

Routes to change

Rural women's voices in land,
climate and market governance
in sub-Saharan Africa

Philippine Sutz, Emilie Beauchamp and Anna Bolin





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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association, IED Afrique and the DCF Alliance (including Hannah Patnaik and George Djohy for their previous work on gender and inclusion in the DCF), Mark Kebo Akparibo from Ghana Federation of Forest and Farm Producers (GhaFFaP) and Elvis Kuudaar from the Forest and Farm Facility Ghana, for their contributions in shaping up the case studies, as well as Tracy Kajumba, Pilar Domingo and Lorenzo Cotula for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of the report. Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report, and any errors, are the authors' alone.

Produced by IIED's Natural Resources Group

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Published by IIED, July 2021.

Sutz, P, Beauchamp, E and Bolin, A (2021) Routes to change: rural women's voices in land, climate and market governance in sub-Saharan Africa Research report. IIED, London.

pubs.iied.org/20331IIED
ISBN: 978-1-78431-906-9

This publication has been reviewed according to IIED's peer review policy, which sets out a rigorous, documented and accountable process (see www.iied.org/research-excellence-impact for more information). The reviewers were Pilar Domingo from ODI and Tracy Kajumba from IIED.

Cover photo: Women shea collectors in Tele-Bere, Ghana, sorting shea nuts before washing and drying them (Credit: Tele-Bere)

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Acronyms

BRACED	Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters
CDA	communal adaptation committee
DCF	Devolved Climate Finance
FFF	Forest and Farm Facility
FFPO	forest and farm producer organisations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TAWLA	Tanzania Women Lawyers Association
VSLA	village savings and loans association

Summary

Context and objectives

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified women's unequal share of power and decision-making as a critical area of concern for gender equality. While there have been some improvements in women's formal political participation in the interim, they remain underrepresented in most decision-making processes across the globe. This is particularly the case in the global South, where rural women tend to bear the bulk of the impacts of poverty and climate change, often without any opportunity to voice their needs or priorities.

This report, through a cross-sectoral analysis of some of IIED's recent work, aims to map out the most effective tools and approaches for strengthening rural women's voices in decision-making processes, and in doing so inform improved, better integrated policy and programming. More specifically, the report looks to answer the following questions:

- What factors enable rural women's voices to be heard in decision-making affecting their livelihoods?
- What are the main challenges that practitioners should be aware of?
- How can programmes and projects ensure that rural women's voices are heard and can influence decision-making processes?

Overview of evidence to date

There is a growing body of research relevant to what works, and how, when it comes to strengthening women's voices and participation in decision-making processes. The key findings identified include:

- The local institutional and incentive context is a key enabling condition for successful collective action, with the nature of political processes, regimes and institutions playing a decisive role in enabling women's access to decision-making.
- Achieving a 'critical mass' of women at meetings is crucial to influencing decision-making.
- Gendered socio-cultural norms can be a strong constraining factor on how women and girls participate in and benefit from collective action and decision-making processes.

- Women's increased representation in governance bodies, including the adoption of 'quota systems', does not per se guarantee 'full and effective' participation or that women's voices have proportionate influence.
- Women's voices rely on individual and collective capabilities, with formal education, access to legal and technical knowledge, as well as networks and solidarity, potentially enhancing individual capabilities.
- Economic capital combined with social and cultural capital can increase the chances of women gaining bargaining power at the household level, as well as their potential influence at a community or national level.
- Women's movements, groups and coalitions are crucial to women's voices, as, in the absence of a collective ability to defend their interests and rights, it is very difficult for women to exert the power and influence necessary to shift entrenched legal and social norms.
- CARE's Gender Equality Framework (GEF) sets out a number of requirements that must be met to achieve gender equality and enable women's voices to be heard, including: 1) build agency; 2) change relations; and 3) transform structures.

Case studies

The report focuses on three recent case studies from sub-Saharan Africa involving sectors – land, climate and forest-based enterprise – that affect rural women's livelihoods. Though the three cases vary according to geography, scale and sector, all relate to local-level governance in rural areas, thereby allowing cross-sectoral lessons to be drawn.

The first case study, from Tanzania, analyses an approach aimed at strengthening women's participation in local land governance through adoption of gender-sensitive village bylaws. The second case study, from Senegal, assesses advances and lags in women's participation achieved through the pilot of the socially inclusive, bottom-up Devolved Climate Finance (DCF). Finally, the third case study, from Ghana, looks at how a mixed-gender federation of producer organisations is strengthening women's individual and collective agency through enterprise.

Lessons learnt from Case Study 1: Tanzania

- Women's quotas for local governance bodies in national legislation can be an important starting point, both in terms of legitimising the adoption of gender-sensitive bylaws and facilitating their replication on a wider scale.

- Participatory adoption of local regulations is an effective way of ensuring that national legislation promoting women's participation is implemented locally, as well as initiating community discussions on their purpose and the opportunities they present.
- Local rules that provide community-wide benefits, rather than following a purely women-centric approach, contribute to greater local ownership and are more likely to be well-received by all community members.

