

Enhancing Land tenure security for women and local communities in Africa within a globalized world

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State of play

Pressure on and for land continues to mount globally, unabatedly. Multiple crises facing humanity; from, pandemics, extreme weather-induced displacements, conflicts, loss of life and property; hunger, biodiversity and ecosystem-integrity loss- all looking for solutions on land. At the center of these is an extractive economic model, characterized by insatiable demand for fossil fuels; mining and overexploitation of the agricultural production system. In the face of this, land rights are evermore precarious for many, especially women and marginalized communities with less economic wherewithal to undertake intensive; and often extractive land use. **Land has been commoditized to the extent that its value is narrowly measured by the short-term economic returns** derived from it, ignoring all other cultural, religious, and environmental values.

Need for an inclusive and green land use system for today and tomorrow.

The industrial Agriculture model, anchored on monocultures, chemical inputs and mechanized operations is most widespread across the world today. In Africa, Governments and aid agencies continue to invest in intensive production through top-down extension services, research and infrastructure development that does not give farmers an option or support to adopt extensive ecologically restorative inclusive food & income systems such as agroecology. Promises that industrial farming would reduce hunger and increase production are short-lived, as recent reportsⁱ show. Agriculture intensification in Africa of the last few decades, has not resulted the taunted goal of increasing food production or reducing hunger. Instead the impact has been soil degradation, over-dependence on chemical inputs, and concentration of resources- land, water and seeds- in the hands of few, leading to disinheritance of many women and poor communities, whose land and seed sovereignty rights were already dicey. Once soil and ecosystem health get destroyed, local farmers are left indebted without income, evermore susceptible to the worsening climate crisis and more food insecure. In 2021, FAO reportedⁱⁱ that over 3 billion people globally were food insecure. Many governments in Africa have not fully protected all legitimate land tenure rights; especially those not protected in law as called for in the VGGTⁱⁱⁱ

Moreover, Land and land use is a big piece in the in the climate change puzzle. Climate change affects the quality and health of land, while land-use determines whether or not it contributes to the climate crisis. IPPC^{iv} puts a big question mark on the future of intensive, large-scale industrial farming. Intensive land use, coupled with chemical inputs and mechanization kills the ability of the soil not only to absorb and hold carbon but also to nurture healthy life. Most African countries have not systematized appropriate application of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) principles in land based projects, and as such, communities and women stand to lose their land without recourse or an equitable share of the benefits of such projects

Governments and investors have to rethink the agriculture & food production systems to those that work for people and planet.

No land-based projects should jeopardize legitimate tenure rights of women and local communities

The intersecting gender question in the land sector

Gendered cultural dynamics in Africa imply that women have little or no say in decisions made on land. Land is still governed under customary laws, women's land rights are often hinged to their relations with male kin. Commercialization and intensification of land use further alienates women from decision making on how land is used, and how proceeds from the land are allocated. Yet, women continue to shoulder the greatest burden of care within their households. Any crisis; be it local or global such as GBV, Pandemics such as covid 19, climate crisis etc, only increases this burden of care on women^v.

While women have consistently innovated alternative spaces to consolidate and raise their voices through collective mobilization such as *Women to Kilimanjaro movement*^{vi}, not much attention is given to their demands at the policy arena. Their grievances remain largely unattended. **Governments and their partners, including investors in land, should be guided by an intersectional gender analysis in any land based projects and facilitate the engagement of women and marginalized communities in decision making.**

A globalized food system is not the answer.

So called global value chains, long supply chains undermine food sovereignty, local food security and the right to food and puts pressure on local communities to produce for an export market. With low and middle income countries depending on food imports they are very vulnerable to global crises. Locally determined land and food systems have been seen to be more agile and resilient to global crises: Covid 19 showed us that the global food system is precarious, and can collapse any time. Shocks or stresses in any components of a global food system from production; distribution; to consumption, as happened during the Covid crisis; spread rapidly throughout system and threatens the functioning of supply chains and the food security and nutrition of consumers^{vii}. Similarly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has had far reaching impacts on the global food system. In recent research^{viii}, ActionAid found that food prices in Asia, Latin America Middle East and Africa have doubled and even tripled in some cases, due to rise in fuel prices, cost of grains like wheat and maize as well as increase in fertilizer prices.

Similarly, the heavy reliance on food imports by African countries has placed countries at significant risk of exposure to global economic shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic^{ix}. **Food systems transformation must NOT be driven and centered on profits for corporates. It must incorporate and support smallholder and family food producers who produce the most food consumed in the world and. It must also prioritize local food systems including farmers' markets that are more resilient to global shocks and crises.**

Governments in Africa and their development partners must step up their support and protection for legitimate and legal land tenure rights of communities in line with the provisions of VGGT.

End Notes

ⁱ UNECA 2021: African regional overview of food security and nutrition 2020: transforming food systems for affordable **health diets** <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/44789>

Failing Africa's Farmers: An Impact Assessment of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa: https://sites.tufts.edu/qdae/files/2020/07/20-01_Wise_FailureToYield.pdf

ⁱⁱ FAO, 2021: Statue of Food and Agriculture Rome, Italy. <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/sofa-2021/en/>

ⁱⁱⁱ FAO 2012: Voluntary Guidelines On The Responsible Governance Of Tenure Of Land, Fisheries And Forests In The Context Of National Food Security. <https://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

^{iv} ActionAid 2019: <https://actionaid.org/news/2019/actionaid-responds-un-report-land-and-climate-change>

^v AAI/PSA 2021: Southern Africa on the Brink of Famine? Recovery from food crisis through resilient, accountable and gender-responsive agricultural development. <https://feministafrica.net/2022/05/17/feminist-africa-volume-3-issue-1-2022-african-womens-lives-in-the-time-of-a-pandemic/>

^{vi} ActionAid 2016: Charter of Demands: Actualizing Women's Land Rights In Africa. <https://actionaid.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/English-Charter-to-print.pdf>

^{vii} FAO, 2021: Statue of Food and Agriculture Rome, Italy. <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/sofa-2021/en/>

^{viii} ActionAid 2022: Doubly Devastating: Local Communities disproportionately affected by food fuel and fertilizer prices. <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Doubly%20Devastating%20-%20ActionAid%2022.pdf>

^{ix} <https://actionaid.org/news/2020/reliance-imports-and-industrial-farming-deepening-food-crisis-across-southern-africa>