



FIG Working Week 2024

19-24 May

Accra, Ghana

Your World, Our World:
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Presented at the FIG Working Week 2024,
19-24 May 2024 in Accra, Ghana

Improving Gender and Women's Access to Land by increasing land availability through land conservation and land Restoration(12640)

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Keywords: Gender, Women's land rights, land restoration, land degradation, land conservation

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The Issues:

Uncontrolled land degradation from several sources including extreme weather events, is contributing to a reduction in the volume and quality of available lands and this is happening globally.

The Impact:

This reduced land availability for access by women and youth, coupled with poverty, marginalization and gender inequality is further widening the gap in land access and ownership, particularly by women

UNCCD Action:

UNCCD is promoting land restoration through its G20 Global Land Initiative with the objective of preventing, halting, and reversing land degradation, with an ambition to reduce degraded lands by 50 percent, by the year 2040.

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1 INTRODUCTION

- Ongoing global discussions and dialogues on land degradation and restoration are connected with three pressing global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- The conversion of natural habitats, such as forests, grasslands, and wetlands, into human-dominated landscapes has led to the decline and extinction of many species, disrupting the delicate balance of ecosystems (IPBES, 2019).
- The UNCCD G20 Global Land Initiative (GLI), is promoting land restoration and this presents an opportunity for women's economic empowerment through their involvement in the land restoration industry.
- Land degradation has an impact on the volume and quality of available land to be distributed equitably.

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2 LAND DEGRADATION AND LAND AVAILABILITY

- Uncontrolled land degradation reduces the available land for human use and life on earth. When combined with market forces, this can lead to price increases which makes the poor, including women, less able to secure land.
- Land degradation, driven by unsustainable land use practices, deforestation, and climate change, has led to the loss of arable land, the depletion of soil fertility, and the scarcity of land resources (Doss et al., 2015).
- The loss of arable land, the depletion of soil fertility, and the scarcity of water resources can significantly limit the ability of women to engage in productive agricultural activities and secure their livelihoods (Deere & Doss, 2006).
- Two main issues that impact on women's access to land include gender stereotypes and purchasing power are these are discussed.

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2.1 Gender Stereotypes and Women's Access to Land

- Gender stereotypes make broad generalization about the characteristics, roles and behaviours of men and women based on their gender. These work against women's access to land in different ways.
- The view that land ownership is best suited to men and not to women because men are better at leadership roles within the family and should therefore be in charge of land is one of such stereotypes. Women tend to be deprived of land ownership in some traditional settings, particularly in Africa.
- There are certain belief systems that run through most African communities, such as the denial of women's land rights and the patriarchal nature of societies. (Akinola, 2018).
- Also, women themselves hold on to some of these cultural norms and stereotypes and they ultimately succumb to gender stereotypes which are not in support of women owning land or property.

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2.2 Purchasing Power and Women's Access to Land

- The market forces of demand and supply shape land value patterns, trends and land prices. The ability or inability of supply to match the demand for land can influence land prices quite significantly in either direction.
- As land supply reduces through degradation, the highest bidder syndrome which characterizes the urban property market in particular, enables those with higher incomes have easier access to the limited land in supply, over those with lower incomes. Women generally have a lower purchasing power than men. The disparity between men and women's income is still significant.
- The UN estimates that on average, women in the labour market still earn 23 percent less than men globally and women spend about three times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men (UN Report, Accessed May 2024). Land restoration and women empowerment can change the narrative.

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3 LAND CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND

- Land conservation and land restoration both work to increase land availability. One primary benefit of land restoration in addressing SDG 15 is its ability to enhance the overall health and productivity of terrestrial ecosystems.
- By rehabilitating degraded lands and implementing sustainable land management practices, such as agroecology and conservation agriculture, the overall availability and quality of arable land can be improved (FAO, 2019).
- While land conservation works by reducing the rate at which land degradation takes place, restoration repairs already degraded lands. Both conservation and restoration result in increased land availability.
- Land restoration presents another window of opportunity for women's land rights advocacy groups to penetrate through policy or dialogue to achieve an improvement in women's land ownership.

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3.1 Land Restoration Project Planning

- Land Restoration project planning is driven by the type of degradation, its causes and impact on life and other environmental media. The overall objective in undertaking the restoration project itself further shapes the planning process.
- What is paramount in setting land restoration planning objectives, is that the biodiversity of land is restored which would enable it to continue to render ecosystem services that are required for life on earth and as provided for in SDG Goal 15.
- As land owners are key stakeholders in the planning of restoration projects, in certain contexts, the chances that women would be engaged at this level should not be left to chance.
- It should be a requirement of the responsible agencies, organizations or companies in charge of the restoration project to ensure that equal opportunities are created for equitable representation of women and men in restoration planning.

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3.2 Purchasing Power and Women's Access to Land

- Land Restoration projects are very expensive and involve huge investments running into several thousands of dollars. The process of contracting and vendor selection can be designed to ensure that opportunity is created for women with the requisite entrepreneurial skills and technical skills, to be engaged.
- There is ample opportunity for women to participate in restoration projects and if utilized, can lead to large scale women economic empowerment.
- Economic empowerment increases women's purchasing power and improves their chances for land acquisition amongst other things. Women, besides working for contractors or as contractors, can be actively engaged in the supervision of land restoration projects either as consultants or by direct employment with the restoration implementation agency.
- Land availability can be enhanced through land restoration.

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4 INCREASING LAND AVAILABILITY THROUGH LAND RESTORATION

- The completion and handover of restored lands back to local community or to the government by the project implementers, is a crucial milestone in the life of any land restoration project. It presents an opportunity for a fresh start in sustainable land management particularly, equitable access to land.
- By implementing sustainable land management practices, such as agroecology, conservation agriculture, and ecosystem restoration, the degradation of land can be prevented or even reversed, leading to an increase in the overall availability and quality of land resources (FAO, 2018).
- This can create more opportunities for women to access and utilize land for their agricultural and livelihood activities, ultimately contributing to greater gender equality and food security.

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4.1 A Suggested Approach to Land Redistribution

- Land restoration presents a new opportunity for reforms and an opportunity to make right the wrongs associated with inequities in land ownership of past generations. This has left many women, and in some communities, men also, marginalized and excluded from owning land.
- Degraded land is of little value and use to both men and women alike, and the likelihood that land restoration will be financed by the original land owners using their personal or collective private financial resources is unlikely.
- In situations where huge financial interventions may be required, this creates a bargaining ground for governments and their land restoration financiers to dialogue with land owners on possible avenues for mainstreaming land redistribution into the planning and execution of land restoration projects. A suggested approach would include:

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4.1 A Suggested Approach to Land Redistributioncontd.

- A number of steps are suggested as follows:
 - 1) Stocktaking of the original land owners and/or possibly their descendants to ascertain the primary beneficiaries of a planned restoration process.
 - 2) Disaggregation of the data collected by gender to determine the historical representation of women if any.
 - 3) Development of a proposed land redistribution plan that is gender friendly and sharing that with local community to get their buy-in.
 - 4) Interact with land owners, community and engage stakeholder to secure their consent to land redistribution.
 - 5) Decision-making by the original land owners on the ratio of men to women in the redistribution of restored lands.
 - 6) Ensure that land titling and registration are in place to ensure that all old and new land owners secure proper land titles.

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CONCLUSION

Land restoration has the potential to play a pivotal role in narrowing the gaps in land access, particularly for women and youth, ultimately contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality.

This is possible by increasing the overall availability and quality of land resources. An increase in land availability can create new opportunities for women and youth to access and utilize land for their agricultural, livelihood, and entrepreneurial activities.

By implementing land restoration initiatives, such as urban greening, urban agriculture, and ecosystem-based approaches, the negative impacts of land degradation can be mitigated, leading to improved environmental conditions, increased access to green spaces, and more sustainable resource management.