Lessons learnt from Case Study 2: Senegal

- Active engagement of women is needed at every stage of planning, as merely applying a 'gender lens' to programmed activities will not suffice to ensure that women's priorities are taken into account across all investment decisions.
- More resources and time are needed to engage women – addressing this issue requires not only building women's individual skills, but investing in collective initiatives that will provide trainings and skills development, as well as a support network within which women can find and amplify their voices.

Lessons learnt from Case Study 3: Ghana

- It is important to find common ground upon which shared concerns can be established, thereby ensuring all key actors – not just women – recognise their interests are at stake.
- Working with women's collective enterprises can help strengthen rights and access in other strategic areas, as economic success creates bargaining power, which in turn can generate outcomes with wider implications for women.

Recommendations

The key enabling factors identified in the case studies can be grouped into three main categories: 1) enabling structures, rules and processes; 2) a supportive local environment; and 3) promoting individual and collective capacities to reach critical mass. The report's key recommendations for programming are as follows:

Enabling structures, rules and processes

- Promote robust local governance frameworks with inclusive and participatory processes.
- Advocate for cross-level legislation that stipulates a minimum number (ideally 50%) of local government body members are women, and support adoption of local rules reinforcing and complementing national provisions. Similarly, encourage legislation stipulating a minimum percentage of women members in the decision-making bodies of private entities such as cooperatives and producer organisations.

- Work with local businesses, cooperatives and other local bodies to establish guiding principles and rules promoting gender equality, democratic decision-making and equity.

A supportive local environment

- Ensure that local government, villages and projects hold meetings at times and places accessible to women.
- Allocate more time and spaces to women, with interventions budgeting and planning for women's participation and needs at all stages of project design.
- Request more gender-targeted resources from donors.
- Invest in engagement and power dynamics analysis *before* and *throughout* the intervention, in order to gain in-depth knowledge of the local context, social norms and understandings of gender equality.
- Establish informal consultative bodies that can enable women to share their concerns at implementation stage.

Promoting individual and collective capacities to reach critical mass

- Implement activities aimed at strengthening women's skills and knowledge in the intervention's area of focus.
- Promote women's entrepreneurship not only as an important strategy for achieving financial independence, but as a means of gaining access to resources and capital formation.
- Work with women's networks and groups to engage other and new groups.
- Support women to associate and formalise their savings groups in order to scale up investments.

1

Introduction

Despite progress being made over recent decades, 25 years on from the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) – “the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women’s rights” (UN Women, nd) – gender inequalities remain huge across the globe. Evidence suggests that women from low- and middle-income countries are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and points towards a feminisation of poverty. As a general trend, women earn lower wages than men, face greater challenges in accessing land and natural resources, work longer hours (including unpaid domestic work) and are more vulnerable to climate change (UN Women, 2018). Such discrimination represents an important barrier to achieving gender equality, and ultimately, given that women and girls make up half the world’s population, eradicating poverty for all people as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.

A core component of gender equality and women’s empowerment is women’s ability to participate in and influence decision-making processes in all spheres of life.

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration identified women’s unequal share of power and decision-making as a critical area of concern for gender equality. Since then, “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” has been recognised as a key target in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, with SDG 5 focused on achieving gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment. While there have been some improvements in women’s formal political participation over the past 25 years,¹ in general women remain underrepresented in most decision-making processes across the globe.

1 The 2020 review of the BPfA found that women’s representation in national parliaments doubled from 12% in 1995 to an average of 24.3% globally in 2019 (UN Women, 2020).

Furthermore, though women's lack of participation and voice remains a concern across the globe (UN Women, 2020), this is particularly the case in the global South. Here – although contexts vary considerably across the region, and women from different backgrounds face differing concerns and circumstances – rural women tend to bear the bulk of the impacts of poverty and climate change, often without any opportunity to voice their needs or priorities (Greene *et al.*, 2020). This lack of voice applies to decision-making processes in all sectors, at all levels (household, community, national).

IIED's recent work shows that decision-making bodies in sectors such as land, climate change or conservation are consistently dominated by men, with women's needs and interests rarely taken into account (Franks and Booker, 2018; Greene *et al.*, 2020; Sutz *et al.*, 2019). While there is increasing recognition of this lack of participation, including within planning and institutional tools, there is limited evidence of what really works to ensure that women can fully and effectively participate in political, public and economic life.

1.1 Purpose and focus of this report

This report, through a cross-sectoral analysis of some of IIED's recent work, contributes to an emerging body of literature on the factors enabling women to participate in and influence decision-making processes, with a particular focus on rural women's voices. In doing so, it aims to inform improved, better integrated policy and programming, which will allow such voices to be heard.

Over the past decade, IIED and its partners have implemented a wide range of projects across various thematic areas, several of which have emphasised gender equality and included activities/approaches aimed at strengthening rural women's voices. In adopting a cross-sectoral outlook of these projects, the report's ultimate objective is to map out successful pathways to increasing rural women's voices in local decision-making processes.

More specifically, the report aims to answer the following research questions:

- What factors enable rural women's voices to be heard in decision-making affecting their livelihoods?
- What are the main challenges that practitioners should be aware of?
- How can programmes and projects ensure that rural women's voices are heard and can influence decision-making processes?

1.2 Case studies

For the purpose of our analysis, we have selected three recent case studies from sub-Saharan Africa involving sectors – specifically, land, climate and forest-based enterprise – that affect rural women's livelihoods. Though the three cases vary according to geography, scale and sector, all relate to local-level governance in rural areas, thereby allowing cross-sectoral lessons to be drawn. The cases were selected on the basis that each provided documented evidence of outcomes arising from their chosen approach to women's voices.

The first case study, from Tanzania, analyses an approach aimed at strengthening women's participation in local land governance through adoption of gender-sensitive village bylaws (Sutz *et al.*, 2019).

The second case study, from Senegal, assesses advances and lags in women's participation achieved through the pilot of the socially inclusive, bottom-up Devolved Climate Finance (DCF) mechanism (DCF Alliance, 2019).

Finally, the third case study, from Ghana, looks at how a mixed-gender federation of producer organisations is strengthening women's individual and collective agency through enterprise.

The report is structured as follows: Sections 2–4 present analyses of the three case studies in turn (respectively, Tanzania, Senegal and Ghana). In each instance, an iterative inductive process is used to tease out key enabling and constraining factors. Moreover, the outcomes of the approaches are, to the fullest extent possible, explored. Following this, Section 5 discusses the cross-sectoral lessons learnt from the case studies, and identifies key recommendations for development actors and interventions.

1.3 Overview of evidence to date

There is a growing body of research relevant to what works, and how, when it comes to strengthening women's voices and participation in decision-making processes. Most of the literature reviewed did not have a specific focus on rural women's voices in local-level governance, with little evidence of what works in this particular area having thus far been produced. The key findings identified are listed below.

The local institutional and incentive context is a key enabling condition for successful collective action (Evans and Nambiar, 2013; Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Ostrom, 1990). The nature of political processes, regimes and institutions plays a decisive role in enabling women's access to decision-making (Domingo *et al.*, 2015). In particular, Domingo *et al.* argue that the degree of openness within a political system to women's voices and influence makes a difference to whether and how they engage. An enabling institutional context encompasses a set of institutions and processes that

promote participation and collective action, and ensures that decisions are implemented (Ostrom, 1990).

Achieving ‘critical mass’ is important to influencing decision-making. Studies examining the impact of women’s participation on decision-making and leadership in community forestry institutions in Nepal and India show that the most important factor in women’s voices being heard is their ability to create a ‘critical mass’ at meetings (see Agarwal 2010, 2015). In order to have a positive impact on gender outcomes, this ‘critical’ number translates into at least 25–50% participation of women, with 50%+ participation increasing the likelihood of women taking on leadership roles (Agarwal, 2015).

Gendered socio-cultural norms can be a strong constraining factor. While culture is not homogenous, in many socio-cultural contexts the gendered, hierarchical nature of community norms/institutions have a crucial – often constraining – influence on how women and girls participate in and benefit from collective action and decision-making processes (Agarwal, 2000; Evans and Nambiar, 2013; Pandolfelli *et al.*, 2007)

Women’s increased representation in governance bodies does not equate to full and effective participation or influence. When it comes to shaping outcomes, the adoption of ‘quota systems’ – whereby it is prescribed that a minimum percentage of decision-making body members be women – does not per se guarantee ‘full and effective’ participation or that women’s voices have proportionate influence (International Alert, 2012; Sutz *et al.*, 2019). Even when quotas are respected (which is not always the case) (Bawa and Sanyare, 2013), women do not necessarily attend meetings or fully and effectively participate in decision-making processes (International Alert, 2012; Sutz *et al.*, 2019). It is worth noting, however, that according to Agarwal, local forest management groups with a high proportion of women in their executive committees show significantly greater improvement in forest conditions than groups with a low proportion of women (Agarwal, 2009).

Women’s voices rely on individual and collective capabilities. These are shaped by life experiences and are embedded in the wider socio-cultural context. Formal education, access to legal and technical knowledge, as well as networks and solidarity, can enhance individual capabilities (Domingo *et al.*, 2015).

Economic capital (e.g. ownership of productive assets and control of income) **combined with social and cultural capital** (e.g. education, skills, social and professional networks) **can increase the chances of women gaining bargaining power** at the household level, as well as their potential influence at a community or national level (Domingo *et al.*, 2015).

Women’s movements, groups and coalitions are crucial to women’s voices. Building women’s capacity to organise for their political, civic and economic rights – within both women-only and mixed-gender organisations – is an important

precondition for empowerment and longer-term poverty reduction (Kabeer, 2011). In the absence of a collective ability to defend their interests and rights, it is very difficult for women to exert the power and influence necessary to shift entrenched legal and social norms (Domingo *et al.*, 2015; Evans and Nambiar, 2013).

CARE's Gender Equality Framework (GEF) sets out three key requirements that must be met to achieve gender equality and enable women's voices to be heard. These include: 1) *build agency*: develop women's consciousness, confidence, self-esteem, knowledge, skills and capabilities; 2) *change relations*: through intimate relations, social networks, group membership and activism, alter the power relations through which people live their lives; and 3) *transform structures*: address discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices (informal sphere), and laws, policies, procedures and services (formal sphere) (CARE, 2019).

Box 1. Key concepts

The following key concepts have been used to guide our analysis:

Collective action refers to voluntary action taken by a group to achieve common interests. Collective action can assume various forms, ranging from formal institutions to voluntary self-help groups, and take place across all aspects of political, public or economic life.

Decision-making bodies refers, for the purpose of this report, to both public and private bodies making direct decisions and consultative bodies established to inform decision-makers.

Gender equality refers to the equal enjoyment of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards by people of all genders and ages. Equality does not mean that all genders are the same, rather that someone's enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life chances should not be governed by whether they are born female or male (CARE, 2009).

Participation in decision-making refers to women's ability to gain access to decision-making processes affecting their public, economic and private lives, whether at a national or community level (Domingo *et al.*, 2015). Women's participation in decision-making processes is full and effective when women's voices are heard and their needs and priorities reflected in the decisions being made.

Public life refers to the realm within which formal political processes are embedded, and activities concerned with public and political issues take place. It includes, but is not limited to, the work of government, media, civil society organisations, networks of activists and other figures in public-facing roles (Weldon and Hassim, 2020).

Women's voices refers to the capacity of women to make known their demands, views and interests, and for these to be heeded (O'Neil *et al.*, 2007). Such capacity includes confidence in the worth of one's opinions and the legitimacy of expressing them. It also includes the ability to make informed choices based on information, education and critical understanding. Voice can be exercised at the household, community or national level, through either individual or collective action (Domingo *et al.*, 2015).

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women, individually or collectively, gain control over their lives, including the ability to make and enact strategic choices (Kabeer, 2011). Empowerment can take place across all dimensions of a woman's life – whether psychological, educational, social legal, political or economic – with empowerment in one area not necessarily leading to empowerment in others (Domingo *et al.*, 2015; Eyben, 2011; Luttrell *et al.*, 2009; O'Neill *et al.*, 2014).

Women's economic empowerment refers to women's ability to make economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities, including but not limited to their participation in labour markets, the sharing of unpaid work, and access to/control over productive assets, such as capital, land and natural resources (Domingo *et al.*, 2015; Tornqvist and Schmitz, 2009). Although economic empowerment might open up possibilities for change in other spheres of women's lives, it should not be equated with pure 'empowerment'. A woman who has the ability to make economic decisions and has economic capital may not be empowered in other areas of her life.

2

Tanzania: bringing the law home through village bylaws

In Tanzania, land represents a critical resource, with rural communities dependent on it to sustain their livelihoods. Despite a progressive legislative framework when it comes to gender equality, land remains for the most part controlled by men. As a result, women tend to access it only informally and indirectly, which makes them particularly vulnerable to land dispossession and more prone to poverty (Kempster, 2011), especially in a context of increased pressure on land.

Across the country, large-scale land acquisitions for agribusiness or other commercial purposes have resulted in tracts of village land being leased out to investors. Land loss linked to these investments often results in negative impacts for communities, with women particularly affected, as their lack of control over land means it can more easily be given or taken away (ActionAid, 2015).

Such was the case in the district of Kisarawe, in the coastal Pwani region. In 2009, a UK-based company was offered a 99-year lease to set up a jatropha plantation, affecting land held by 11 villages (Salcedo-La Viña and Boehm, 2018). While the project never became operational, the acquisition nonetheless had long-term implications for local communities, due to the permanent transfer of village land to general land and the revocation of community members' use rights.² This point was not properly communicated to the

2 For a better understanding of tenure types in Tanzania, see Tenga, 2015.

villagers, who had assumed the land would remain accessible. Though some community members were formally consulted, it appears they were not provided with this information and were therefore not in a position to give free, prior and informed consent. Following the project's failure, the land was not returned to villagers – instead, a national company involved in cattle-raising took over the lease (TAWLA, 2016). Despite no obvious activity taking place, the land is now guarded by armed staff, with villagers prohibited from accessing it.

Following the acquisition, many women who had used the land for farming, worship practices and woodfire collection found themselves without any land access. A study examining two of the affected villages by IIED's long-term partner, the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA), revealed the acquisition had come as a surprise to most women, who had not taken part in discussions about the deal, and in some cases were not even aware of it. The study highlighted that many women did not attend or participate in village meetings where these issues would normally be discussed, with further investigation revealing that this was due to gendered socio-cultural practices (“women do not talk in public in front of men”) as well as the fact that meetings often took place at times when women had to perform domestic chores, such as cooking for their families (TAWLA, 2016).

Following their study, TAWLA decided to develop an approach aimed at strengthening women's voices in land-related decision-making processes in the affected villages.

2.1 The approach

In Tanzania, village land is held in trust by the village council – the village executive body – on behalf of all villagers. The village council is, amongst other things, primarily responsible for managing land within the village boundaries, including land allocation processes.

The village council is composed of democratically elected members. The Local Government (District Authorities) Act requires that at least a quarter of council members be women, while the quorum for validating decisions requires that at least half the council's members attend the meeting in question. The village council cannot allocate land without approval from the village assembly, the highest decision-making body in the village, which includes all villagers over the age of 18 (Schreiber, 2017).³

Through the existence of village-level government bodies, gender quotas and democratic processes, the Tanzanian legislative framework holds the potential for ensuring that community-level decision-making regarding land is participative and gender-inclusive.

3 Both institutions were created under the Local Government (District Authorities) Act, 1982.

In practice, however, implementation of the legislation regulating land allocation processes has been a major challenge (Kessy, 2009; Pederson, 2010).

From a gender perspective, though quotas for village council members are usually respected, women members do not always attend meetings. Moreover, many do not attend village assemblies. This, certainly, was the case in Kisarawe. The low participation rates exhibited by women seem to be rooted in socio-cultural norms around gender roles and divisions of labour, as well as the timing of meetings. Women are expected to perform more caregiving tasks than men, which takes up much of their time, thereby limiting their participation in community forums (Kisambu, 2016). Even when they do take part in meetings, this does not guarantee full and effective participation (Misafi, 2014). In practice, women remain largely absent from decision-making, and are rarely actively involved in land administration.

In response to these challenges, TAWLA sought to harness the national legal framework's gender-inclusive and participatory nature to support the adoption of village-level regulations (see Box 2) promoting greater involvement of women in local land governance. The approach was based on a series of multi-dimensional activities that involved all community members. Amongst other things, activities included developing model gender-sensitive provisions, providing technical support to villages wishing to adopt gender-sensitive local bylaws, community dialogue regarding women's access to land, and capacity-building for women around land governance (Sutz *et al.*, 2019).

Box 2. What are village bylaws?

Bylaws are subsidiary rules enacted at the local level. They consist of locally-defined agreements regarding the use and governance of natural resources, and encompass social and cultural relations (Granier, 2010; Williams *et al.*, 1999). In Tanzania, the Local Government (District Authorities) Act, 1982, gives villages and district authorities the power to enact local bylaws provided they are consistent with national laws. Such bylaws can be used to facilitate a consensual, written and legally recognised framework that promotes women's participation in village governance, clarifies land and natural resource governance rules, and increases local government transparency. In this way, their adoption gives women and men the means to participate in, and claim ownership of, land governance processes.

2.1.1 Making bylaws gender-sensitive

With technical support from the World Resources Institute (WRI), TAWLA developed model provisions promoting women's participation in local land governance (Kisambu, 2016; Massay, 2016; Salcedo-La Viña and Morarji, 2016). The model provisions both reiterate a number of rules already existent in national law, and incorporate new rules on community-wide participation in decision-making processes, with a particular emphasis on gender-sensitive quorums and the establishment of a women's committee (see Box 3). Gender thus becomes an element embedded within broader governance mechanisms and rules. The provisions are proposed to community members and discussed during Step 3 of the adoption process (see Figure 1). Although the model provisions have a strong emphasis on women's issues, the approach is not women-centric, as the adoption process offers a means of enacting provisions on any issue of interest to the villagers.

Box 3. Key gender-sensitive model bylaw provisions proposed by TAWLA

- Women shall constitute at least one third of the village assembly quorum for ordinary meetings, and one quarter of the quorum for extraordinary meetings.
- Women shall constitute at least one third of the members of the village council.
- Where there are 20 or more members of the village council, the minimum number of meeting attendees needed to constitute a quorum shall be 15, or 10 where there are less than 20 members.
- Regardless of the required quorum for village council meetings, women shall constitute no less than one third of those present.
- Decisions of the village council shall be made by a simple majority, with at least half the council members present required to arrive at that decision.
- A gender committee shall be established to, amongst other things, conduct women-only meetings prior to village assembly decision-making meetings.

2.1.2 A participatory adoption process

The methods proposed by TAWLA are based on a bottom-up, participatory process. This includes four key steps that must be followed by the village before any bylaw can legally come into effect (see Figure 1). Key actors involved include district and village authorities, who lead the process.

Figure 1. How TAWLA facilitates the participatory adoption of village bylaws



2.2 Implementation and outcomes

The adoption of gender-sensitive village bylaws was initially piloted in six villages in Kisarawe (see Kisambu, 2016).⁴ Having successfully supported this initial phase, TAWLA was asked by district authorities to facilitate the adoption of bylaws across all 71 villages in the district. Since then, the approach has gained momentum across the country, with TAWLA supporting the process in an additional 50 villages in the districts of Kilombero and Ulanga.⁵

In Kisarawe, the request by district authorities for bylaws to be replicated throughout the district stemmed both from the observable positive impacts on local governance and social cohesion, and a desire to harmonise legislation and governance practices across the entire district.

Since early 2018, follow-ups visits have been conducted in a number of villages where bylaws were adopted during the pilot phase, in order to gain a sense of the approach's impact four years on. The following outcomes were observed during these visits.

Women are more present and vocal in village meetings. At the beginning of the initiative, women rarely spoke during meetings and would generally sit separately from men. Four years on, TAWLA observed that men and women were sharing the same

4 With support from the World Resources Institute (WRI) and IIED.

5 With support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

space and mingling during meetings. Women now actively participate in decision-making assemblies, and report that their ideas are being listened to by men (Sutz, 2019). A bylaw provision stipulates that village assemblies can only take place when at least half a village's women are in attendance, and villagers reported that this had been respected thus far, notably through arranging meetings at times when women can attend.

Women make more claims to land. In Marumbo, members of the village council have reported that women have made more claims to individual plots of land through village authorities. While these claims amount to informal registration rather than a formal title, they most likely stem from women perceiving the possibility of securing their land in an official manner in the near future. This rise in women claiming land is a positive development, reinforced by the fact that most of these requests were approved by village councils.

The findings above suggest that the participatory adoption of bylaws contributed, through increased dialogue between and among men and women, to **improved social cohesion**. Furthermore, the participatory process provided a starting point for new forms of intra-community social and political relations.

2.3 Lessons learnt

Given gender-sensitive village bylaws are rooted in the national legal framework, there is strong potential for them to be adopted more systematically. The following lessons were identified through observations and interviews with key informants conducted by TAWLA and IIED during the pilot phase and further refined during the upscaling process.

Women's quotas for local governance bodies in national legislation can be an important starting point. The initiative stemmed from the observation that national provisions providing for women's quotas in local governance institutions did not lead to the desired outcomes in terms of: 1) increased participation and influence of women in decision-making processes; and 2) more gender-equitable decisions. This case study shows that the existence of these provisions in national legislation was an important starting point, as it both legitimised the adoption of gender-sensitive bylaws and facilitated their replication on a wider scale.

Participatory adoption of local regulations is an effective way of 'bringing the law' home and ensuring that national legislation promoting women's participation is implemented locally. Supporting the participatory adoption of village bylaws enables local men and women to understand the provisions included in the bylaws, and in turn initiate a community discussion on their purpose and the opportunities they present. Through being approved by the village assembly, the bylaws receive support from the majority of community members. Moreover, the process contributes to local ownership.

Local rules that provide community-wide benefits contribute to greater local ownership. A key factor behind the success of gender-sensitive village bylaws in Kisarawe is that they do not follow a women-centric approach. While they have been used to promote women's participation in land governance, their adoption has also provided an opportunity to clarify a variety of governance issues – such as land use and access, natural resource use, livestock grazing, health and sanitation – meaning that all community members have benefitted. These wide-ranging and inclusive benefits help explain why the bylaws were so well received, and why the Kisarawe local authorities requested that they be replicated throughout the district.

2.4 Next steps

While the adoption of bylaws was relatively successful in the majority of villages where TAWLA intervened, it remains to be seen how well they have been implemented and what difference they make over the medium to long term – in particular, whether they help women influence the outcomes of land governance decisions. Another important unanswered question concerns representativity and intersectionality. Seeing more women participating in decision-making on land is undoubtedly positive, but how can it be ensured that women (as well as men) from a diverse range of backgrounds – old and young, married and unmarried, and in particular vulnerable women – are able to voice their needs? Finally, it will be interesting to observe if and how gender dynamics change over time due to women having greater voice and influence. IIED and TAWLA have developed a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework to better understand how the project is being implemented over time by villages, and what benefits have arisen for women. Data was collected in late 2020, with findings expected to be shared in mid-2021. Moreover, protocols are being developed to ensure that a wide range of women are playing an active role in land governance processes.

3

Senegal: including women in prioritising local resilience investments

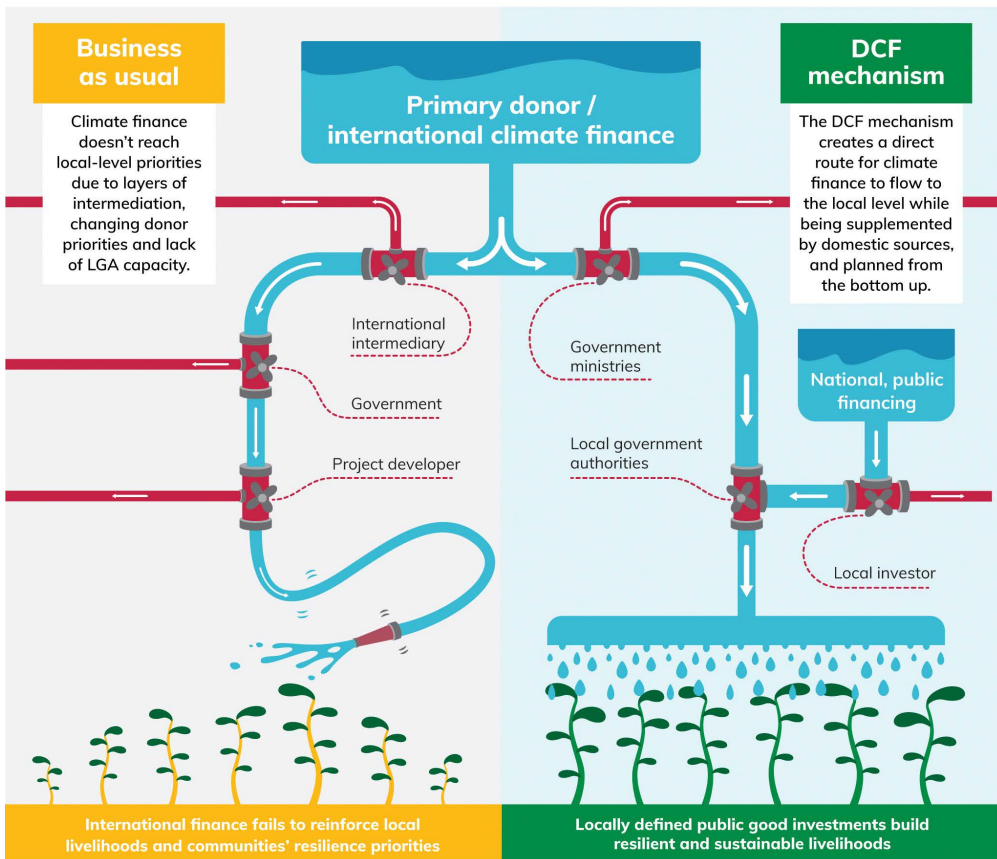
The impacts of climate change and extreme climate shocks pose a particular threat to communities in developing countries, especially those reliant on resource-based livelihoods. In this regard, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities in the Sahel stand out as being vulnerable due to their limited access to common production resources and exclusion from decision-making.

Within these communities, the impacts of climate risks often fall disproportionately on women and young people, as the social norms shaping their social and economic roles frequently lead to a dependency on resources they struggle to access and over which they have limited control. This in turn reduces their ability to anticipate or adapt to climate risks (Carr *et al.*, 2014; Eastin, 2018). Despite the invaluable insights on improving local resource management and planning that women and young people can provide, their knowledge and expertise is too often ignored in community decision-making (Agarwal, 2009).

Operating in this context, the Devolved Climate Finance (DCF) mechanism offers a means of implementing locally-driven adaptation planning and finance systems based on socially

inclusive governance and decision-making processes (DCF Alliance, 2019). The DCF approach recognises that it is local communities themselves, and in particular vulnerable people such as women, who are best placed to identify what actions are necessary to improve their resilience to climate change. The mechanism focuses on strengthening existing local governmental planning systems through the creation of spaces and planning processes within which community priorities can be voiced. Once identified, these priorities can be used to drive local resilient investment decisions. To date, DCF has been piloted in Kenya (since 2011), Tanzania (2014), and Mali and Senegal (2015), with over £6 million of funding channelled into creating 284 community-prioritised investments across the four countries (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The flow of climate finance



Note: The current system features high costs as, compared to financing climate actions/responses directly through local funds via the DCF mechanism, finance flows through intermediaries, which necessitates increased compliance requirements. Source: DCF Alliance, 2019.

In Senegal, the DCF mechanism was implemented as a pilot project in four *départements* from 2015 to 2019. The project was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme, and also included DCF implementation in three *cercles* in Mali. In Senegal, DCF was piloted in the Kaffrine region, by a consortium including Innovation Environnement et Développement Afrique (IED Afrique), Nearest Foundation Mali (NEF Mali) and IIED. Steered by DCF's guiding principles, the project's overarching aim was to improve social inclusion in local government decision-making, thereby helping vulnerable groups and communities express their needs in the face of climate change. Thus, the following questions arise: What characteristics of the mechanism allowed better inclusion of different local social groups in the DCF process, and how? And, more specifically, how have women's voices been improved through DCF?

3.1 The approach

Social inclusion, in its simplest sense, involves reaching people from all backgrounds and conditions, and providing them with an opportunity to participate in community life (MACS-NB, 2006). In practice, this means removing inequities in access to assets, capabilities and opportunities through the adoption of systems of governance, decision-making and policy change that effectively address these concerns.

Within the DCF framework, social inclusion is understood first as taking into account the views of vulnerable groups – especially women – in planning and decision-making (see Box 4). Practically speaking, DCF pilots have supported on-the-ground climate change adaptation by engaging with local stakeholders to identify, prioritise, finance and implement locally-defined adaptation projects (Hesse, 2017). The creation of these channels, through which local communities can identify and receive resilience and poverty-reduction investments, in turn ensures that local decision-making and planning structures are strengthened in an enduring way.

Box 4. Local engagement under the DCF mechanism

Under the DCF project in Senegal, local climate adaptation funds are created through the devolution of funds across all four administrative *départements*. The disbursement of funds followed a multi-stage process that engaged all stakeholders levels (DCF Alliance, 2019). First, DCF established key partnerships with government bodies to ensure the funding mechanism would operate through local government. It then proceeded to build the capacities of department- and regional-level adaptation committees, in order that they could support community planning and the prioritisation, selection and technical implementation of resilience-building investments. Following

this, all villages across the four *départements* were informed of the DCF project and encouraged to discuss their priorities for a local resilience investment. In each case, the deliberation process was determined by the respective communities, though DCF encouraged an inclusive, participatory approach that included women and young people in planning and decision-making.

Depending on the community's approach, a village-level meeting was held to decide which investment best people's their needs. Following this, a community forum was held at the municipal (*commune*) level to identify the priorities and needs of the various villages in the municipality. The forum provided a space for representatives of villages and local groups to deliberate on the investments needed to build resilience to climate change. DCF made this forum a required stage of the investment selection process in order to ensure social inclusion and a participatory approach.

Having arrived at a consensus, the community was then tasked with submitting a proposal (or proposals) to a departmental communal adaptation committee (CDA) made up of local actors – including technical and elected authorities – requesting projects that could help their communities adapt. Following submission of the proposals, the CDA formed a sub-committee of relevant field experts (e.g. employees from agriculture, livestock, forestry government services) that assessed which proposals to fund based on the agreed-upon eligibility criteria. On receiving funds for an investment, local communities were required to establish a management committee – which had to include women – in order to oversee construction and ensure proper management of their public goods investments.

3.2 Implementation and outcomes

Rather than simply targeting women, the DCF mechanism applied a gender lens to its operationalisation. Specific gender-positive actions were implemented at various key stages of an investment proposal's design, selection process and implementation. For example, when involving local communities in the call for investment proposals, women and women's groups were consulted separately, thereby ensuring they had access to project information. Engagement with women was also sought during a proposal's design stage, when the type of investments prioritised were discussed and selected by communities.

Quotas were also used to ensure women had at least 50% representation in local and communal decision-making committees (communal adaptation committees – CDAs), who reviewed and selected which of the proposals submitted by communities to fund. One of their selection criteria was the prioritisation of public good investments that would support the “most vulnerable groups in the community”. Finally, at the start of the implementation

phase, women's engagement was sought on aspects such as the investment's location and construction design.

Research on social inclusion in DCF across both Senegal and Mali (Djohy, 2019), as well as women's participation in DCF in Senegal (Patnaik, 2021), reveals that the DCF pilots have been very successful at vertically including actors across the planning cycle – bringing bottom-up linkages at different levels. However, despite quotas for women's participation in local authority institutions being respected, the extent to which women's voices were taken on board in community deliberation and participation processes varied across DCF villages. In fact, several factors influenced whether, how and to what extent women participated in local-level processes – and ultimately whether their priorities were considered in final investment decisions. Project monitoring and evaluation, as well as independent research, show the following outcomes (Djohy, 2019; Patnaik, 2021):

Engaging women at all stages of the project meant their priorities were reflected in the types, locations and designs of investments. Successful outcomes of the gender lens applied during the DCF mechanism's social inclusion process can be seen in the selection of investment types. Women reported that, where they had been involved in all stages of the engagement process, investments reflected their priorities. Examples include the location of wells and pumps, which women are the primary users of, and water troughs being designed to ensure safe use by both households and livestock. Women also got involved in the management of investments, for instance in managing their village's water demand.

More educated women exhibited greater participation. Women who were more educated and had basic writing and counting skills showed greater involvement than their less educated counterparts. This was not merely about skills gained through formal education, but encompassed informal negotiating and haggling skills used by entrepreneur women at markets. Less educated women expressed that they did not feel credible or knowledgeable enough to voice an opinion. By contrast, women with higher levels of schooling, especially those working on income-generating activities, felt they had developed skills that allowed them to participate and push for their demands.

Women's groups and networks boosted participation. Women's participation was higher in villages where women's groups and networks were present. This is because associations often conduct training in public speaking and deliberation, or simply bring women together to share experiences and knowledge. In some villages, women's associations kept women across communities informed of the investment funding process' progress, and of relevant meetings. