutions (Belay & Abza, 2020). Ghana has established an administrative structure to ensure that women have tenure security (OHCHR & UN Women, 2013). Evidence from Ghana and Tanzania shows that when women have access to local mediation committees or dedicated government focal points, land disputes are resolved more equitably, and women feel more empowered to assert claims (Chigbu, 2015; Kameri-Mbote, 2008).
- **Establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms:** Recording ownership, inheritance, and land use by gender allows policymakers to identify gaps and design targeted interventions (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020; OECD, 2021), yet reporting remains limited, with only a few countries having comprehensive systems to track and publicly share gender-equality data (UNDESA, 2022). Participatory monitoring ensures local voices - particularly those of women - are heard, creating accountability in land administration and dispute resolution (Chigbu, 2015; Santpoort et al., 2021).

Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers

Transforming entrenched social norms is complex but achievable through multi-level strategies:

- **Promote community sensitisation and dialogue:** Programs that engage men and traditional leaders alongside women have proven effective in shifting attitudes regarding women's land rights (Chigbu et al., 2019). In Senegal, Kenya, and Mozambique, community workshops combining legal education and participatory storytelling have helped challenge norms restricting women's rights (Balas et al., 2021; Santpoort et al., 2021). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Kenya, awareness campaigns at community and household levels have promoted gender-equitable land tenure and guided women on how to register their land rights (Giovarelli & Scalise, 2016; Ingwani, 2021; Khuzwayo et al., 2019).
- **Ensure women's representation in governance:** Encouraging women's participation in customary councils, land dispute mechanisms, and local government strengthens their voice in decision-making. In Rwanda, mandated representation in local councils has increased women's influence in land governance. (Abbott et al., 2018).
- **Support vulnerable groups:** Programs targeting widows, single women, and ethnic minority women, who often face compounded disadvantages, can include pro bono legal aid, microcredit linked to land acquisition, and inclusion in participatory mapping initiatives, such as in Ethiopia (Belay & Abza, 2020; Djurfeldt et al., 2018).

Economic Empowerment and Access to Resources

Economic measures complement legal and institutional interventions:

- **Improve women's education:** Civil society organisations, women's groups, and local NGOs play a pivotal role in educating women about their rights, helping them navigate bureaucratic processes, and monitoring implementation (Chigbu et al., 2019; Cooper, 2012). Training in sustainable agriculture, forest management, and resource diversification equips women with the knowledge to derive income from land, enhancing their bargaining power and tenure security (Brixiová et al., 2020).
- **Establish networks for support:** In Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, and Malawi, platforms and forums were established to enable women to voice their concerns independently (Khuzwayo et al., 2019; Santpoort et al., 2021). Several studies recommend establishing micro-credit schemes and accessing financing to enable women to borrow at negotiated interest rates to purchase, rent, and register land use and other property rights in their names (Efobi et al., 2019; Ingwani, 2021; Wekwete, 2014).
- **Access to credit and financial instruments:** Linking land ownership to micro-finance, cooperative loans, or gender-responsive credit schemes help women invest in land, increase productivity, and secure tenure (Dugasseh et al., 2021; OHCHR & UN Women, 2020).
- **Data and technology for empowerment:** Sex-disaggregated land registries, mobile land information systems, and digital mapping tools improve visibility of women's land rights and help monitor implementation of reforms (OECD, 2019; Treinen & Elstraeten, 2018).

Summary

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's land rights are constrained by the combined and mutually reinforcing effects of legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and socio-economic barriers. While many countries have introduced progressive legal reforms, significant gaps remain between formal provisions and their implementation, limiting women's ability to own, control, inherit, and transfer land in practice.

These constraints are compounded by weak institutional capacity, limited enforcement, and the coexistence of statutory and customary systems that often operate in parallel and sometimes in contradiction. Deeply rooted social norms and inheritance practices continue to shape unequal access to land, while economic disadvantages and limited access to education, finance, and information further reduce women's ability to secure and exercise land rights.

Evidence from across the region shows that progress is most effective when interventions are integrated and mutually reinforcing. Approaches that combine legal and policy reform, strengthened land administration systems, inclusive governance, norm change at the community level, and improved access to economic resources and data systems are most successful in narrowing the gap between legal rights and lived realities. In particular, measures such as joint land registration, women's participation in land governance, strengthening the capacity of land institutions and customary authorities, and access to credit and information systems are key enablers of change.

Overall, advancing women's land rights in SSA requires coordinated, multi-dimensional strategies that address structural inequalities across legal, institutional, cultural, and economic domains in a coherent and sustained manner.

2.2 Latin America and the Caribbean

Andrea Marín-Salazar (Colombia), **Susana Lastarria-Cornhiel** (Peru) and **Johan Avendaño Arias** (Colombia)



Photograph courtesy of DANE – National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia

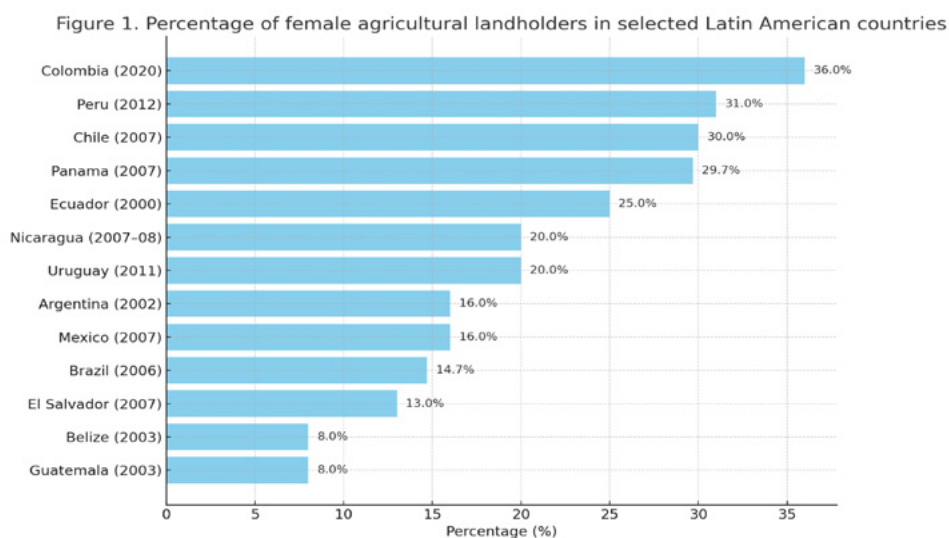
Context

As of 2025, the population of Latin America and the Caribbean was projected to reach approximately 680 million, with around 17.3 per cent living in rural areas. Rural women represent about 8.4 per cent of the total population, roughly 57 million individuals, many of whom depend directly on land and natural resources for their livelihoods (UNECLAC, 2025). Despite their central role in rural economies, this group continues to face persistent gender disparities in access to land, property, housing, and other productive assets, including financial services (World Bank, 2024).

The proportion of women landowners varies significantly across countries in the region, ranging from 7.8 to 36 per cent (Nobre & Hora, 2017; OXFAM, 2022; UNDP, 2023) (see **Graph 1**). Beyond limited access to land, rural women also carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving work. In 2023, 35.7 per cent of rural women were engaged exclusively in unpaid work, compared to 24.7 per cent of urban women (UNECLAC, 2025), highlighting a persistent rural–urban divide in how women use their time and economic opportunities.

While this section focuses primarily on rural women, it is important to acknowledge that a growing proportion of women in Latin America and the Caribbean live in urban and peri-urban areas, where land and housing challenges are increasingly prominent. In these contexts, low-income women prioritise secure access to affordable, well-located housing and serviced land, as tenure insecurity directly affects livelihoods, investment in housing improvements, and household wellbeing. Evidence shows that strengthened tenure security can improve living conditions and enhance women's intra-household decision-making power, with positive spillovers for family welfare. However, these benefits are not automatic, as legal tenure does not necessarily translate into access to credit or economic opportunity. This highlights the need for gender-responsive land and housing policies that address both rural and urban realities while recognising persistent structural inequalities in land access (Radoki, 2014).

Graph 1: Percentage of female agricultural landholders out of total agricultural landholders.



Source: (DANE, 2020; World Bank, 2024a)

These intersecting constraints (restricted access to land and high levels of unpaid labour) significantly limit women’s economic autonomy and participation in land and labour markets. As a result, when women do access land, it is often in the form of smaller plots of lower quality, with limited infrastructure and reduced productivity (Marín & Avendaño, 2018; Nobre & Hora, 2017). At the same time, important data gaps remain. Updated and comparable country-level statistics are scarce, and differences in methodologies across studies continue to hinder comprehensive regional assessments.

The following sections examine the main barriers women face in accessing land and securing tenure in the LAC region.

Legal and Institutional Advances

LAC countries generally recognise women’s land and property rights in constitutions, civil codes, and statutory laws, encompassing daughters, wives, widows, single women, and those in legally recognised common-law unions. Despite these formal guarantees, gaps remain between de jure equality and de facto access. Chile represents one exception where legal frameworks continue to privilege men; under the Civil Code, men recognised as household heads retain exclusive decision-making authority over marital property and family matters (World Bank, 2023).

In many LAC countries, historical land titling and registration programs initially favoured men, granting titles primarily to husbands. Over time, institutional reforms have modernised these processes, deliberately incorporating women as co-owners, particularly within joint titling schemes for married or cohabiting couples (Deere et al., 2011; Nobre & Hora, 2017).

Countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua revised legal texts in the 1990s to incorporate non-sexist language and explicit provisions for women’s participation in land ownership (Deere & León, 2001, 2005). These reforms have resulted in measurable increases in female landownership. In Bolivia, women landowners rose from 9–46 per cent by 2014, while in Brazil, the share of married or cohabiting women holding land increased from 23–72 per cent between 2003 and 2015, and the share of single women increased from 13–24 per cent (Nobre & Hora, 2017). Legal reforms have also extended to indigenous land rights, joint titling initiatives, and recognition of caregivers’ claims as legitimate grounds for land access (IGAC & UN Women, 2024a). **Table 2** illustrates some of the initiatives countries undertook to promote women’s land rights in the LAC region.

Table 2: Examples of institutional and legal initiatives to promote women’s land rights in the LAC region.

Country	Type of Initiative	Impact/Outcomes
Honduras	Land Rights Strengthening Project incorporating a gender strategy	Expected to formalise titles for ~50,000 families, including women, through cadastral updates and awareness campaigns (World Bank, 2024a)
Guatemala	Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Strengthens the capacity of indigenous and rural women to participate in forestry management (World Bank, 2024a)

Colombia	Decree-Law 902 of 2017; multipurpose cadastre with sex and ethnicity variables	Recognises caregiving as legitimate land use, allows women caregivers' participation in adjudication and registration (IGAC & UN Women, 2024a)
Nicaragua	Law 717 of 2010: gender-equitable land purchase fund	Institutional framework for women's land purchase; limited implementation due to budget constraints (La Lupa, 2022)
Paraguay	Law 5446 of 2015: gender-informed rural policies	By 2024, 45.1% of land-titling plan beneficiaries are women; 42% received plots they cultivate (CIAL, 2024)
Uruguay	INC reform (2005) and the "associative lands" model with gender mainstreaming since 2013	Collective land allocation and active participation of rural women (O'Neill & Piedracueva, 2017)
Mexico	Inter-institutional initiative for the delivery of property titles and legal recognition of women's agrarian rights.	Guarantees territorial rights for rural women under equity and non-discrimination (Government of Mexico, 2025)
Argentina	"Sembrar Igualdad" Program	Provides technical assistance, financing, legal support, and institutional backing to improve territorial access (Gov't of Argentina, 2021)
Peru	Proyecto de Catastro, Titulación y Registro de Tierras Rurales (PTRT-3)	Joint titling and gender-affirmative actions included (ILC, 2018)

Source: Compiled by this section's authors

Despite legislative advancements in joint titling and inheritance rights, and specific initiatives aimed at empowering women in land tenure in countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, the region continues to grapple with the practical implementation of these laws, often influenced by customary practices and socio-cultural norms that can disadvantage women. Therefore, ongoing efforts are crucial to bridge the gap between legal guarantees and the lived realities of women's land rights across Latin America, thereby fully realising the objectives of SDG Target 5.a.2 (Deere & León, 2003; Nobre & Hora, 2017).

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Cultural norms continue to constrain women's land access, despite formal legal guarantees. Patriarchal structures in many rural communities still limit women's decision-making power and reinforce male-dominated inheritance systems. Traditional patrilineal inheritance often privileges sons, while daughters receive smaller or no shares of land. For example, in Bolivia, ancestral land is typically passed to sons, with widows relegated to caretaking roles without formal ownership rights (Deere & León, 2005).

Even when legal reforms exist, implementation may be constrained by entrenched cultural biases, discriminatory land markets, and local administrative practices (Deere & León, 2003; Doss et al., 2008). In Nicaragua, community governance and local norms confine women to domestic and agricultural work, limiting their participation in public decision-making and reinforcing gender inequities in property rights (Deere et al., 2011).

The interplay of socio-cultural norms and unpaid care responsibilities further limits women's ability to assert land claims or participate in productive activities. In Colombia, rural women work an average of 14 hours per day, yet 61 per cent of that time is unpaid domestic labour, compared with 73.9 per cent of men's work being paid (Henaó, 2022). Such inequalities reduce savings capacity, investment potential, and economic autonomy, compounding gender gaps in land access.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Even with progressive legal frameworks, rural women face persistent socio-economic constraints. Limited access to credit, discriminatory eligibility criteria, and exclusion from decision-making mechanisms constrain investment in land and agricultural productivity (Deere & León, 2001; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). The care economy compounds these challenges: rural women devote substantial unpaid labour to domestic and caregiving activities, undermining their ability to generate income or accumulate savings for land acquisition. In Colombia, rural women work an average of 14 hours per day, of which only 39 per cent is remunerated, compared to 73.9 per cent for men's labour (Henaó, 2022).

Access to technology and technical assistance is similarly constrained. Women frequently receive less support in adopting innovations or accessing markets, further limiting productivity and sustainable land use (OECD, 2019; Treinen & Elstraeten, 2018). Without gender-responsive interventions, technological advances risk reinforcing existing inequalities.

Evidence indicates that the lack of control over resources and time results in limited decision-making authority, even for women who hold land, and that limited financial control affects family food security (Quisumbing et al., 2011). For example, female landholders experience a 20 per cent increase in food security through enhanced crop diversification and improved decision-making authority (Schling & Pazos, 2021).

Strategies, Advocacy, and Good Practices

Several institutional and programmatic initiatives across LAC have sought to close these gaps. Colombia exemplifies gender mainstreaming in land administration through the multipurpose cadastre, integrating a sex-disaggregated Land Information System and adopting LADM (LADM-COL) standards to capture gender-specific data (see case study box). This approach enables evidence-based policymaking, improved tracking of women's land tenure, and the identification of priority interventions. Complementary training for surveyors and public officials strengthens gender sensitivity in land administration processes.

Case Study: Colombia and the Gender-Sensitive Multi-Purpose Cadastre

Colombia has pursued innovative approaches to address gender gaps in land access.

The 2016 Peace Agreement mandated a sex-disaggregated Land Information System, enabling policymakers to visualise gender disparities in land tenure. Subsequent legal reforms, including Law 9092 of 2017 and the adoption of the LADM-COL standard, which incorporates the “sex” variable, have facilitated better data collection and informed interventions. Resolution 746 of 2024, issued by the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC), has made the “sex” variable mandatory for cadastral legal components.

Publications such as the *Gender and Cadastre Booklet* and the *Guide for Gender Mainstreaming in the Multipurpose Cadastre* provide practical tools and training, including machine-learning approaches to predict missing gender data.

Updates to nearly 189,213 rural parcels reflect these efforts, though challenges remain in formalising informal occupations, addressing cultural biases, and expanding cadastral coverage. The data show that women hold 36.3 per cent of rural properties with a sole owner, and 75.1 per cent of these are micro-plots of less than 3 hectares, with 24.4 per cent designated for residential use.

Source: (Colombia: Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace, 2016; DANE, 2020; IGAC & UN Women, 2024b, 2024a)

Other countries have implemented gender-informed titling and registration programs. Brazil’s agrarian reform programs expanded joint titling for cohabiting and married couples; Nicaragua’s Law 717 created a gender-equitable land purchase fund; Peru’s PTRT-3 project applied gender affirmative actions to formalise land tenure for women; and Honduras implemented cadastral updates with awareness campaigns targeting women-headed households (ILC, 2018; Nobre & Hora, 2017; World Bank, 2024a).

Empirical studies confirm that female land ownership improves household food security and agricultural diversity. Women’s control over land increases the likelihood of diversified production. It strengthens decision-making on crop selection and resource allocation, with estimates suggesting a 20 per cent improvement in food security outcomes (Schling & Pazos, 2021). Economic empowerment initiatives, including improved access to credit, technical assistance, and digital financial services, further enhance women’s ability to manage land and generate income (Chassin, 2022; Quisumbing et al., 2011). Coupled with awareness campaigns and community engagement, these measures address both structural barriers and socio-cultural norms that restrict women’s land rights.

Conclusion

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women’s land rights are formally recognised in most legal frameworks, yet significant gaps persist between legal equality and effective access to land. Rural women in particular continue to face structural constraints, including unequal land ownership patterns, heavy burdens of unpaid care work, and limited access to credit, services, and productive assets. These inequalities are further shaped by socio-cultural norms and administrative practices that reinforce unequal inheritance systems and restrict women’s decision-making power over land.

Despite these challenges, the region has made notable progress through legal and institutional reforms, including joint titling policies, gender-sensitive land laws, and the modernisation of land administration systems. Countries such as Brazil, Colombia, and Nicaragua have introduced targeted measures to improve women’s land access, with evidence showing increases in female landownership where reforms are effectively implemented.

However, implementation gaps remain a central challenge. Even where progressive legislation exists, entrenched cultural norms, discriminatory practices, and uneven institutional capacity continue to limit outcomes on the ground. Emerging good practices, such as sex-disaggregated cadastres, gender mainstreaming in land information systems, and targeted land regularisation and titling programs, demonstrate the importance of combining legal reform with institutional strengthening and data-driven approaches.

Overall, advancing women’s land rights in LAC requires sustained efforts that integrate legal, institutional, socio-economic, and cultural interventions to ensure that formal rights translate into equitable and tangible access to land in practice.

2.3 Middle East and North Africa

Dina Naguib (Egypt) and **Kholoud Saad** (Egypt)



Photograph courtesy of Mohamed al-Hajjar, Middle East Eye

Context

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region comprises 22 Arab countries with diverse legal frameworks, traditions, and land governance systems. Despite this diversity, common challenges persist, particularly regarding women’s access to land. These include overlapping statutory, religious, and customary legal systems, entrenched pa-

triarchal norms, and significant disparities in land ownership and control. Although many constitutions recognise formal gender equality, a wide gap remains between legal rights and their practical enforcement (UN-Habitat et al., 2023; UNESCWA, 2023; UNESCWA et al., 2019).

Women's land and property rights across the MENA region remain constrained by a combination of legal, institutional, social, and economic factors. While most Arab states have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), its effectiveness is often limited by reservations to key provisions, particularly those related to family law and inheritance. These reservations significantly weaken the legal basis for women's land ownership.

Moreover, the coexistence of civil and religious legal systems creates overlapping and sometimes conflicting frameworks, reinforcing gendered inequalities and limiting the consistent recognition and enforcement of women's land and property rights (UN Women, 2021). In many countries, dual or even triple legal systems - comprising civil codes, religious laws (primarily Islamic Shari'a), and customary norms - govern land, inheritance, and family matters. Although Islamic law technically grants women the right to inherit land, their share is usually half that of male heirs. In practice, many women forgo even these rights under social pressure (UNESCWA, 2020).

Land governance systems across MENA are often bureaucratic, opaque, and non-gender sensitive. Women rarely hold decision-making positions in land administration institutions, and joint titling of marital property is uncommon. The cost, complexity, and inaccessibility of property registration further discourage women from formalising land ownership, especially in rural areas (UN-HABITAT, 2022).

Cultural norms and patriarchal traditions remain strong across the region, with land and property often considered the domain of men. Many women refrain from asserting their inheritance rights to maintain family harmony, and widows or divorced women may be denied any claim to marital property. In countries affected by conflict and displacement, such as Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, and Libya, women face even greater risks of land loss and tenure insecurity (FAO, 2023; UN-Habitat et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, progress is being made. Some Arab countries have introduced land policy reforms, gender quotas, and awareness campaigns to address these disparities. The Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, led by the League of Arab States and UN-Habitat, encourages inclusive urban and land policies. Tools such as the FFPLA approach (Enemark et al., 2021) and regional advocacy efforts are contributing to positive change.

Legal and Institutional Barriers

Islamic Shari'a law, which governs inheritance in much of the region, formally entitles women to inherit land. However, women typically receive half the share of male heirs, and social pressures often lead them to forgo even these rights (UNESCWA, 2020). Dual and triple legal systems, civil, religious, and customary, create contradictions that impede access to land, particularly for women navigating inheritance or marital property claims.

Land registration and titling systems are frequently bureaucratic, costly, and non-gender sensitive. Women rarely hold decision-making positions within land administration institutions, and joint titling of marital property remains uncommon. In Egypt, despite

constitutional guarantees of equality, only 5.2 per cent of private land is registered in women's names, highlighting the gap between legal entitlement and formal recognition (NCW & World Bank, 2019). The Iraqi experience reveals how discriminatory practices and weak enforcement can undermine gender-neutral laws. Although women can legally own and inherit land, they often face pressure from relatives to relinquish their inheritance. Furthermore, issues of forgery and procedural fraud are common, with women frequently denied their legal entitlements in both formal and informal dispute mechanisms (Ahmed, 2010; Gorevan & Boswijk, 2020).

Institutional weaknesses across MENA countries include a lack of sex-disaggregated land data, insufficient female representation in land governance, and limited gender-sensitive administrative procedures. Nevertheless, some progress has been made. Jordan and Tunisia have piloted gender-integrated land registration reforms, and Morocco has utilised the FAO Legal Assessment Tool (LAT) to map legislative gaps and recommend improvements (UN-HABITAT, 2022; UN-Habitat et al., 2023). However, most initiatives often remain pilot projects with uneven coverage.

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Patriarchal norms strongly influence women's access to land. Land is traditionally considered a male domain, and social pressures deter women from asserting inheritance or property rights. Inheritance practices rooted in tribal and religious traditions often favour male heirs. Widows, divorced women, and rural women are particularly vulnerable, often excluded from communal decision-making and customary governance processes.

In Jordan, over 70 per cent of women reportedly waive inheritance claims in favour of male relatives (GLTN, 2023; UN-Habitat et al., 2023). In Jordan, widows and daughters are frequently excluded from inheritance, while social pressure encourages women to forfeit their legal claims (Ababsa, 2017). Women's absence from formal property deeds limits access to credit and diminishes participation in agricultural decision-making.

Cultural stigma and fear of social ostracism prevent women from pursuing legal claims. Many women also lack access to female legal advisors or awareness programs, limiting their ability to navigate complex legal and administrative systems.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Economic dependency on male relatives reinforces these patterns. Women are disproportionately poor, less educated, and concentrated in rural areas with minimal access to financial resources.

Despite extensive labour on agricultural land, many women remain landless, serving as seasonal labourers without formal employment, social protection, or ownership rights (UN-Habitat et al., 2023). This lack of income and collateral restricts their ability to purchase, register, or defend property.

Financial exclusion compounds these challenges. MENA has the lowest rate of financial inclusion globally: only 4 per cent of urban women hold savings accounts, and less than 6 per cent of loans are granted to women (World Bank, 2022). High registration costs and bureaucratic complexity further deter formal land ownership, leaving women vulnerable to disputes and dispossession (UN-HABITAT, 2022).

Displacement due to conflict, climate change, or economic hardship exacerbates these vulnerabilities in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Libya, where women may lose land access entirely (UN-HABITAT, 2022).

National Strategies and Regional Advocacy

Some MENA countries have taken steps to address gender disparities in land rights through legal reform and strategic planning. Morocco, for example, used the FAO Legal Assessment Tool to identify and address legal gaps affecting gender equity in land governance. This led to amendments to the national land tenure strategy promoting inclusive land access (Land Portal Foundation, n.d.).

Morocco also represents a pioneering case in the Arab region for integrating gender equality into collective land rights (Sulaliyyate land titles) (see case study). Traditionally, these lands were managed under customary norms that excluded women from ownership and decision-making, despite their contribution to rural economies. This practice was rooted in patriarchal interpretations of custom and reinforced by the lack of legal clarity surrounding collective lands.

Case Study: The Implementation of Collective Land Rights (Sulaliyyate Land Titles) in Morocco

Significant reforms began in 2019 with the promulgation of new laws (notably Law 62.17 and Law 63.17) governing collective lands. These laws explicitly affirm the equal rights of women and men to benefit from collective land titling, breaking centuries-old exclusion. One of the most transformative steps was the recognition of women's right to register their names as right-holders and beneficiaries on Sulaliyyate land titles, enabling access to compensation, agricultural land distribution, and income-generating opportunities.

The Ministry of Interior and other stakeholders, supported by development partners like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and UN Women, launched outreach campaigns, legal awareness workshops, and administrative reforms to facilitate women's registration. In parallel, the *Centre d'Inclusion des Femmes au Foncier* (CIFF) was established to support women's land claims, collect data, and advocate for policy change. Despite early resistance from traditional assemblies, women's inclusion in melkisation (individual titling) processes has gained momentum, especially in oasis areas and agricultural extension projects.

This shift demonstrates that legal reforms, when coupled with institutional support and civil society advocacy, can change long-standing discriminatory practices.

Source: (Gagné, 2024; UN Women, 2013)

The Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, developed by the League of Arab States and UN-Habitat, calls for integrating gender into national housing and land policies. While several countries have adopted components of the strategy, implementation remains uneven and underfunded (UN-HABITAT & League of Arab States, 2020).

The FFPLA approach model has also gained traction. Designed to be cost-effective and inclusive, FFPLA encourages flexible land documentation approaches that can better

accommodate women's tenure claims, especially in customary and informal contexts (Enemark et al., 2021). Pilot programs in countries like Sudan and Tunisia have shown promise but require sustained political commitment (Abukashawa et al., 2024).

International development agencies, including UN-Habitat, FAO, and the World Bank, have begun integrating gender-responsive land governance components into technical assistance and funding programs. These collaborations help build national capacity and support the design of inclusive policies.

Regional efforts led by organisations like the Arab Land Initiative and the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign have helped raise awareness of the structural barriers women face. These initiatives work with national governments and local NGOs to promote legal reforms, collect data, and provide training for surveyors and other land professionals on gender-responsive practices.

Local women's organisations continue to play a crucial role in advocating for land rights. In Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine, civil society groups have helped women file legal claims, understand inheritance laws, and engage in community-level dialogue about land governance; however, these efforts are often hampered by limited funding and institutional support (UNESCWA, 2020).

Conclusion

Despite constitutional guarantees and legal frameworks affirming gender equality, women across the MENA region continue to face widespread barriers to owning, inheriting, and accessing land. The persistence of patriarchal norms, overlapping legal systems, and weak institutional mechanisms contributes to the systemic exclusion of women from land governance. While promising initiatives, such as the FFPLA approach, legal awareness campaigns, and gender-responsive land policy reforms, are underway in several countries, significant gaps remain between legal rights and their implementation.

Addressing these disparities requires sustained political will, increased investment in legal and institutional reforms, and broader public education to shift cultural norms. Collecting sex-disaggregated data, simplifying land registration procedures, and enhancing the capacity of land governance institutions are critical steps. Most importantly, empowering women as landholders and decision-makers is essential for achieving inclusive development, tenure security, and social justice in the region.

Furthermore, comprehensive reform must extend beyond legislation. It must include training for land administration personnel, integration of gender indicators into national land monitoring systems, and stronger legal aid frameworks to support women navigating land disputes. Building multi-stakeholder coalitions, including governments, civil society, and international organisations, can accelerate policy coherence and on-the-ground implementation. In fragile and post-conflict settings, targeted strategies to document women's land claims, provide restitution, and prevent dispossession are essential. Special attention should be given to the rights of displaced women, widows, and marginalised communities, ensuring no one is left behind.

Ultimately, securing women's land rights is not just a gender equity issue; it is a driver of broader social and economic transformation. Ensuring that women have access to, control over, and ownership of land will enhance food security, reduce poverty, and strengthen community resilience across the MENA region.

2.4 Mekong

Renée Chartres (Australia), Elizabeth Daley (Australia), Natalie Y. Campbell (Italy) and Jessica Lowy (Australia)²



Photograph courtesy of Laszlo Mates

Context

The Mekong Region comprises Vietnam, Myanmar, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), and Cambodia. Despite variations in political systems, economic structures, and levels of development, the region faces broadly similar gendered challenges in land access, use, and ownership. Women, particularly ethnic minority women, experience the greatest structural disadvantages in exercising land rights due to intersecting social, cultural, and economic barriers.

Legally, all four countries have committed to gender equality by ratifying the CEDAW and by developing national gender policies. In practice, however, land-related laws remain largely “gender-blind.” Although statutory provisions may formally ensure equality, discriminatory social norms, limited awareness, and structural barriers often prevent women from realising their rights. Vietnam’s constitutional and legislative provisions provide relatively robust protections for women, including ethnic minority women. But enforcement and practical awareness remain limited, and ethnic minority women face persistent gaps between legal protections and actual practice. Similarly, Cambodia’s Civil Code and Marriage and Family Law grant women equal rights to property within marriage, yet customary practices and unregistered unions create vulnerabilities for widows and single women. In the Lao PDR, the Constitution guarantees gender equality, yet customary tenure systems, particularly among patrilineal and matrilineal ethnic groups, often determine women’s actual access to land. Myanmar presents a complex scenario in which religious and customary laws predominate over statutory provisions, leaving most women, particularly in rural and ethnic minority areas, with limited land rights.

2 This analysis is based on text extracted from Daley et al. (2024): Elizabeth Daley, Natalie Y. Campbell and Jessica Lowy’s MRLG Publication Outlook on Gender and Land in the Mekong Region, Vientiane, January 2024. The sources for the data used in this brief are found in the Gender report.

Across the region, socio-cultural norms, patriarchal traditions, and economic inequality intersect to constrain women's land rights. Local land governance institutions often underrepresent women, and women's participation in decision-making is limited, particularly for ethnic minority and rural communities. These structural and normative barriers operate alongside weaknesses in institutional capacity, procedural complexities, and economic constraints, creating significant tenure insecurity for women.

Legal and Institutional Barriers

Lao PDR

Lao PDR's Constitution and property legislation formally promote gender equality. The 1990 Property Law defines matrimonial property as jointly held by spouses, and the 2005 Law on Heritage and Basis of Inheritance, together with the 2008 Law on Inheritance, provides for a surviving spouse's claim alongside children. Statutory law does not distinguish by gender, and both men and women are legally entitled to equal rights over property acquired during marriage.

In practice, however, inheritance customs, ethnic diversity, and limited legal literacy constrain women's access to land. Among the over 50 recognised ethnic groups, matrilineal communities such as the Lao-Tai and Bru/Makong maintain more equitable inheritance practices. In contrast, patrilineal or bilineal communities often exclude women from land inheritance. Formal titling processes also disproportionately affect women, especially ethnic minorities and poor rural households, who face high fees and complex documentation requirements.

Myanmar

Myanmar presents a complex plural legal system where statutory law, Buddhist or Muslim religious law, and customary law intersect. The 2008 Constitution guarantees equality regardless of sex, yet in practice, family and property rights for most women are governed by religious laws, which vary in application and are often not codified. The 1898 Burma Laws Act and the 1925 Succession Act determine which law applies depending on the religion of the parties, leaving women's rights uncertain and difficult to enforce.

Discriminatory social norms further undermine women's rights. In many ethnic minority areas, customary and religious practices dominate, and women's participation in land governance is limited. Formal court processes are costly, written in the majority language, and largely inaccessible to ethnic minorities. Even when women are responsible for generating household income from land or forest resources, they often lack recognition in decision-making or customary inheritance rights.

Cambodia

Cambodia has a relatively gender-neutral legal framework. The 1989 Law on Marriage and Family and the Civil Code ensure equal rights to use and manage property acquired during marriage and to protect inheritance rights, allowing both spouses to consent jointly to the sale or other disposition of common property. However, gaps remain, particularly for women in unregistered or customary marriages. Widows or women without supportive relatives are vulnerable to losing property rights, highlighting the role of customary norms in undermining statutory protections.

Vietnam

Vietnam has the strongest statutory framework for gender equality in the region. The Constitution and Civil Code prohibit discrimination based on sex, ensure equality in

property rights, and require that both spouses be listed on Land Use Rights Certificates (LURCs). Legal provisions are robust, yet ethnic minority women and rural populations face practical obstacles. For instance, in rural areas, only 37–46 per cent of women are aware of their statutory inheritance rights. In urban contexts, gender gaps persist in the formal recording of land titles.

Institutional barriers across the region are notable. National-level women's institutions, such as the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), advocate for gender equality. Still, agencies responsible for land administration often lack gender mandates. Participation of women in local land governance structures, such as Vietnam's local land-use councils, remains low, limiting women's influence on land management decisions.

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Across the Mekong region, patriarchal norms and traditional practices significantly constrain women's land rights. In the Lao PDR, inheritance practices vary widely by ethnic group, with matrilineal communities providing relatively greater security for women than patrilineal ones. Ethnic minority women often participate in household-level land decision-making. Still, they are underrepresented in village governance bodies, such as Village Agriculture and Forestry Subunits, with participation varying by ethnicity, education, and reliance on natural resources.

In Myanmar, entrenched social hierarchies and patriarchal customs limit women's access to land and community-level decision-making, especially in ethnic minority areas and conflict-affected zones. Despite women's active roles in agriculture and forest management, their knowledge and rights are frequently unrecognised.

Cambodian norms, influenced by the Chbab Srey (Women's Code of Conduct) and Chbab Prohh (Men's Code of Conduct), shape gendered divisions of labour and reinforce male authority in households, affecting women's ability to claim land or participate meaningfully in governance. Even where laws support equality, widows and single women may forgo claims to avoid social conflict. In Vietnam, gendered social norms limit women's awareness of statutory inheritance rights, particularly among ethnic minorities, and restrict participation in decision-making both at home and in local institutions.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Economic dependency, poverty, and limited access to financial services compound women's land insecurity in all four countries. Lao PDR's formalisation costs for land titling disproportionately affect women, poor households, and ethnic minorities. In Cambodia, landlessness among rural households, particularly women-headed households, undermines livelihoods and perpetuates poverty. In Vietnam, market reforms and urbanisation have increased pressure on small-scale and ethnic minority landholders, disproportionately affecting women who rely on small plots for subsistence. Myanmar's conflict and displacement exacerbate women's economic vulnerability, reducing access to land and formal documentation.

Low literacy rates, particularly among ethnic minority women, further limit engagement with land governance systems, legal frameworks, and administrative procedures. Across the region, women often have restricted access to credit, banking services, and

income-generating opportunities, undermining their ability to acquire, maintain, or defend land rights. Gender-based social norms additionally limit participation in market and community decision-making, reinforcing unequal access to land and resources.

National Strategies, Good Practices, and Advocacy

Several initiatives across the Mekong region demonstrate promising approaches to improving women's land rights. In the Lao PDR, the Lao Women's Union (LWU) provides an institutional platform for women's advancement, although implementation gaps remain at the local level. In Vietnam, legal provisions requiring joint spousal listing on LURCs, combined with advocacy and capacity-building programs, support women's land tenure security. Cambodia's Community Forest and Protected Area programs have demonstrated women's active engagement in land management, though committee representation remains limited.

Regionally, the Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG) program, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, promotes gender-sensitive land administration and provides training to increase women's participation in local governance. Recommendations emanating from research on gender equality emphasise the importance of participatory governance, ethnic minority inclusion, bridging policy-implementation gaps, and addressing gendered social norms. Civil society, community-based organisations, and international partners play crucial roles in promoting awareness, advocacy, and capacity-building to strengthen women's tenure security.

In summary, across the Mekong region, several initiatives demonstrate potential to improve women's land rights:

- 1. Ethnic Minority and Indigenous Rights:** Programs must account for intersectional vulnerabilities. Ethnic minority women require targeted legal, administrative, and educational support to secure land rights.
- 2. Policy-Implementation Gaps:** Laws supporting gender equity often fail due to weak enforcement or lack of technical capacity. Strengthening local-level administration, coordination among development partners, and consistent implementation are critical.
- 3. Participatory Land Governance:** Local governance mechanisms, including Commune Dispute Resolution Committees (Cambodia) and Village Agriculture and Forestry Subunits (Lao PDR), need gender-inclusive participation. Training, gender sensitisation, and accountability measures are essential to ensure women's meaningful involvement.
- 4. Addressing Gendered Social Norms:** Transforming deep-rooted patriarchal values requires long-term engagement with communities. Civil society, government, and local champions – both women and men – should collaborate to promote equitable norms, backed by education and advocacy campaigns.
- 5. Institutional Support:** Strengthening women-focused institutions such as the LWU, VWU, and local women's organisations can enhance advocacy, provide legal literacy programs, and monitor progress in land governance.

Conclusion

Despite relatively progressive legal frameworks in parts of the Mekong region, women continue to face systemic barriers to land ownership and use, particularly ethnic minority and rural women. Challenges arise from legal pluralism, weak enforcement, patriarchal norms, limited access to financial resources, and low representation in governance structures.

Effective interventions require coordinated, multi-level approaches. This includes strengthening awareness and legal literacy among women, particularly in ethnic minority communities, while ensuring their meaningful representation and participation in land governance institutions. It also entails addressing persistent economic barriers by reducing costs and expanding access to credit and financial services. These efforts must be complemented by participatory land governance mechanisms that actively engage local communities, including marginalised women, alongside stronger coordination among government, civil society, and development partners to promote policy coherence and achieve gender-equitable outcomes.

Securing women's land rights in the Mekong region is essential not only for gender equity but also for social stability, food security, and sustainable rural development.

2.5 Pacific Island Countries

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Photograph courtesy of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Overview of Regional Context

The Pacific consists of approximately 22 large oceanic states³ commonly grouped into three cultural-geographic sub-regions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (**Figure 4**).

3 A reframing of 'small island developing states' and excluding Australia and New Zealand.

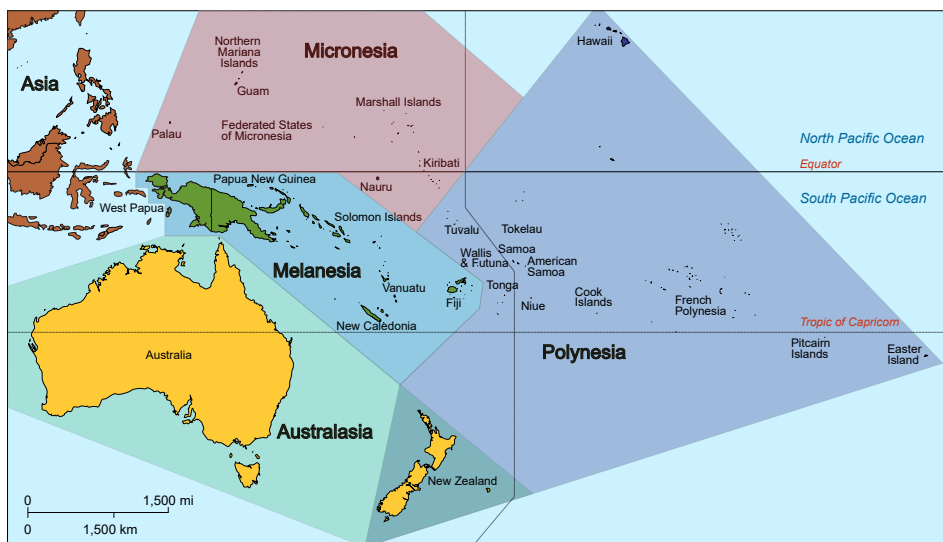


Figure 4: Map of Pacific regions

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oceania_Regions.svg

These states vary greatly in land area and population, from micro-states such as Nauru and Niue to much larger countries and economies such as Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Marine Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) vastly outweigh terrestrial areas. Key development dynamics shared in the Pacific include acute climate and disaster vulnerability; geographic isolation; small, open economies vulnerable to external shocks; rapid but uneven urbanisation; and constrained fiscal and governance capacity (Duke et al., 2025; World Bank, 2025). Against these challenges, access to land remains a critical safety net, shaping how households absorb shocks and adapt to change. However, these dynamics are experienced unevenly, with women’s access to land and decision-making power often more insecure despite women playing central roles in livelihood and climate adaptation efforts (McLeod et al., 2018; Rohe et al., 2018).

Legal Framework Barriers and Progress

Almost all Pacific Island states are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and have constitutional provisions prohibiting gender discrimination (Farran, 2015) – with Tonga, and to a lesser extent Palau, remaining outside the convention. Yet these formal commitments have translated unevenly into practice, particularly in sectors such as land where enforcement is mediated through customary institutions (Jivan & Forster, 2009). Constitutional recognition of customary tenure and indigenous authority has led to legally plural systems, with state law and custom coexisting, often shaped by broader historical and social norms, including Christianity (Monson, 2023). With customary land ownership accounting for over 80% of land in most Pacific countries (AusAID, 2008b), this pluralism frequently leads to the marginalization of women’s voices and rights, whether through exclusion from decision-making spaces or the ‘invisibility’ of women’s land uses (AusAID, 2008b, 2008a; Farran, 2005; Nagarajan & MacDermott, 2013). As a result, land law reform is often constrained by constitutional protections of customary tenure, limiting the effectiveness of statutory change and, in some cases, reinforcing existing inequalities. Pacific women are thus frequently more tenure insecure than

men, with their access to land predicated on familial relationships and customary practice.

Tonga presents an extreme case, being the only Pacific nation **not** a signatory to CEDAW⁴: women are legally prohibited from owning land and their access is limited to conditional arrangements such as leases or life estate interests for widows (Farran, 2015; Moa, 2017) (Farran, 2005). These rights are typically temporary and contingent: women cannot transfer them, may lose them upon remarriage and access can depend on social approval. This reflects a system in which women's relationship to land is dependent and mediated, rather than one of secure legal entitlement.

Elsewhere, more nuanced patterns emerge. In Nauru, women can and do formally own and inherit land, but highly fragmented ownership structures often dilute individual control⁵. Samoan women can hold 'matai' (chiefly) titles, enabling their control and management of land, though this remains rare in practice. In the Cook Islands, women play a key role in family councils, which determine land management matters (Farran, 2005). In Vanuatu, a well-established leasehold system provides a pathway for women to access land, and, in principle, finance (McDonnell, 2023); however, banking practices, group-ownership arrangements and gendered barriers to credit often limit such opportunities in practice. In Papua New Guinea, the gender asset gap remains significant and women's land rights – whether in matrilineal or patrilineal systems – remain subject to heavily male-dominated systems of decision-making across household, community and government institutions (Kwapena, 2024). In many of these jurisdictions, challenging social norms can expose women to social sanction, including violence and displacement (Kwapena, 2024; Moa, 2017).

As seen in other regions, inheritance rules and norms are similarly gendered. In Kiribati, the National Lands Ordinance 1998 favours male heirs, with spouses not considered as next of kin (UN Women, 2022), and the case is similar in Tuvalu in cases of intestacy (e.g. Farran, 2005). Whilst localised examples exist of empowered (and typically wealthier) women changing family inheritance and land decision-making practices, these tend to be informal and exceptional (e.g. Ferguson Irlanda et al. (2025) discuss the context of Fiji).

Women's participation in land-related decision-making remains a key constraint. As Farran (2005) writes, "if management vests in the head of the family, invariably that head is a male. If decisions are made in the meeting places of men, to which women have little or limited access, then those decisions will be made by men." This is compounded by practical barriers including limited access to legal aid, low land administration literacy, and the cost and social difficulty of engaging with formal dispute mechanisms (Monson, 2023; Nagarajan & MacDermott, 2013).

Institutional Barriers and Progress

"In many Pacific Islands, custom, culture and religion have a strong influence on people's behaviour and value systems. The practice of traditional resource management

4 Noting further that Palau has signed but not yet ratified the Convention. Farran (2015) further notes that Vanuatu remains the only Pacific State to have also adopted CEDAW within domestic law, a necessary step for implementation under dualist legal systems.

5 Arguably, Nauru is yet another context where the colonial push to formalise land led to the loss of women's prior interests in and control of land, in what was then a largely matrilineal society. See e.g. MacSporran (1995).

systems; the chiefly system of leadership, and placing the church as the central organising unit in the villages are a few examples of such practices” (Ram-Bidesi, 2015, p. 3).

Women’s political representation in the Pacific remains low, with only around 7% of parliamentarians being women (J. Collins, 2024), reflecting broader structural inequalities. Gender-based violence also persists at alarming levels (Jewkes et al., 2017), reinforcing constraints on women’s participation in public and economic life.

At the institutional level, the interplay of formal and informal land institutions, and the ‘remaking’ of rules through processes of land formalisation, remains a central constraint to improving women’s access to land. Efforts to codify customary tenure can reconfigure authority in ways that marginalise women (Monson, 2023). Translating flexible, relational practices into rigid statutory frameworks often entrenches patrilineal norms, centralises authority in male leaders, and introduces procedural barriers to recognition and dispute resolution (Monson, 2023; Stege, 2008).

This tension is evident in Papua New Guinea, where land registration initiatives have had mixed outcomes. While joint titling is promoted as good practice, in matrilineal contexts it has sometimes undermined women’s empowerment, particularly where inheritance systems are poorly reflected in law (Kwapena, 2024). These gaps can enable powerful male actors to capture and reshape outcomes. Institutional processes surrounding land – including courts, negotiations and administrative procedures – tend to channel authority through male leaders, marginalising women’s roles even where customary systems previously recognised them (Monson, 2023).

Institutional weaknesses further compound these challenges. Limited state capacity in remote island contexts restricts access to services, legal systems, and education. Where natural resource extraction dominates, risks such as opaque transactions, elite capture, and weak oversight undermine equitable outcomes (Transparency International, 2024).

Even with safeguards, interventions can reproduce inequalities. In the Tina River Hydro-power Project in Solomon Islands, women were excluded from the Landowner Council despite matrilineal traditions (Radclyffe & Foukona, 2026, p. 14). More broadly, state, donor, and church-led reforms often reinforce male-dominated authority structures, marginalising women’s land rights (Monson, 2023).

A key opportunity for the Pacific lies in examining how women’s resource access operates across the land-sea interface. Coastal zones – including shorelines, reefs, mangroves, and nearshore fisheries – are central to many Pacific women’s livelihoods, yet formal tenure systems often fail to recognise the overlapping and gendered nature of claims across land and marine domains⁶. Women play critical roles in nearshore fisheries, informal governance, and ecological stewardship, but these contributions are rarely reflected in formal tenure arrangements or decision-making bodies (Harper et al., 2013). Community-based and co-management approaches, while often promoted as inclusive, frequently reproduce patriarchal norms, resulting in women’s exclusion from rules, committees and benefit streams (Ram-Bidesi, 2015). This exclusion is not only inequitable but has governance implications: women’s marginalisation from marine decision-making is associated with lower compliance with local management rules, having consequences for ecological sustainability (Rohe et al., 2018).

6 Especially when such land is – or becomes – government land.

Socio-cultural Barriers and Progress

“Land is treasured in the Pacific, but it is often forgotten how precious it is to women” (Huffer, 2008, p. i). While women may hold recognised rights under customary systems, these are frequently constrained in practice by patrilineal biases, male-dominated authority structures, and the growing influence of commercial and extractive activities.

Importantly, matrilineal systems do not automatically secure women’s land rights. Evidence from across Melanesia shows that processes such as commodification, state engagement, and the institutionalisation of male “spokesperson” roles can shift effective authority over land to men, even where descent is traced through women. Women’s land rights in such systems often remain mediated through their relationships with male relatives, rather than exercised independently (Naupa & Simo, 2008).

A more nuanced understanding of Pacific women’s land rights as socially embedded, enacted and relational, rather than purely legal or formal is necessary (McDonnell, 2023; Monson, 2023). In Vanuatu and elsewhere in Melanesia, contemporary, often male-led interpretations of *kastom* have progressively marginalised women from land decision-making, even where women maintain substantial customary responsibilities for land and resources (McDonnell, 2023). Pacific feminist and *kastom*-focused scholarship suggest that strategies and stories which foreground women’s *kastom* knowledge, descent- and place-based ties may be more effective pathways into decision-making spaces than approaches focused only on formal legal rights (McDonnell, 2023). This framing is significant given the historic obscuring of women’s relationships to land through colonial and missionary interventions, alongside male-dominated anthropological accounts.

‘Place’ is further important in terms of the location of decision-making. Whether in courts, land tribunals, or traditional meeting places, these arenas are typically socially and culturally coded as male, limiting women’s attendance and participation (Maetala, 2008; McDonnell, 2023).

Social dynamics with respect to land are further shaped by broader pressures, including population growth, urbanisation, land scarcity, and climate change: “as land becomes scarce, it is daughters rather than sons who are losing access” (McDonnell, 2023, p. 160). At the same time, changing social norms and the increasing awareness among younger generations are creating new opportunities for contestation and change.

Socio-economic Barriers and Progress

Limited access to finance and financial services – including limited collateral, low formal income recognition, and, in some contexts, restricted banking access – limits women’s ability to engage in land-related transactions, investments, or dispute processes. These challenges are particularly acute in remote contexts, where distance, cost, and limited institutional presence further constrain access. Gaps in legal and financial literacy also affect women’s ability to claim and defend their rights. Women’s engagement with land is therefore shaped not only by gender, but also by class, geography, education, and kinship relations (Monson, 2023; Rohe et al., 2018).

A further barrier lies in the systematic undervaluation of women’s roles, especially in land–sea food systems. Mangrove ecosystems (critical for biodiversity, carbon storage, and food security) are often overlooked in food systems research because they sit at the land–sea interface and because women’s harvesting activities are categorised as

“subsistence” rather than productive economic activity (Bruckner & Paia, 2025). This framing obscures both the scale and significance of women’s contributions, reinforcing their exclusion from policy attention and resource governance.

Research from the Solomon Islands illustrates how these dynamics operate in practice. Women play a central role in harvesting shellfish and other nearshore resources in mangrove ecosystems however this labour is frequently ‘invisible’ because it is socially coded as informal or domestic (Bruckner & Paia, 2025). This invisibility weakens the perceived legitimacy of women’s claims to coastal and intertidal spaces and has broader implications for climate adaptation, food security and indigenous sovereignty. Strengthening women’s socioeconomic position – through improved financial inclusion, land literacy, and recognition of gendered livelihood systems – is therefore central to building more equitable and resilient land–sea governance frameworks.

Women also remain underrepresented in land administration, surveying, and geospatial sectors. While participation is increasing in areas such as GIS, planning, and administration, qualified female surveyors (and indeed, surveyors of both genders) remain rare. In 2015, Tonga had its first female surveyor, which marked a step forward for gender inclusion in the profession; as of 2025, Fiji reported 3 female surveyors out of a total of 50 (Wise, 2025). Expanding women’s representation in these technical and decision-making roles is an important, though often overlooked, pathway to strengthening gender equity in land governance.

Strategies, Advocacy and Good Practices

Strong examples of women’s leadership and action in the Pacific include:

- **Kiribati Women in Mapping**, a non-government organisation dedicated to empowering women and young girls to build meaningful careers in mapping. KWIM provides training, pathways to independence and employment, and to enable women to contribute to broader development initiatives (Babera, 2025).
- Establishment of the **Pacific Geospatial Women’s Network**, endorsed by the Pacific Geospatial and Survey Council and with direct support from the PGSC Secretariat within The Pacific Community (SPC). PGWN seeks to increase women’s capacity and leadership in geospatial sectors and provides training and supported community-based mapping and natural resource management initiatives.
- In PNG a ‘whole of family approach’ to customary land reform is suggested as a more effective approach to supporting women’s equitable land rights, targeting ‘family’ livelihoods and land uses, rather than individual women’s or men’s land rights.
- In Vanuatu, financial inclusion initiatives led by the National Bank of Vanuatu and development partners such as UNDP and ANZ include targeted financial literacy and savings programmes for rural women market vendors, aiming to strengthen budgeting, savings, and business management skills as part of broader women’s economic empowerment efforts.
- In Solomon Islands, leveraging church networks for land-related awareness and advocacy, coordinating responses to logging and mining proposals, and reinterpreting women’s church and community groups to emphasise women’s

descent- and place-based ties to land, present important alternatives to purely legal or formal reform (Monson, 2023).

Conclusion

In most Pacific nations, insecure land access and uncertain property rights constrain women's economic empowerment and well-being. Rapid urbanisation, climate change, disasters, and geographic isolation further heighten vulnerability, particularly where tenure is insecure. In this context, gender-responsive land administration and planning, supported by disaggregated data, are essential. Equally important is the inclusive participation of all community members in land use and climate adaptation processes, as excluding women undermines both equity and resilience outcomes. Priority actions include recognising women's land relationships and practices, creating neutral decision-making spaces, and improving access to information and land education. Particular attention is needed at the land-sea interface, where climate change and sea-level rise intensify risks. Without securing women's rights in these dynamic coastal zones, future gender equality in the Pacific remains at risk.

3 ACTORS AND PARTNERSHIPS ADVANCING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

Advancing women's land rights requires coordinated action across multiple levels, bringing together international organisations, development partners, civil society, professional networks, and the private sector. While global normative frameworks establish principles and commitments, their translation into practice depends on the collective efforts of actors who generate evidence, support policy reform, strengthen institutions, and engage directly with communities.

The organisations presented in this section play complementary roles in advancing women's land rights and have been actively engaged with FIG's Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying, in line with its objective to foster partnerships and coordinated action across the global landscape. Through this engagement, the Working Group contributes to and draws from ongoing efforts, helping to position surveyors and other land professionals within broader initiatives promoting women's land rights.

These organisations combine advocacy, technical assistance, capacity development, data production, and on-the-ground implementation to address the legal, institutional, social, and economic barriers that continue to constrain women's access to land and tenure security. Their work spans global policy dialogue, regional initiatives, and country-level interventions, reflecting the diversity of contexts in which women's land rights are pursued.

A common thread across these efforts is the recognition that securing women's land rights requires more than legal reform alone. It demands integrated approaches that link law and practice, strengthen land administration systems, promote inclusive governance, challenge discriminatory norms, and leverage innovation and technology. Increasingly, these actors also emphasise the importance of partnerships among governments, civil society, grassroots movements, and surveyors and other land professionals to ensure that interventions are both context-responsive and sustainable.

The following contributions illustrate how different organisations are advancing women's land rights through distinct yet interconnected pathways. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of current efforts, lessons learned, and opportunities for collaboration, offering valuable insights for surveyors and other land professionals seeking to engage in this agenda.

3.1 *The World Bank: Supporting Ownership and Use of Economic Assets*

Victoria Stanley (USA) and **Jennifer Lisher** (USA)

The World Bank Gender Strategy for 2024–2030 (World Bank, 2024b) aims to accelerate gender equality by focusing on three strategic objectives: end gender-based violence and elevate human capital; expand and enable economic opportunities; and engage women as leaders.

These strategic objectives reflect both the intrinsic value of gender equality and its contribution to advancing development outcomes. Under objective 2 to expand and enable women's economic opportunities, the Strategy recognises the important role of women's access to and ownership of housing, land and property with an outcome area to "expand ownership and use of economic assets".

The Bank has learned that strengthening women’s rights to land and other property leads not only to economic benefits (land value/agricultural productivity, access to credit, off-farm income) but also to social benefits (improved bargaining power within the household and community).

Emerging evidence shows that strengthening women’s land rights can have positive impacts across a range of outcomes (**Figure 5**), including greater bargaining and decision-making power for women; reduced domestic violence; increased consumption; and better child welfare (Stanley & Lisher, 2023).

The Bank recommends three categories of interventions that can strengthen women’s rights to land and other assets (Stanley & Lisher, 2023):

- a) Legal, regulatory, policy, and institutional reforms.** Interventions include recognising women’s right to access, own, transfer, bequeath, and inherit land; designating the default marital property regime as community property; public outreach; and training.
- b) Clarification and formalisation of women’s land rights.** This entails ensuring that women’s ownership and use rights – whether individually, jointly, or collectively – are documented in land mapping, titling, regularisation, and spatial planning efforts.
- c) Women’s participation in land governance functions and institutions:** Aside from formalising or registering land rights, it is important to ensure women’s participation in land governance bodies, so that they have more say in longer-term land management and allocation decisions.

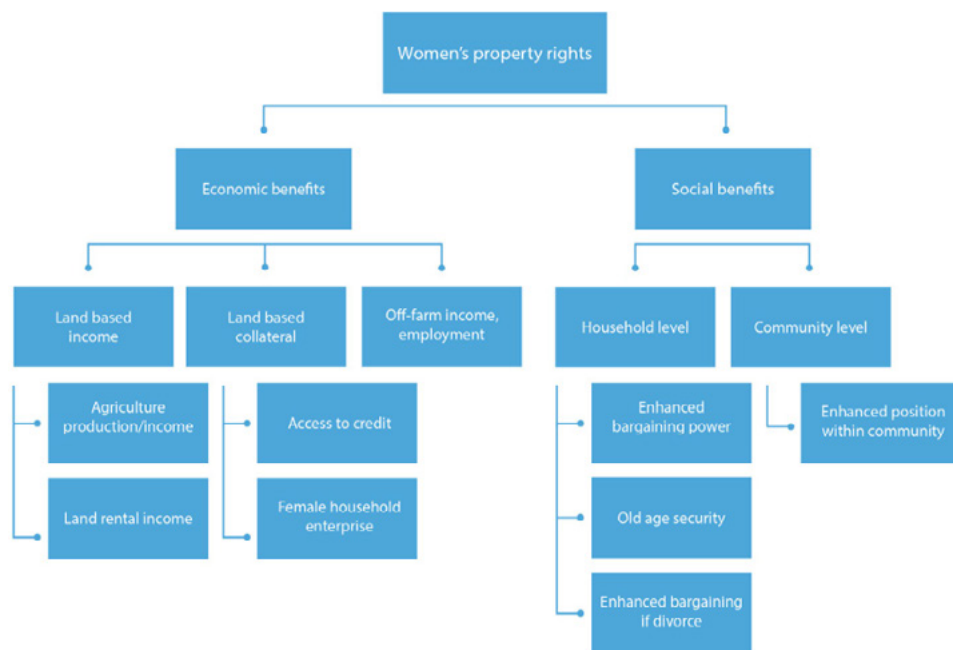


Figure 5: Conceptual framework for potential effects of the formalisation of women’s property rights.

Source: World Bank. Gender Issues and Best Practices in Land Administration Projects, 2005, updated 2023

World Bank projects and financing have been used across these three categories to improve women's land rights and economic opportunities.

Support for improved land legislation has also been provided under World Bank investment financing. In Ghana, the First and Second Land Administration Projects (P120636) provided extensive support for new land legislation, including the provision that properties acquired during marriage are to be registered jointly in the names of both spouses. In Albania, the Gender Equality in Access to Economic Opportunities Development Policy Operation (P160594) supported government mandates for notaries to recognise the co-ownership of immovable property obtained during marriage under the community of property regime. The State Cadastre Agency issued guidelines for registration offices to correct the under-registration of women co-owners in Albania's existing property registries by refilling immovable properties registered in the name of one spouse that were presumed to be co-owned.

Much of the **World Bank's work is in systematic demarcation and registration**. In the recently completed Mozambique Land Administration Project (MozLand) (P164551), the Project supported the Government in issuing 1.37 million Land Use and Benefit Rights Certificates (DUAT) to 686,561 beneficiaries, with **women accounting for 44 per cent of the DUAT beneficiaries**, both individual and jointly titled. This was done by combining public information and mobilisation campaigns, training Community-Based Paralegals, and an active campaign to encourage men to register their land jointly with their wives. One of the learnings from Bank operations is that when wives are present for parcel demarcation in the field, they are more likely to understand and request their name on the certificate, and husbands are more likely to agree to have their wives' names on the title.

A long-term investment in awareness-raising and engagement with beneficiary communities can begin to change norms around women's land rights. In Nicaragua, during the Land Administration Program (PRODEP) (2002–2024), the social assessment found that, though recently passed gender-sensitive legislation required land titles to be issued jointly to husband and wife, the data suggested that joint titling was limited. This facilitated the development of a gender strategy directly linked to the project's communication strategy and grievance redress mechanism, and the mainstreaming of gender across all project activities throughout the PRODEP program. It helped empower women beneficiaries by raising awareness about their land rights; **51 per cent of beneficiaries were women**, both individual and jointly titled.

Under the Liberia Land Administration Project (P162893), the project supported the new Liberia Land Authority to pilot key provisions of the Liberia Land Rights Act of 2018, which **recognised customary land rights in Liberia for the first time in the country's history and that women should be part of the customary land management committees**. A pilot customary land registration was implemented in 4 communities, consisting of about 29,529 community members. In each community, the project supported the establishment of Community Land Development and Management Committees, comprising 50 per cent women and 35 per cent youth (18–35 years old).

Beyond project interventions, the World Bank has been developing tools and analytics to support the integration of gender into land projects. For example, the Toolkit for Integrating Gender in Land Projects draws on secondary research and applied experience to provide recommendations and tools for successfully integrating gender into the design and implementation of land projects, programs, and activities. Further,

the Bank supports the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign as a critical component to building advocacy and political will at the country level and building women's capacity to advocate for their land rights.

3.2 *FAO: Policy Dialogue and Inclusive Land Governance for Driving Women's Land Rights Reforms*

Muriel Veldman (The Netherlands) and **Ghita Abouyoub** (Morocco)

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) champions women's land rights as a cornerstone of its Strategic Framework 2022–2031. This commitment is central to transforming agrifood systems for Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life, ensuring no one is left behind. Gender equality and women's empowerment are cross-cutting themes across all FAO programs and intrinsically linked to its mandate to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. Within this framework, FAO's Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP) leads work on rural institutions, social protection, gender equality, decent rural employment, tenure rights, and the right to food. ESP strengthens national capacities to formulate gender-responsive land, agricultural, and rural development policies, laws, and programs, supporting implementation of FAO's Policy on Gender Equality (2020–2030), the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), and the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition.

As a custodian agency for SDG indicator 5.a.2, ESP coordinates the global effort to assess whether national legal frameworks protect women's rights to land ownership, control, inheritance, and participation in land-related decision-making. The process engages governments, civil society, legal experts, academia, and traditional and religious leaders to identify gaps, set priorities, and align national laws with international, regional, and national commitments.

By February 2026, close to 100 countries are reporting on SDG 5.a.2, with around 40 reporting or updating processes ongoing and over 35 countries having pre-filled draft reports prepared with FAO support. In 2025, FAO launched the first comprehensive update round under the four-year cycle, allowing governments to track legal changes over time, measure reforms, identify barriers, and demonstrate progress.

Capacity strengthening underpins this work. Multi-country webinars in July and October 2025 reached over 300 participants from 83 countries, including NSO representatives, government officials, legal experts, civil society, women's groups, youth groups, and Indigenous representatives. Partners from the International Land Coalition (ILC), UN Women, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) also participated, strengthening inter-agency coordination, promoting regional coherence, and facilitating the exchange of good practices in support of women's land rights reforms.

The sessions focused on the SDG 5.a.2 methodology and legal assessment tool, strengthening countries' capacity to manage reporting processes independently and to use findings in national policy dialogue. As a result, reporting is becoming more institutionalised,

civil society engagement is expanding, and evidence from SDG 5.a.2 is increasingly informing land and gender reform agendas. Broader data coverage and increased country engagement are fostering peer learning and subregional exchanges, allowing governments to share experiences and practical solutions. In response to rising demand, FAO is revising its learning strategy to strengthen interactivity and provide more sustained technical support. At the same time, the SDG 5.a.2 methodology and tools continue to evolve, enabling context-specific analysis, capturing collective and customary tenure arrangements, and improving the assessment of temporary special measures.

A growing community of practice has emerged around the indicator, including SDG 5.a.2 focal points, legal experts, civil society actors, and parliamentarians. Cross-country learning is particularly valuable for reforms in land, family, and inheritance law, which often involve sensitive cultural or religious norms. In countries such as Mozambique, Guinea, the Gambia, Cameroon, and Eswatini, SDG 5.a.2 findings are informing national discussions on land governance, and demand for technical support continues to grow, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Complementing legal monitoring, SDG 5.a.1 (also under FAO custodianship) tracks agricultural land ownership and secure tenure by sex, with 49 countries reporting. Together, 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 allow countries to compare legal frameworks with outcomes, assess whether protections translate into improvements, and inform targeted measures. This is supported by initiatives such as the 50x2030 Initiative, which strengthens the availability of reliable, sex-disaggregated data.

SDG 5.a.2 is increasingly used to support reporting under international human rights instruments, including CEDAW, linking legal frameworks to on-the-ground tenure outcomes. Since 2015, FAO, GIZ and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the International Union of Notaries (UINL) have partnered in the Western Balkans to strengthen women's land rights through SDG 5.a.2 reporting, notary guidelines, national trainings, and multi-stakeholder gender teams, boosting female land ownership and informing legal reforms; the initiative was recognised as an SDG good practice in 2021. In Iraq, FAO supported the 5.a.2 reporting process in 2025, enhancing coordination across federal and Kurdistan Region ministries, the Supreme Judicial Council, and civil society, while mapping legal barriers and opportunities. In Tanzania, the 2024 update informed the review of the 1995 National Land Policy, highlighted inheritance gaps, and fostered dialogue between Mainland and Zanzibar authorities. In Sierra Leone, FAO collaborates with the Ministry of Land, Housing and Country Planning and the World Bank to strengthen land administration, monitor the implementation of land reforms, and support inclusive registration and dispute-resolution systems that enhance women's and vulnerable groups' access to secure land rights. In Chad, FAO collaborates with Oxfam Novib and Kadaster International under the RVO Land-at-Scale programme to strengthen gender-transformative and youth-inclusive land governance, building local capacity so women and young people actively shape tenure decisions.

Beyond land-sector reforms, SDG evidence is increasingly integrated into environmental and climate-related programming. Through Global Environment Facility (GEF)-supported initiatives, FAO assists more than 40 countries in incorporating gender equality into drought management, land degradation neutrality and sustainable land governance. A GEF-8-funded project in Kyrgyzstan, Paraguay, South Sudan and Sri Lanka, currently implemented with the ILC and partners, aims to strengthen inclusive and gender-equitable land tenure governance. Through these efforts, FAO contributes to the

implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity, reinforcing the importance of secure land rights for women for environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

These country – and cross-sector experiences generate evidence and practical knowledge on land governance and administration. Lessons from SDG 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 feed directly into methodological refinement, policy guidance, and capacity building, helping national statistical systems and other relevant national institutions (including land and gender) capture and use sex-disaggregated data to inform policies, planning, and investments. FAO disseminates findings through its data platforms and key publications, providing evidence that supports policy reform, legal drafting, and multi-actor platforms globally. With nearly 100 reporting countries, 40 ongoing processes, and over 35 pre-filled reports, SDG 5.a.2 has evolved into a dynamic tool for linking legal frameworks with tenure outcomes, enabling governments, surveyors, and land managers to track progress, identify gaps, and improve women’s land rights in practice.

3.3 UN-Habitat and GLTN: Global Land Actors Committed to Improving Tenure Security for All

Hellen Ndung’u (Kenya)

The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) is a dynamic, multisectoral alliance of global land actors committed to improving tenure security for all, prioritising women, youth, and vulnerable groups in both urban and rural contexts.

Established in 2006 to address gaps in land governance and administration, GLTN develops inclusive, practical, and innovative tools that follow the **continuum of land rights (Figure 6)**, enabling recognition of diverse tenure types within legal and administrative systems. These tools are grounded in normative development, complemented by testing in countries to ensure real-world applicability and impact.

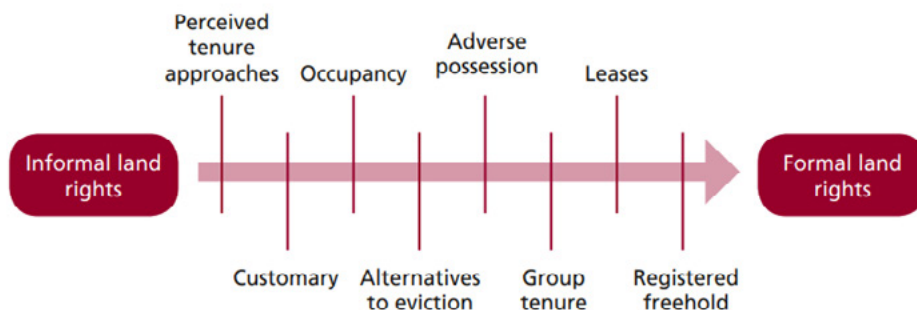


Figure 6: The Continuum of Rights.

Source: UN-HABITAT et al. (2012)

From its inception, gender equality and secure land rights for women and girls have been central to GLTN’s mission. In 2006, a gender mechanism was adopted at the World Urban Forum to guide the development of gender-responsive land tools, ensuring that women’s tenure rights are recognised and protected alongside men’s.

GLTN addresses inequalities across formal, customary, and informal tenure systems, applying its approaches to rural and indigenous lands, urban informal settlements, conflict-affected areas, and contexts impacted by climate change.

GLTN operationalises its commitment through legal, technical, advocacy, and capacity-building interventions. Key strategies include:

- **Supporting governments in revising laws and policies** to remove discriminatory provisions and develop innovative, gender-responsive land governance frameworks. Between 2019 and 2023, these efforts have enhanced tenure security for approximately 329 million people globally, including over 166 million women and girls.
- **Promoting inclusive land registration practices**, such as joint spousal registration, inclusion of daughters in tenurial instruments, registration of single women heads of households, and advocating for tax incentives to improve women's access to land.
- **Implementing GLTN land tools at scale** to facilitate the collection of socio-economic and geospatial data and secure recognition of rights for women and other vulnerable groups. This resulted in improved tenure security for over 388,000 households, including 182,000 women.
- **Capacity building and awareness-raising**, targeting government officials, traditional authorities, civil society, grassroots organisations, and local communities to challenge discriminatory norms and empower women to claim and manage land rights.
- **Advocacy and partnerships**, including campaigns such as the Women and Land Campaign in the Arab region and the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign, leveraging collaboration with governments, civil society, and FIG's Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying.
- **Monitoring progress through SDG land indicators**, notably SDG 1.4.2, supporting National Statistical Offices and land registries across multiple countries to collect sex-disaggregated land data and inform evidence-based policymaking.

GLTN's work also emphasises applying its tools to diverse contexts, including recognising customary and indigenous rights, communal and group tenure systems, securing tenure in urban informal settlements, and mitigating land vulnerabilities related to climate change and conflict.

Across all interventions, GLTN aims to **leave no one behind**, ensuring that women and girls have equitable access to, use of, and control over land.

Based on GLTN's experience, advancing women's and girls' land rights requires:

1. **Institutionalising gender-responsive, FFPLA** approach tools and applying the continuum of land rights approach to improve tenure security for all.
2. **Strengthening legal and policy frameworks** at national and local levels, including effective enforcement of reforms.
3. **Building the capacity of policymakers, traditional leaders, and community actors** to promote women's and girls' land rights.
4. **Fostering partnerships** among governments, civil society, traditional authorities, and grassroots movements to leverage expertise, networks, and resources.

5. **Engaging men alongside women in gender-transformative approaches** to challenge discriminatory social norms, laws, and inheritance practices.
6. **Supporting monitoring and use of sex-disaggregated data**, including SDG land indicators, to inform policy decisions and track progress.

Through these interventions, GLTN demonstrates how surveyors and other land professionals can play a critical role in promoting gender equality, securing land rights, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable land governance globally.

3.4 *The Arab Land Initiative: Supporting Women's Land Rights in the Arab Region*

Eleonora Serpi (UN-Habitat)

The Arab Land Initiative of UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), has undertaken a wide range of activities to promote women's land rights across the Arab region - one of the key themes of focus of the Initiative. Recognising that secure land rights are essential for women's empowerment, poverty reduction, and the realisation of the SDGs, the Initiative launched several interconnected efforts at the regional and national level.

Regional advocacy and awareness campaigns

A cornerstone of this work was the regional Women and Land Campaign, launched in February 2021 in partnership with the Stand for Her Land Campaign, which ran until mid-2022. The campaign aimed to raise awareness of the legal, cultural, and social barriers that women in the Arab region face in securing their land rights, as well as the avenues to claim and protect them. The campaign adopted a phased communications approach to highlight the broader development benefits of women's land tenure security.

A digital communications strategy formed the backbone of the campaign. Sixty-two message cards, in Arabic and English, were widely disseminated via social media platforms of UN-Habitat, GLTN, and partners, as well as in print during high-level events. This effort reached over 80,000 people, with about 40,000 actively engaging with the content online.

Country-level engagements

The regional campaign was complemented by targeted national activities in Lebanon, Tunisia and Libya, with the support of UN-Habitat country offices.

In Lebanon, the campaign was conducted in partnership with the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) from April to December 2022. It began with a high-level roundtable in December, attended by 72 stakeholders from civil society, media, and legal organisations. The campaign featured testimonial videos, brochures, and success stories, and introduced the Lebanese legal context related to women's land rights. The outreach garnered over 3.5 million impressions and reached more than 2 million people. Brochures included contact information for legal aid providers, facilitating referrals for women seeking support.

As a follow-up, in 2025, UN-Habitat and NCLW began work on a policy brief exploring local practices that impede women's access to land rights in Lebanon, to advance

knowledge on the subject, raise awareness, and ultimately advocate for effective solutions and evidence-based policies to address the prevailing challenges.

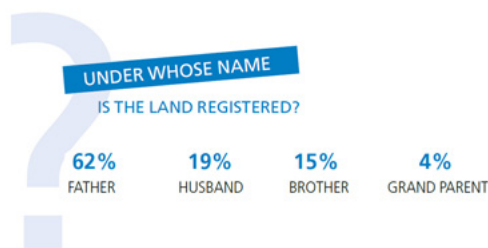
In Tunisia and Libya, a joint introductory workshop was held in Tunis in September 2022. It brought together about 30 experts and activists from both countries to align local strategies with the regional campaign. Follow-up activities focused on raising awareness of the socio-economic importance of land rights. The campaign reached about 8,000 people in Tunisia and 15,000 in Libya.

Research, knowledge sharing, and capacity building

In 2019, UN-Habitat partnered with the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) of Palestine to generate evidence on the linkages between land rights, women’s empowerment, and socio-economic development in the Arab region. This collaboration produced a study titled “Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region: Evidence-based Perspectives” (UN-Habitat et al., 2023).

LAND REGISTRATIONS PATTERNS

Women are less likely to have individual ownership rights in their names compared to men



LAND USE AND LAND MANAGEMENT PATTERNS



WHY WOMEN ARE RESTRAINED FROM CLAIMING THEIR RIGHTS?

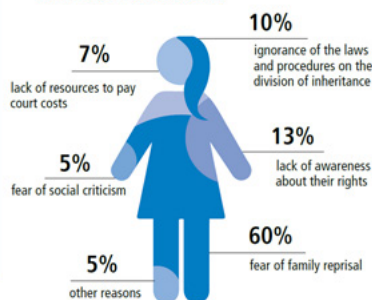


Figure 7: The gender dimension of land use and land management patterns in the Arab region

Source: (UN-Habitat et al., 2023)

The research drew from literature reviews, stakeholder consultations, and fieldwork in Palestine, Tunisia, Iraq, and Kuwait. It found that gender inequality in land matters extended beyond ownership, affecting use, control, and economic benefit. It affirmed that secure land rights enhance women’s decision-making power, social status, and protection from gender-based violence. The study culminated in concrete policy recommendations on legal reform, data improvement, awareness, and women’s participation. A decision-maker’s brief was also produced to facilitate advocacy.

To promote the study’s findings, an Expert Group Meeting was held in February 2021 with 96 participants, including government representatives, civil society, academics,

and grassroots women. Discussions emphasised the need for sex- and age-disaggregated data on tenure insecurity, forced displacement, and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) violations, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

Two major **training events** followed. The first, held in Hebron, Palestine, in June 2021, brought together 147 participants, including both women and male allies, to explore gender, power dynamics, and HLP rights. The second, in Erbil, Iraq, in October 2021, focused on gender-equitable land governance, including legal and technical challenges and effective communication approaches.

To further regional dialogue, in 2022, the Arab Land Initiative facilitated a twinning initiative between Bena Foundation (Egypt) and Masarat Nesaya (Tunisia). This project used a feminist lens to examine how patriarchal social norms affect women's inheritance rights and broader land governance. Activities included oral history collection and capacity-building for planners, lawyers, sociologists, and activists. By focusing on Egypt and Tunisia, two states with contrasting legal systems but similar social norms, the initiative fostered knowledge exchange and joint advocacy.

Women's land rights were also a key theme discussed at the Second Arab Land Conference in Cairo, 2021, and the Third Arab Land Conference in Rabat, 2025. This was done through dedicated high-level sessions, roundtables, and technical sessions.

3.5 The International Land Coalition: Promoting People-Centred Land Governance

Dina Naguib (Egypt)

The International Land Coalition (ILC) works to remove customary barriers and cultural constraints that prevent women from accessing land, and to promote people-centred land governance through its 10 global commitments (ILC, 2023). Commitment 4 explicitly calls on members to ensure gender justice in land, pursuing both **de jure** and **de facto equality**, enabling women to defend their land rights, participate in decision-making, and exercise equal control over land and its benefits.

Advancing women's land rights is central to social, economic, and environmental justice. ILC's Women Land Rights Programme employs **Gender Transformative Approaches (GTAs)**, which actively challenge gender norms, confront stereotypes, promote equitable resource sharing, and ensure inclusive decision-making, addressing the root causes of discrimination. GTAs transform underlying power dynamics, strengthening women's leadership and participation in land governance.

ILC's network comprises **people's organisations** accountable to those who depend on land for their livelihoods, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, and landless people. Among its 27 women's organisations, over 1.1 million women across 22 countries are represented. Each region appoints women leaders to a global reference group, the Women's Organisations Constituency Platform, fostering cross-regional collaboration and leadership development.

Women-led organisations within ILC have demonstrated leadership in training, mentoring, and advocacy. Notably, collaboration with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) led to a ten-year agenda for women's land rights across member states, advancing joint land ownership for spouses, raising awareness of women's rights, and establishing reporting mechanisms.

ILC also leverages international treaties such as CEDAW and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to hold governments accountable and, in 2019, supported the creation of the Global Feminist Land Platform, a space for feminist organisations and land defenders to collaborate and shape the global discourse on gender justice in land governance.

Multi-Level Approach: Local to Global

ILC engages in multi-level strategies to advance **gender justice in land governance**, empowering women to claim, secure, and exercise their land rights while transforming power structures, policies, and practices. By combining legal support, capacity building, advocacy, data, funding, and cross-regional networks, ILC demonstrates how global surveyors and other land professionals, as well as networks, can contribute to equitable and sustainable tenure security for women and vulnerable populations.

These approaches are:

(i) Member Organisations and National Land Coalitions (NLCs)

Transformative change is led by ILC's member organisations, particularly women-focused groups. Through National Engagement Strategies (NES) in countries such as Uganda, Colombia, Tunisia, and Indonesia, women-led platforms embed gender justice into national land agendas, advancing legal and institutional reforms. The Women for Women (W4W) Mentoring Programme strengthens a growing network of women leaders, fostering peer support and shared advocacy momentum.

(ii) Gender Justice Working Group and Regional Platforms

The Gender Justice Working Group promotes cross-regional exchanges, co-creation of tools, and collective advocacy. Regional women's platforms, such as the EMENA Women's Land Platform, connect local struggles to regional and global agendas, advancing mentorship, knowledge sharing, and influence in policy spaces, including the Arab Land Conference and regional intergovernmental forums.

(iii) Global Campaigns and Advocacy: Stand for Her Land

ILC is a core partner of the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) campaign, mobilising grassroots networks in Senegal, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Uganda to demand enforcement of women's land rights. These campaigns complement national and regional advocacy, ensuring that laws are translated into practice.

(iv) Data and Evidence for Empowerment

ILC emphasises **sex-disaggregated, people-centred data** to inform advocacy and policy, supporting SDG targets 5.a.1 and 5.a.2. Initiatives like LANDex and citizen-generated data projects empower women to track progress, identify gaps, and demand reform.

(v) Funding and Protection for Women

Through the **Women's Grassroots Fund**, ILC provides accessible, flexible funding directly to women-led organisations, supporting locally driven initiatives, climate action, and peacebuilding. Complementary efforts include protection mechanisms for women land defenders, risk mitigation and resilience-building through the Women Land Defenders Solidarity Network, and emergency support.

(vi) Integrating Women’s Land Rights into Global Policy

ILC ensures that rural, Indigenous, and vulnerable women are represented in international frameworks related to climate change (UNFCCC), biodiversity (CBD), desertification (UNCCD), SDG reporting, Generation Equality, and regional advocacy platforms. Cross-country learning initiatives, including the **Women’s Community of Practice (CoP)** and the Land Collaborative, foster knowledge sharing, co-development of solutions, and collective empowerment.

3.6 The G20 Global Land Initiative: Advancing Women’s Land Rights Through Land Restoration

Iyenemi Ibimina Kakulu (Nigeria)

The G20 Global Land Initiative (GLI) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), as part of its overall theory of change and strategy, engages with women and youth in diverse land restoration campaigns and capacity-building initiatives. Through its outreach, stakeholder engagement, and capacity-building activities at various fora, the G20 GLI is reaching out to women and men about the economic empowerment opportunities and the inherent benefits associated with participation in both land restoration and the related industry.

Global Changeloger Academy for Parliamentarians

In 2023, in collaboration with the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), the G20 GLI launched its annual Global Change-Maker Academy (G-CAP) for Parliamentarians. In each cohort of this annual five-day event, the G20 GLI engaged with up to 30 parliamentarians from over 25 countries in awareness-raising and capacity-building on land restoration. Parliamentarians were exposed to the enormity of the challenge of land degradation and the need for large-scale restoration efforts by 2030. They were also exposed to the economic opportunities for women and the importance of gender strategies to address gender inequality in land restoration.



Figure 8: Ibrahim Thiaw, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary UNCCD, addressing G-CAP 2024 Cohort in Bonn. Photo courtesy of Iyenemi Kakulu

Parliamentarians were empowered to understand the attributes of land-use policies, norms, and traditional practices that render them gender-discriminatory or gender-transformative. Parliamentarians were also encouraged to recognise policies, norms and practices that do not acknowledge gender perspectives and peculiarities, or that

are discriminatory and gender blind. They were encouraged to pursue gender-transformative policies and practices.

Land restoration provides a unique opportunity for addressing historical marginalisation and the exclusion of women from land ownership through equitable land redistribution. By promoting gender-aware, neutral, sensitive, gender-responsive, and redistributive policies, opportunities for the economic empowerment of women within the land restoration industry can be protected. Women with reasonable incomes and purchasing power can purchase land and gain access to land rights.

Roundtable on Gender Issues in Post-Mining Land Restoration

The G20 GLI advocates for women’s empowerment through active engagement in land restoration initiatives. In 2024, in Ghana, in collaboration with the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, COLANDEF (a Ghanaian land rights organisation), and FIG’s Working Group 7.5 on Women’s Land Rights and Women in Surveying (from Commission 7) and the Spatial Planning Instruments and Climate Change working group 8.3 (from Commission 8), the G20 GLI organised a three-day Roundtable dialogue on Gender Issues in Post-Mining land restoration.



Figure 9: Panel Discussion at the Roundtable on Gender Issues in Post-Artisanal Mining Land Restoration, Ghana, May 2024. Photo courtesy of Iyenemi Kakulu

Following three days of presentations, intensive discussions, and field visits, the opportunities that restoration offers for women were recognised. Visits to active artisanal mining sites also highlighted the challenges of restoring degraded landscapes. These sessions led to three key recommendations with implications for women’s land rights:

1. Engage with community leaders and appropriate agencies to deliberate on customary tenancy and land use for women. This is a necessary first step to navigate the restoration industry.
2. A gender-based tenure assessment should be done before embarking on land reclamation and restoration in localities.
3. Women who participate in land restoration should be given the opportunity to benefit from the land.

By actively participating in land restoration, women can be financially empowered, increasing their chances of land ownership and rights through purchase.



Figure 10: Nana Ama Yirrah, Chief Executive of COLANDEF, with two of Ghana’s Queen Mothers at the Roundtable event in Ghana, 2024.
Photo courtesy of Iyenemi Kakulu

3.7 Landesa/S4HL: Her rights. Her land. A better future for all.

Esther Mwaura-Muiru (Kenya) and **Ashleigh Flowers** (USA)

Recognition of women’s legal rights to land has gained enormous ground. Leaders across the globe have made formal commitments to strengthen women’s land rights, recognising their integral role in economic prosperity, reduced inequality, climate action, and gender justice. Yet despite these commitments, countries’ legal and policy frameworks vary in guaranteeing women’s land rights in a fully inclusive manner, while deep-rooted discriminatory norms and weak enforcement mean these rights are frequently unrealised in practice.

Stand for Her Land (S4HL) is closing this gap between law and women’s lived realities by centering and elevating the leadership of grassroots women – those advocating for women’s land rights within their communities. S4HL seeks to achieve gender justice in land, housing, territory, and natural resources at grassroots and global levels. It envisions a world where everyone, regardless of gender, is allowed to thrive in harmony with each other and the planet.

The Model

S4HL is realising gender equality from the ground up. Substantial work to strengthen women’s land rights is ongoing in many countries, often led by women at the grassroots level. But challenging the status quo often risks severe repercussions. Our work centers the voices of grassroots women leaders and elevates their solidarity, legitimacy, and efficacy, organising their movement into a collective call for justice.

S4HL cultivates national-level Coalitions comprising grassroots, subnational, and national civil society organisations and individual advocates, all working toward stronger women’s

land rights. S4HL Coalitions are active in 17 countries and counting, with more than 200 partners – from grassroots organisations to global UN bodies – advocating collectively.

A Global Steering Committee of international non-governmental organisations (GLTN/ UN-Habitat, Landesa, International Land Coalition, World Bank, Huairou Commission, and Rights and Resources Initiative) provides strategic direction. It provides technical expertise, learning opportunities, global reach, and administrative coordination. Landesa serves as the Global Secretariat of S4HL.

Stakeholders across grassroots, national, and global levels share good practices and advocate collectively for stronger women’s land rights. S4HL is the first advocacy campaign of its kind to merge global and local efforts to radically accelerate the realisation of women’s land rights.



Figure 11: Representatives from the S4HL delegation at the UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, 2024. Photograph Courtesy of Ashleigh Flowers



Figure 12: S4HL with partners made a strong presence at the 2025 Conference on Land and Policy in Africa (CLPA). Photograph Courtesy of Esther Mwaura-Muiru

The S4HL, in collaboration with FIG, has continued to engage both at the country level and through joint advocacy platforms globally. The campaign aims to strengthen working relationships among surveyors, other land professionals, and grassroots women in local communities to accelerate the securing of land and natural resource tenure rights for women and girls.

3.8 Esri: The Role of GIS in Advancing Women's Land Rights

Linda Foster (USA) and **Jill Urban-Karr** (USA)

Context

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) play a critical role in documenting, analysing, and visualising land rights, enabling women to secure formal recognition of property they use, inherit, or depend on. By making land information visible, accessible, and verifiable, GIS helps address persistent global disparities in which women contribute significantly to agriculture, natural resource management, and household welfare, yet often lack legal recognition and protection of their rights. In many contexts, the lack of reliable, accessible spatial information reinforces these inequalities, making GIS a key enabler of more inclusive land governance systems.

This contribution is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), which call for equal rights to economic resources, including land, property, natural resources, financial services, and inheritance (Kavvada & Gray, 2021). In recognition of women's essential role in agriculture and rural economies, the United Nations General Assembly has declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer, aiming to raise awareness of the structural barriers faced by women and girls in agriculture and to promote coordinated policy action to address these challenges (Resolution A/RES/78/279, 2024). This global momentum provides an important opportunity to strengthen the integration of geospatial technologies into efforts to advance women's land rights.

The Role of GIS in Advancing Land Rights

Complex interactions among statutory law, customary norms, and informal practices shape land tenure systems. In many countries, these overlapping frameworks create uncertainty in the recognition and enforcement of rights, particularly for women. In this context, GIS offers a powerful tool to support more transparent, inclusive, and accountable land administration and advance reform (Betancourt, 2022). By enabling the digitisation of land records, mapping of property boundaries, and integration of spatial and legal data, GIS helps users visualise and better understand the distribution and nature of land rights.

For women, this has practical and transformative implications. Improved access to spatial information can strengthen their ability to claim rights, participate in decision-making, and defend their interests in disputes. GIS also supports the recording of diverse tenure arrangements, including joint ownership, secondary rights, and customary claims, often overlooked in conventional systems.

Combined with complementary technologies such as GNSS, remote sensing, and mobile data collection tools, GIS supports FFPLA approaches that are flexible, scalable, and

cost-effective (Enemark et al., 2014). These are particularly relevant where formal systems are incomplete or inaccessible, and where rapid, inclusive, and affordable methods are needed to document land rights at scale.

Beyond data capture, modern GIS platforms enable the aggregation, management, and sharing of land information across institutions, supporting integrated systems that provide a comprehensive view of property rights, restrictions, and responsibilities. GIS is now a core component of digital governance, underpinning transparency, efficiency, and evidence-based decision-making across levels. As a point of reference, ArcGIS is used by 70 per cent of the largest global companies, 95 per cent of the largest national governments, and 80 per cent of the largest cities (Esri, n.d.).

However, technology alone cannot resolve structural inequalities. A key constraint to using GIS for women's land rights is access to current, high-quality data, which remains outdated, incomplete, or inaccessible in many regions. Initiatives such as Map Africa aim to address this gap by providing open-access basemaps, reducing barriers and enabling stakeholders to focus on inclusive, sustainable solutions (Esri, 2025). Without such foundational data, the rapid advancement of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, risks reinforcing rather than reducing existing inequalities.

Women as Agents of Change in Geospatial Practice

While GIS is a powerful tool, its impact ultimately depends on who uses it and how. Women have played a significant, though often under-recognised, role in the history of mapping and spatial knowledge production. Today, this is beginning to change, with increasing efforts to highlight women's contributions and leadership in the geospatial sector (Laiture, 2026). Initiatives such as Esri's Women and GIS series (Esri, 2026) document the diverse ways in which women around the world are using geospatial technologies to address social, environmental, and development challenges. These stories not only showcase technical expertise but also illustrate how GIS can be used as a tool for empowerment, advocacy, and social change.

In addition, several programs and organisations have worked over the last decade to support women's contributions to the profession and to highlight how collective action can make a difference. For example, African Women in GIS hosts workshops to elevate women's perspectives and mapping needs, putting mobile mapping technology in women's hands. GeoChicas and YouthMappers' Let Girls Map empower women to make maps through training and education that address the digital divide. Women in GIS and Women+ in Geospatial build community through professional networks in map making. Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team amplifies women's voices to inform geospatial approaches and empower women's contributions.

Global platforms and events also play a key role in amplifying women's voices. For example, the GeoSmart India conference featured a dedicated programme "*GeoWomen: Shaping the World One Map at a Time*" that highlights how women are using geospatial and space technologies to solve problems, empower communities, protect the environment, and contribute to national development. This is an interesting focus, as it encourages and guides engagement with women on the topic of land rights, specifically the use of geospatial technology to not only enable problem-solving but also drive change in communities and the national dialogue.

At the same time, integrating gender perspectives into GIS remains an evolving field. As noted in emerging literature, gender-sensitive geospatial analysis can reveal dis-

parities in access to resources and services, providing critical insights for more equitable policy and planning. In an article for *Geospatial World*, Shimonti Paul articulates, *“Though the role of gender in GIS is new, gender in GIS can serve to illustrate distribution and access to resources, which in turn can help in solving varied socio-economic issues and reduce disparities between men and women”* (Paul, 2018).

Conclusion

Despite growing recognition of the importance of women’s land rights, significant disparities in land ownership and control persist globally, reflecting deep-rooted structural inequalities. While legal recognition of rights remains a fundamental objective, experience shows that social norms, power relations, and institutional practices often pose the greatest barriers to change. In this context, geospatial technologies offer important opportunities, not only to support the formalisation of land rights but also to enhance their visibility, legitimacy, and enforceability. By providing clear, accessible, and verifiable information, GIS can strengthen the defensibility of women’s land rights and reduce the risk of dispossession by communities, institutions, or external actors.

However, real progress requires more than technological adoption. It demands integrated approaches that combine legal reform, institutional strengthening, inclusive practices, and capacity development, while ensuring that women are not only beneficiaries but active participants in shaping land governance systems. When used responsibly and inclusively, GIS can play a transformative role in advancing women’s land rights and contributing to more equitable, resilient, and sustainable development outcomes.

3.9 Trimble: How geospatial technology supports gender equality in FFPLA projects

Markus Koper (Germany)

Technology plays a critical role in modern land administration, particularly in FFPLA approaches. When thoughtfully integrated, digital tools can support women's land rights, ensuring that land registration, mapping, and tenure recognition processes are accessible, inclusive, and aligned with local legal and cultural contexts. Technology alone does not guarantee gender equity – it must be embedded within a broader gender-sensitive approach, including data models, community engagement, and training.

Key Principles for Technology Integration

i. Purpose-Driven Use

Technology must prioritise securing land rights, especially for women, over merely improving geospatial workflows. While automation, such as orthophoto processing, point cloud creation, and feature extraction, can speed up work, its output must ensure accurate recognition of land rights. Simple technology often aids performance and inclusivity in FFPLA, as complex automation can lack inclusivity. Legal frameworks are crucial for integrating FFPLA data into formal systems.

Legal aspects could also play a significant role. It is important to understand what is required, allowed and accepted in a particular legal framework. This becomes crucial when FFPLA data are integrated into formal land tenure systems.

Inclusive Data Models are essential. Digital systems must capture gender-relevant information (e.g., women's ownership, joint rights). Data models must incorporate customary/statutory tenure and communal lands to faithfully represent women's land rights, making them a critical building block for gender equity.

Software and data-collection systems must be designed to record and represent these rights faithfully.

ii. Accessible Technology

Hardware and software must be affordable, easy to use, and scalable for quick adoption. GNSS positioning is vital for cadastral and FFPLA projects. Tools like Trimble Catalyst GNSS combine affordability, ease of use, and reliable accuracy. Utilising Trimble's RTX (PPP) - Service⁷, Trimble Catalyst allows FFPLA projects to start immediately, without relying on a Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) network, a base/rover⁸ setup, or even mobile network connectivity - all of which pose challenges in FFPLA environments due to training, budget, time, or infrastructure limitations. The base/rover setup is a more advanced survey workflow that requires more training and budget. Establishing a sustainable CORS network is often not feasible, demanding significant time and cost.

7 CenterPoint RTX (Real-Time Extended) is a high-accuracy, real-time Precise Point Positioning (PPP) GNSS correction service.

8 A GNSS base/rover setup is an RTK (Real-Time Kinematic) positioning technique utilizing two receivers to achieve centimetre-level accuracy.

iii. Training and Capacity Building

Gender-responsive training, including peer mentoring and female champions, is crucial for effective technology use. This builds trust, especially among women, enhancing team performance and ensuring inclusive, accurate data collection.

iv. Integration with Gender-Responsive Processes

A holistic FFPLA approach integrates technology with survey methods, community engagement, conflict resolution, and recognition of land rights. Successful projects utilise hardware, software, workflows, and training alongside gender-aware protocols to ensure women's inclusion in fieldwork, decision-making, and tenure recognition.

Technology in Practice

Technological innovation is increasingly important in translating gender-responsive land policies into practice.

Digital tools and fit-for-purpose technologies can support more inclusive, transparent, and efficient land administration processes, particularly in contexts where conventional surveying approaches are costly, slow, or inaccessible. When appropriately designed and applied, these technologies can help reduce barriers to women's participation, improve the recording of diverse land rights, and strengthen tenure security at scale.

Case studies (**Figure 13**) illustrate effective application: projects in Uganda, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Chad and other FFPLA contexts have used GNSS and mobile applications to improve tenure security for women, while providing scalable, low-cost, and easy-to-use tools.

- GNSS-enabled field data collection allows inclusive, accurate, and rapid mapping, suitable for rural and urban contexts. Precise Point Positioning (PPP) technology simplifies GNSS processing, compared to base-rover setups and CORS, while enabling survey-grade performance for FFPLA field teams.
- Field software solutions act as the user interface for data collection, offering visual, real-time verification and transparency. This capability is crucial for supporting joint ownership and family land rights. The software controls the sensor (e.g., GNSS), supports the data model, carries the digital base map or ortho-photo, and manages the data interface for import and export.
- Automation reduces manual errors, simplifies processes, and improves accessibility for less experienced surveyors, enabling women and youth participation in technical teams.



Figure 13: Technology supporting participatory land registration in Chad, 2025, and Sierra Leone, 2023.
Photograph Courtesy of Markus Koper

Summary: Technology for Gender-Responsive Land Administration

When integrated thoughtfully, technology enhances FFPLA projects and empowers women to secure and exercise their land rights. While tools like Trimble Catalyst GNSS provide illustrative examples of accessible, efficient geospatial solutions, the critical factor remains how technology is applied, combined with gender-aware training, data models, and community-focused practices.

In summary, the following lessons are important to keep in mind:

- **Data that matters:** capture women’s rights, customary forms, and joint ownership.
- **Training is key:** build confidence, trust, and competence for all participants.
- **Confidence in processes and technology:** ensures accurate and equitable data collection.
- **Keep it simple:** simplicity supports adoption, maintenance, and gender-inclusive participation.

4 THE ROLE OF SURVEYORS AND OTHER LAND PROFESSIONALS IN RECOGNISING AND ADVANCING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

Marisa Balas (Mozambique), **Christiaan Lemmen** (The Netherlands), **Susana Lastarria-Cornhiel** (Peru), **Rohan Bennett** (Australia), **Jennifer Whittal** (South Africa), and **Izuegbu Uju** (Nigeria)



Photograph courtesy of the Netherlands Cadastre Land Registry and Mapping Agency (Kadaster).

Secure land rights for women are central to achieving broader development objectives as they strengthen food security, reduce vulnerability to poverty, increase bargaining power, and promote economic security, while supporting progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

As highlighted in the preceding sections, despite significant advances in legal and policy frameworks, women around the world continue to face persistent and often intersecting barriers to accessing, controlling, and securing land. These barriers are legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and economic in nature, and are deeply interwoven in both formal and informal systems of land governance. Addressing them, therefore, requires coordinated and sustained action across policy design, institutional practice, and on-the-ground implementation.

Within this context, surveyors and other land professionals play a pivotal role in translating legal and policy commitments into practice. Through their daily engagement in land administration, cadastral processes, spatial data production, and field-level implementation, they directly influence how land rights are identified, recorded, recognised, and enforced. Their decisions and practices shape not only technical outputs but also who is visible or invisible within land systems.

In addition, surveyors and other land professionals are central to the generation, management, and use of sex-disaggregated geospatial data, supporting monitoring and reporting efforts on gender equality and women’s empowerment. When aligned with national statistical systems and broader governance frameworks, these efforts improve data quality, comparability, and policy relevance, while also helping to expose gaps between statutory provisions and lived realities, including in areas characterised by customary and informal tenure systems.

Building on this foundation, this chapter outlines how FIG and its members can advance women’s land rights by acting across four interconnected areas of intervention and within these, specific commitments for surveyors and other land professionals.

4.1 Key Areas of Intervention for Surveyors and Other Land Professionals

Advancing women’s land rights requires coordinated action across four key areas of intervention, as illustrated in **Figure 14**:

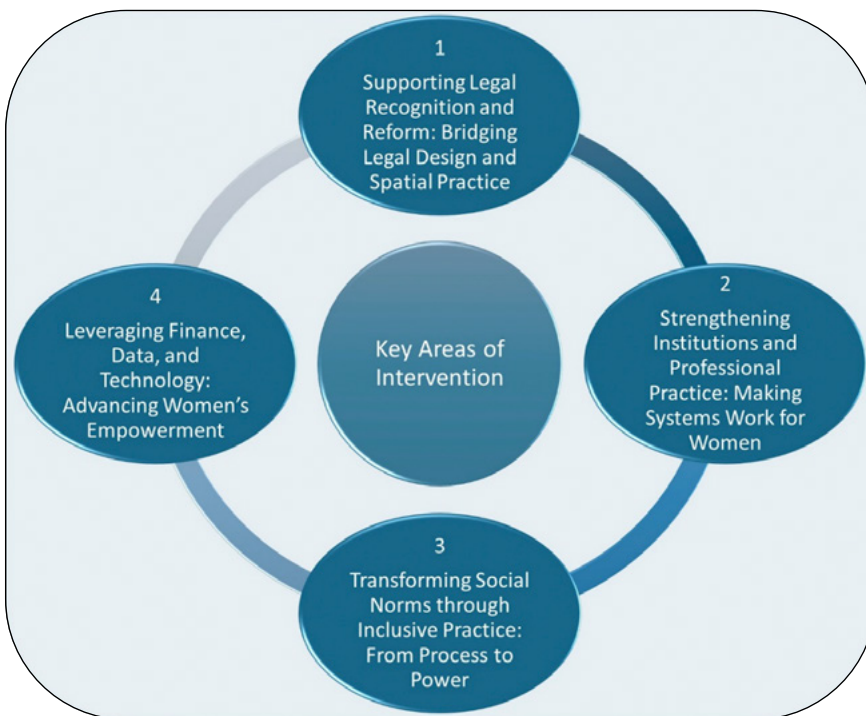


Figure 14: Key areas of intervention for surveyors and other land professionals.

Source: Illustrated by Marisa Balas

- (i) supporting legal recognition and reform, ensuring that gender equality is embedded not only in legislation but also in its interpretation and implementation;
- (ii) strengthening land administration institutions and professional practice, so that systems are accessible, accountable, and responsive to women’s needs;
- (iii) transforming socio-cultural norms through inclusive practice, recognising that land administration processes both reflect and shape power relations; and

- (iv) leveraging finance, data, and technology to make women's land rights visible, measurable, and actionable.

These are not discrete areas but mutually reinforcing dimensions of change. Legal frameworks define rights, institutions determine how those rights are implemented, social norms shape whether they are recognised in practice, and empowerment ensures that women can effectively claim and benefit from them.

Supporting Legal Recognition and Reform: Bridging Legal Design and Spatial Practice

Across regions, legal illiteracy and legal pluralism remain among the most significant barriers to the recognition of women's land rights. The coexistence of statutory, customary, and religious systems often creates uncertainty about which rights are recognised, by whom, and under what conditions. Even where laws are formally gender neutral, they frequently fail to reflect women's lived realities, resulting in indirect discrimination in practice.

These challenges are not confined to the legal domain; they are produced and reinforced in everyday land administration practice. As the first point of translation between legal norms and spatial records, surveyors and other land professionals play a decisive role in determining how land rights are recorded, classified, and validated. Decisions on whose names are included in documentation, how tenure types are interpreted, and whether customary claims are recognised, directly shape whether women's rights become visible or remain excluded from official systems. In this sense, cadastral systems mediate people-land relations by defining what counts as legitimate evidence of rights.

In this context, surveyors and other land professionals function as a critical bridge between legal intent and implementation. Through field-level engagement, they can support clearer communication of rights and procedures, ensure that registration processes accommodate diverse tenure situations, and identify inconsistencies between formal law and on-the-ground practice. These insights also position them to inform policy dialogue and contribute to more responsive and inclusive legal and regulatory reforms.

Global professional bodies, particularly FIG, further strengthen this bridge by developing and promoting practical guidelines, standards, and models that support consistent, gender-responsive interpretation and application of land laws across diverse contexts. By advancing tools for recording multiple tenure types, improving inclusive adjudication and documentation practices, and strengthening legal literacy among professionals and communities, FIG helps ensure that legal recognition is effectively translated into spatial, administrative, and institutional practice.

Strengthening Institutions and Professional Practice: Making Systems Work for Women

Institutional barriers feature prominently across regions. Women often face difficulties accessing land institutions due to cost, distance, language constraints, and administrative complexity. Weak institutional capacity, manifested in limited staffing, insufficient training, lack of accountability, and poor coordination, further undermines the effective implementation of existing laws. Experts consistently rank weak implementation as a greater constraint than legislative gaps. In addition, many land information systems are not designed with a gender-responsive perspective, limiting the visibility and usability of women's land rights.

Table 3: How surveyors and other land professionals can support legal recognition and reform

Role of surveyors and other land professionals in supporting legal recognition and reform:

Surveyors and cadastral practitioners are often the first to operationalise abstract legal rights in spatial systems. Professionals can support women's land rights by:

- Identifying inconsistencies between statutory laws and customary practices, and providing structured, actionable feedback to policymakers and institutions.
- Promoting safeguards to ensure that land formalisation and registration processes do not inadvertently weaken or extinguish women's existing rights.
- Supporting the interpretation and application of laws in ways that are consistent with gender equality principles.
- Promoting the inclusion and meaningful participation of women at all stages of the legal reform's activities.
- Documenting and reporting legal implementation challenges and good practices to inform ongoing legal and regulatory reforms.
- Collect and use sex-disaggregated data to support reporting and monitoring of gender-land-related indicators, and evidence-based decision-making.
- Engaging in policy dialogue and multi-stakeholder platforms to bring field-based evidence into legal reform processes.
- Supporting the development and application of FIG-aligned professional standards and guidelines that bridge legal frameworks and spatial practice.

These challenges place surveyors and other land professionals at the centre of institutional performance. Surveyors, registrars, and geospatial practitioners are not merely technical intermediaries; they are often the most visible representatives of land institutions. Their availability, conduct, and professional judgement shape whether land administration systems are perceived as legitimate, accessible, and trustworthy – particularly for women.

Surveyors and other land professionals contribute directly to strengthening institutions by improving the accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness of land services; supporting the design and maintenance of inclusive land information systems; embedding gender considerations into professional education and practice; promoting ethical conduct and accountability; and enhancing coordination across institutions. Through these roles, they help translate institutional mandates into services that are usable, fair, and effective in practice.

Table 4: How surveyors and other land professionals can strengthen institutions

Role of surveyors and other land professionals in strengthening institutions:

Surveyors and other land professionals are frontline representatives of the state. Their conduct, availability, and expertise shape institutional legitimacy and access. Key professional actions include:

- Simplifying procedures and ensure land services are accessible, affordable, and user-friendly for women.
- Ensuring gender-responsive forms, processes, and service delivery in land administration.
- Strengthening professional education and training by integrating gender equality, legal frameworks, and the impacts of discriminatory customary practices.
- Designing and maintaining transparent, accessible land information systems that reduce informational and procedural barriers.
- Assisting in the creation and maintenance of sex-disaggregated land registries.
- Use geospatial and cadastral data to identify inequalities and support targeted, inclusive land-use planning and policy interventions.
- Supporting coordination between institutions to improve service delivery.
- Promoting professional ethics, accountability, and safeguards against discrimination.
- Establishing gender focal points within institutions to ensure sustained attention to women's land rights.

Transforming Social Norms through Inclusive Practice: From Process to Power

Even well-designed laws and functioning institutions are insufficient if social norms continue to restrict women's ability to claim and exercise their rights. Patriarchal norms, including the persistent perception of land as a male domain, remain among the most pervasive constraints on women's land rights. Discriminatory inheritance practices and unequal power relations within households and communities reinforce women's exclusion, even where formal legal protections exist.

Although social norms may appear beyond the technical mandate of surveyors and other land professionals, land administration processes often reflect and reproduce these norms. Decisions about who is invited to community meetings, when and where consultations are held, whose testimony is accepted during boundary demarcation, and whose signatures are deemed authoritative are all deeply embedded in local power structures.

Surveyors and other land professionals, therefore, play a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging exclusionary norms. By designing participatory processes that deliberately include women, facilitating safe spaces for their engagement, creating awareness within communities, sensitising customary and traditional leaders, and documenting land rights in ways that recognise women's claims, professionals can help shift entrenched practices.

Participatory mapping and community-based approaches highlight that mapping is not a purely technical exercise but a negotiated social process. Initiatives such as legal and land clinics for grassroots women further support awareness, confidence, and agency in claiming land rights.

Table 5: How surveyors and other land professionals can help transform discriminatory social norms

Role of surveyors and other land professionals in transforming discriminatory social norms:

While surveyors are not social reformers, their work can either reinforce or challenge entrenched norms by:

- Supporting community-level awareness and sensitisation efforts to strengthen understanding of women's land rights.
- Proactively ensuring the meaningful participation and representation of women in community consultations.
- Communicating land rights and procedures in clear, accessible ways to ensure informed participation.
- Creating safe and inclusive spaces for women to express their views, adapting meeting times, locations, and formats to enable their engagement.
- Engaging customary and traditional leaders to promote the recognition of women's land rights within local governance systems.
- Recognising and addressing power dynamics within households and communities when implementing land administration activities.
- Explicitly accommodating joint ownership, secondary use rights, and overlapping claims within cadastral and registration processes.
- Designing and facilitating participatory and gender-responsive land registration processes that deliberately include women's voices, knowledge, and claims.
- Documenting, recording, and visualising land rights in ways that make women's claims visible and legitimate within land administration systems.

Leveraging Finance, Data, Systems, and Technology: Advancing Women's Empowerment

Across regions, limited access to education, particularly high dropout rates among girls, emerged as the most significant socio-economic barrier to gender-equal land rights. Financial insecurity, including limited access to credit, formal employment, and decision-making power, further constrains women's ability to claim, defend, and benefit from land rights.

While these barriers extend beyond land administration, they fundamentally shape women's engagement with land systems. Surveyors and other land professionals can play a meaningful, even if indirect, role by improving access to information, reducing transaction costs, and enhancing the visibility and usability of land rights data.

Approaches such as FFPLA can reduce procedural and financial barriers for women when applied in a gender-responsive manner. Digital tools and innovative surveying

methods can further enhance accessibility and transparency, especially when they support the creation and maintenance of reliable, sex-disaggregated land registries. However, technology alone is insufficient; it must be embedded within institutional reform and professional accountability.

These professionals can also strengthen the links between land rights and financial inclusion, including access to microfinance, cooperative lending, and gender-responsive credit schemes. Transparent and accessible land information systems enable women to understand their rights and use land as an economic asset.

At the same time, promoting gender diversity within the land profession - by supporting female surveyors and making their contributions visible - helps challenge persistent stereotypes and reinforces the principle that “you can’t be what you can’t see.”

Table 6: How surveyors and other land professionals can help empower women

Role of surveyors and other land professionals in empowering women:

While surveyors are not social reformers, their work can either reinforce or challenge entrenched norms.

Surveyors and other land professionals can:

- Strengthen legal and land literacy by training and supporting women and local communities to understand land rights, land information systems, and dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Promote inclusive land-use planning that reflects the needs of women, including female-headed households and other vulnerable groups.
- Ensure the visibility of women’s land rights in data and digital systems, including joint ownership and secondary use rights.
- Apply FFPLA and other innovative approaches to reduce transaction costs and expand access to land administration services.
- Strengthen the links between land rights and financial inclusion by reducing procedural barriers and enabling women to use land as a productive and financial asset.
- Support the sustainable financing and scaling of women’s land rights initiatives by contributing evidence, cost–benefit analysis, and practical models that demonstrate their economic and social value.
- Promote the responsible and inclusive use of technology, ensuring that digitalisation does not reinforce inequalities or exclude those with limited access or literacy.
- Promote gender diversity within the profession by mentoring, supporting, and increasing the visibility of women surveyors and land professionals.

4.2 From Roles to Action: Key Commitments

Building on these four interrelated areas, the following commitments translate broad principles into concrete professional responsibilities for surveyors and other land professionals. They reflect the reality that advancing women’s land rights is not only a matter of legal reform, but also of how laws are interpreted, implemented, and experienced in practice. Grounded in everyday professional functions, from fieldwork and adjudica-

tion to data management and institutional engagement, these commitments provide a practical framework to guide more consistent, gender-responsive, and accountable land governance across diverse contexts.

These commitments are structured around the four interrelated areas of intervention (**Figure 15**):

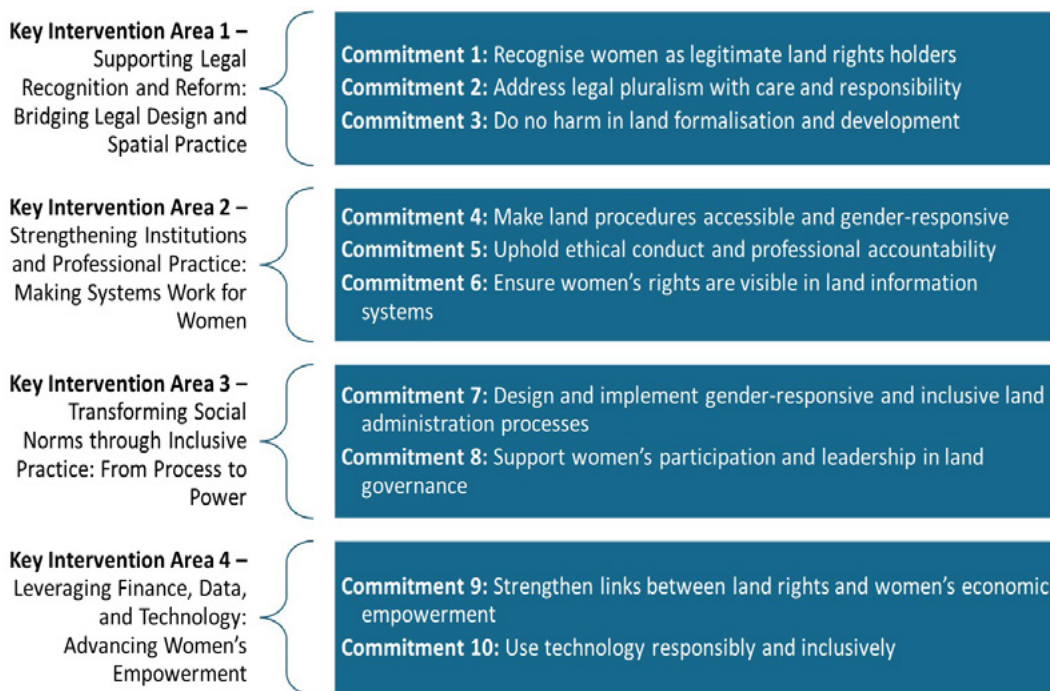


Figure 15: Ten commitments surveyors and other land professionals should uphold.

Source: Illustrated by Marisa Balas

Commitment 1 – Recognise women as legitimate land rights holders

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to recognising women as land rights holders in their own right, across formal, informal, customary, or religious tenure systems. This requires moving beyond narrow perspectives, such as titled ownership, to reflect the full spectrum of land relations.

What does this mean in practice? Ensure women’s names are recorded in documentation; recognise women as legitimate rights holders at the community level, not only as dependents; record joint and secondary rights; and contribute to gender-responsive laws, policies, standards, and land information systems using sex-disaggregated data.

Commitment 2 – Address legal pluralism with care and responsibility

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to engaging constructively with statutory, customary, and religious systems, recognising their interaction and gendered implications, and supporting the gender-equitable interpretation and application of laws in practice.

What does this mean in practice? Avoid reinforcing discriminatory norms in land tenure and boundary formalisation; recognise socially legitimate use rights; and flag inconsistencies between legal frameworks and field realities to inform reform.

Commitment 3 – Do no harm in land formalisation and development

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to ensuring that land recordation, titling, registration, consolidation, and investment processes do not weaken or extinguish women's rights.

What does this mean in practice? Identify and safeguard existing land rights during adjudication; ensure women are included in recordation, titling, and compensation processes; assess risks of dispossession before formalisation; and implement safeguards to prevent loss of legitimate rights.

Commitment 4 – Make land procedures accessible and gender-responsive

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to reducing barriers related to cost, distance, language, and administrative complexity.

What does this mean in practice? Simplify procedures; ensure services are affordable and accessible; provide clear information in local languages; use gender-responsive forms; and support awareness initiatives, such as land and legal clinic days.

Commitment 5 – Uphold ethical conduct and professional accountability

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to adhering to high ethical standards and ensuring transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination in their work. This includes adhering to the principles and recommendations outlined in the FIG Publication No. 88 "*Statement of Ethical Principles and Model Code of Conduct*".

What does this mean in practice? Prevent discrimination, corruption, favouritism, sexual harassment, and abuse of power; ensure transparency in decision-making; establish and follow accountability and redress mechanisms, including gender-responsive dispute resolution; address professional biases; and promote continuous training on gender equality and ethics.

Commitment 6 – Ensure women's rights are visible in land information systems

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to designing and managing land information systems that accurately capture, maintain, and make visible women's land rights.

What does this mean in practice? Use sex-disaggregated data; adopt inclusive data models (e.g. LADM/STDM); record joint, secondary, and overlapping rights; and align data with gender-related indicators (e.g. 1.4.2, 5.a.1, 5.a.2) to inform policy and planning.

Commitment 7 – Design and implement gender-responsive and inclusive land administration processes

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to applying participatory and inclusive approaches that address power imbalances and discriminatory social norms.

What does this mean in practice? Apply participatory approaches, including FFPLA, that enable women to be informed, consulted, and to influence decisions, and to engage in dispute resolution; ensure land services are localised and responsive to all users, including those facing social or cultural barriers; and tailor communication and outreach to context-appropriate channels and tools.

Commitment 8 – Support women’s participation and leadership in land governance

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to strengthening women’s meaningful participation and leadership in land governance and decision-making at all levels.

What does this mean in practice? Support women through training and legal and land literacy initiatives such as the Clinic Day Initiative; promote their participation and leadership in community processes, dispute resolution, and land institutions; create opportunities for women to influence decisions; encourage their entry, retention, and visibility in land professions; and support continuous professional development.

Commitment 9 – Strengthen links between land rights and women’s economic empowerment

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to supporting the use of land rights as a foundation for women’s access to finance, services, and economic opportunities.

What does this mean in practice? Ensure land records are reliable and usable for financial purposes; support documentation enabling women to use land as collateral or proof of tenure; align land information with credit and investment schemes; reduce transaction costs through fit-for-purpose approaches; support spatial data systems for inclusive planning and economic opportunities; and generate evidence to inform and scale financing.

Commitment 10 – Use technology responsibly and inclusively

Surveyors and other land professionals commit to ensuring that digital tools and technologies enhance inclusion, support decision-making, and do not reinforce existing inequalities.

What does this mean in practice? Deploy affordable, accessible, and transparent digital tools; ensure technologies do not exclude women, including those with limited access or literacy; use technology to support participatory registration and mapping; enable accessible mechanisms to submit, track, and resolve land claims; strengthen the validation and visibility of women’s rights; apply geospatial tools for inclusive decision-making; and embed digital solutions within broader institutional and social contexts.

5 CONCLUSION

Advancing women's land rights remains both an urgent priority and a complex challenge. As this publication has shown, progress has been made across regions in strengthening legal frameworks and increasing global recognition of the importance of gender equality in land governance. Yet, significant gaps persist between policy and practice. Legal reforms have not always translated into meaningful change on the ground, and women continue to face structural barriers that limit their ability to access, use, control, and benefit from land.

These challenges are multifaceted. They are rooted not only in legal and institutional constraints but also in deeply embedded socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations, and persistent data gaps. Addressing them, therefore, requires more than isolated interventions. It calls for integrated, sustained, and context-specific approaches that connect legal reform with institutional strengthening, inclusive practices, and the effective use of data and technology.

Throughout this publication, the central role of surveyors and other land professionals has been emphasised. As key actors within land administration systems, they are uniquely positioned to influence how land rights are recognised, recorded, protected, and disseminated. Their work determines whose rights are made visible, whose claims are formalised, and how land governance systems function in practice. This places a clear responsibility on the profession to ensure its practices contribute to greater equity rather than reinforce existing inequalities.

The four key areas of intervention identified in this report provide a structured framework for action: supporting legal recognition and reform; strengthening land administration institutions and professional practice; transforming socio-cultural norms through inclusive approaches; and leveraging data, systems, and technology. These areas are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, reflecting the need for holistic responses to complex challenges.

Building on this foundation, the ten commitments presented in this publication offer practical guidance for translating principles into action. They call on surveyors and other land professionals to recognise women as legitimate land rights holders, to engage responsibly with legal pluralism, to ensure that interventions do no harm, and to make land processes more accessible and understandable. They further emphasise the importance of ethical conduct, inclusive participation, improved access to information, and the responsible use of data and technology. Together, these commitments provide a clear and actionable pathway for integrating gender-responsive approaches into professional practice.

At the same time, advancing women's land rights cannot be achieved by any single group of actors. It requires strong partnerships and coordinated efforts across governments, professional organisations, civil society, Non-Governmental Organisations, academic institutions, development partners, communities, and households. Collaboration is essential to ensure that interventions are contextually appropriate, inclusive, and sustainable, and that they respond effectively to the realities women face on the ground.

Looking ahead, the challenge is not only to maintain momentum but to deepen impact. This will require continued investment in capacity development, stronger accountabil-

ity mechanisms, and improved data to monitor progress and inform decision-making. It will also require a sustained commitment to addressing the underlying social norms and power structures that shape land relations.

Ultimately, securing women's land rights is not only a matter of justice and equality; it is also essential for building more resilient communities, improving livelihoods, and achieving broader development outcomes. Surveyors and other land professionals play a critical role in this process. By embracing the commitments outlined in this publication and working collaboratively with others, they can contribute to land governance systems that are more inclusive, transparent, and responsive, ensuring that women's land rights are recognised not only in principle, but in practice.

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Salote Michaela Covilati is a geospatial practitioner from Fiji and the Technical Assistant for the Pacific Geospatial Women Network (PGWN) at the Pacific Community (SPC). Salote supports community-based mapping, training, and data initiatives in the Pacific, with a strong focus on empowering local women in geospatial fields. She works extensively with open-source tools and regional partners, bridging technical geospatial knowledge with grassroots needs to support inclusive, data-informed decision-making.



Rohan Bennett is the chair of FIG Commission 7 on Cadastre and Land Management 2023–26. He holds a PhD in Land Administration from the University of Melbourne, Australia, and degrees in Geomatic Engineering and Information Systems. Rohan is also a Professor in Information Systems, specialising in geospatial, cadastral, surveying and land data science. He leads the GeoBusiness research theme within the Innovative Planet Research Institute.



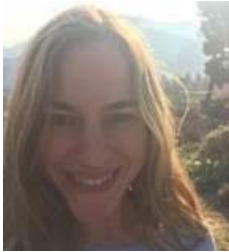
Jennifer Whittal is a Professor in the Geomatics Division at the University of Cape Town. She obtained a BSc (Surveying) and an MSc (Engineering) specialising in GNSS from the University of Cape Town. She also holds a PhD from the University of Calgary for applying critical realism, systems theory and mixed methods to a case of fiscal cadastral systems reform. She is a Professional Land Surveyor and lectures on advanced surveying and land law.



Izuegbu, Ogochukwu Uju is a registered Surveyor with the Surveyors Council of Nigeria and a full member of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors. She is also affiliated with the Geoinformation Society of Nigeria, Northern Surveyors Forum, Women-In-Surveying, and the Young Surveyors Network. She works at the Office of the Surveyor General of the Federation in Nigeria. She holds a B.Sc., M.Sc., and a PhD (2025) in land-related fields, is a LEAD-P certified officer, and serves in Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying.



Victoria Stanley is a Senior Land Administration Specialist at the World Bank. She has worked in more than 25 countries across Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Latin America, and across a wide range of issues, including land reform, land administration, land governance, and land policy. She also has experience in rural and municipal development, gender analysis and inclusion, information technology, public service delivery, and institutional reform. Her current focus of work is on land issues in East Africa and women's land rights globally.



Jennifer Lisher is a Senior Land Administration Specialist at the World Bank with 25 years of experience in land tenure, administration, monitoring and evaluation, and international trade. She has worked across Africa, Asia, and South America with the World Bank, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and the United Nations. She co-founded the Global Land Indicator Initiative, developed a global land logic model and evaluation guidelines, and led efforts to establish SDG indicator 1.4.2 on secure tenure.



Muriel Veldman is a Senior Gender and Land Specialist at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), focusing on land tenure governance, women's land rights, and gender equality. She co-leads the global SDG 5.a.2 workstream, supporting country reporting and advancing methodologies to measure women's land rights. Her work links legal frameworks, land administration systems, and data to inform evidence-based policymaking. With a socio-legal background, she combines legal analysis with field experience in Africa and research in the Middle East.



Ghita Abouyoub is a gender and land specialist at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), supporting global monitoring and reporting for SDG indicator 5.a.2 by providing technical assistance to national stakeholders. With a background in law and political science, and experience in regulatory compliance and development law, she focuses on women's land rights and gender equality in agrifood systems. Her work spans legal and policy analysis, multilingual technical support, and institutional change management across diverse contexts.



Hellen Nyamweru Ndung'u is a land governance professional working with UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN). Based in Nairobi, she contributes to global and regional initiatives on land governance, with a focus on gender equality and women's land rights. Her work supports knowledge sharing, capacity development, and multi-stakeholder engagement to strengthen inclusive land administration systems. She has been involved in facilitating technical discussions and global dialogues to advance equitable and sustainable land governance practices.



Eleonora F. Serpi is an international land governance specialist working with UN-Habitat's Land, Housing and Informal Settlements Section. She supports housing, land, and property initiatives with a strong focus on the Arab States, contributing to UN-Habitat's land and conflict portfolio in the region. Her work promotes FFPLA and context-specific solutions to strengthen land governance, particularly in fragile and Muslim-majority settings, with an emphasis on advancing women's access to land and housing rights.



Iyenemi Ibimina Kakulu (Ibby) is a land management professional with over 40 years of experience spanning academia and industry. She is a Professor of Land Management and Valuation at the Rivers State University, Nigeria. Ibby has served as a Senior Expert with various international organisations, including the UNCCD G20 Global Land Initiative, in her role as a Senior Expert on Gender and Land. She is a member of the Working Group 7.5 on Women's Land Rights and Women in Surveying, bringing a gender focus to land restoration initiatives.



Esther Mwaura-Muiru is a Gender, Governance, and Development expert, currently serving as the Global Advocacy Director for the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign, a global initiative advancing women's land rights, hosted by Landesa. She also co-chairs the Feminist Action Coalition on Climate Justice Commitment Makers sub-committee of Generation Equality. Previously, she was the Global Women, Land Rights Manager for the International Land Coalition and served on the UN-Habitat Advisory Group on Gender Issues (AGGI).



Ashleigh Flowers is a development practitioner and Global Manager at Landesa, serving on the Secretariat of *Stand for Her Land*. Her work is focused on the intersection of gender equity, land rights, and global advocacy. She leads strategic partnerships, resource mobilisation, coalition establishment and development, and global coordination to strengthen women's land rights. She is a graduate of the University of Washington, Seattle and lives on a small farm in the Olympic Peninsula of Washington.



Linda Foster, PLS, GISP, oversees Esri's worldwide strategic vision for land records, cadastre, surveying, and land administration. Long recognised as a champion of bringing GIS and geospatial technologies to unique and challenging situations, she has spent much of her career improving outcomes for timeless, land-based challenges. She also holds a Bachelor of Science in Geological Engineering and a Master of GIS from Penn State University. She is a doctoral candidate in the University of Maine's Surveying Engineering Technology program.



Jill Urban-Karr is a senior business development manager on the international land administration team at Esri. For over 25 years, she has worked around the world to establish innovative, sustainable, and equitable multi-participant land tenure solutions that leverage diverse technologies and international best practices. She holds a Bachelor of Science in geography from Texas A&M University, where she was awarded the Geosciences Distinguished Alumni Award in 2021. She is also a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of the UK.



Markus Koper is a Business Development Specialist at Trimble, contributing to the Cadastral & Boundary Surveying team as a surveying engineer. His expertise lies in FFPLA and Cadastral & Boundary Surveying. Markus began his career in land surveying in 1998 with a three-year vocational training. He earned a degree in surveying technology and gained extensive field experience. He also holds an engineering diploma in geodetic surveying from the Bochum University of Applied Sciences. Markus joined Trimble in 2012. He serves as Trimble's official representative for FIG.

FIG PUBLICATIONS

The FIG publications are divided into four categories. This should assist members and other users to identify the profile and purpose of the various publications.

FIG Policy Statements

FIG Policy Statements include political declarations and recommendations endorsed by the FIG General Assembly. They are prepared to explain FIG policies on important topics to politicians, government agencies and other decision makers, as well as surveyors and other professionals.

FIG Guides

FIG Guides are technical or managerial guidelines endorsed by the Council and recorded by the General Assembly. They are prepared to deal with topical professional issues and provide guidance for the surveying profession and relevant partners.

FIG Reports

FIG Reports are technical reports representing the outcomes from scientific meetings and Commission working groups. The reports are approved by the Council and include valuable information on specific topics of relevance to the profession, members and individual surveyors.

FIG Regulations

FIG Regulations include statutes, internal rules and work plans adopted by the FIG organisation.

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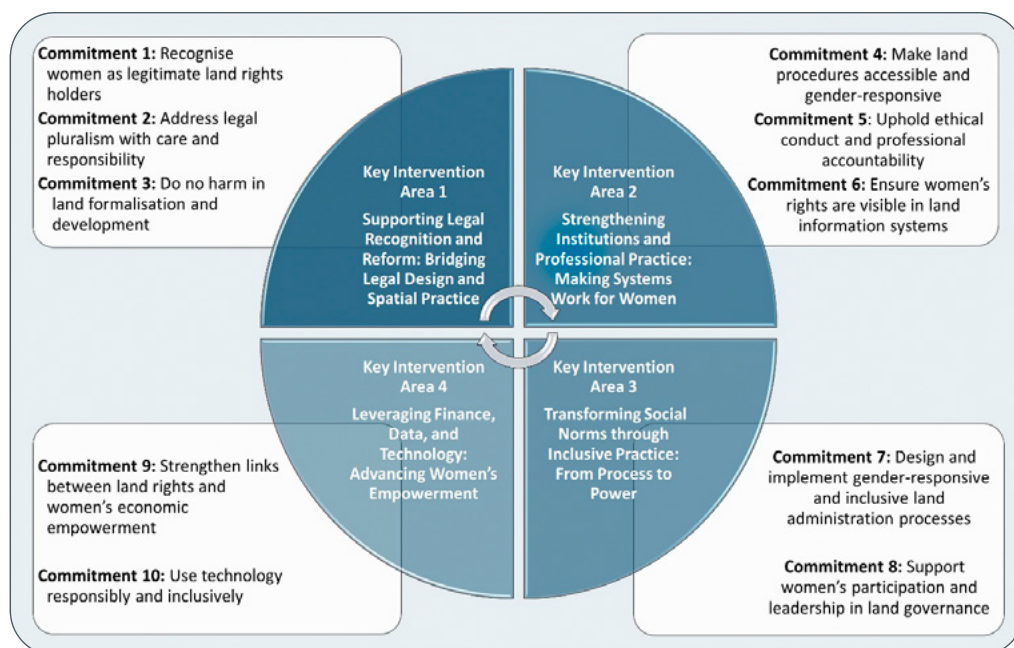
ABOUT FIG



International Federation of Surveyors is the premier international organisation representing the interests of surveyors worldwide. It is a federation of the national member associations and covers the whole range of professional fields within the global surveying community. It provides an international forum for discussion and development aiming to promote professional practice and standards.

FIG was founded in 1878 in Paris and was first known as the Fédération Internationale des Géomètres (FIG). This has become anglicised to the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG). It is a United Nations and World Bank Group recognised non-government organisation (NGO), representing a membership from 120 plus countries throughout the world, and its aim is to ensure that the disciplines of surveying and all who practise them meet the needs of the markets and communities that they serve.

FIG GUIDE



Advancing Women's Land Rights: A Call to Action for Surveyors and Land Professionals

Across the globe, women continue to face significant barriers in accessing, using, and controlling land. These challenges are rooted not only in legal frameworks but also in institutional weaknesses, socio-cultural norms, and limited access to information, resources, and technology. Addressing these barriers requires coordinated, practical action across all levels of land governance.

This publication brings together regional insights and global experiences to highlight the critical role of surveyors and other land professionals in promoting and advancing women's land rights. It demonstrates how everyday professional practices can either reinforce inequality or contribute to more inclusive and equitable outcomes.

Structured around four key intervention areas, the publication outlines 10 concrete commitments that guide professionals in bridging the gap between legal frameworks and lived realities, strengthening institutions, transforming social norms, and leveraging data and technology to empower women.

By translating global principles into actionable steps, this publication provides a practical framework for professionals committed to ensuring that women's land rights are recognised, protected, and realised.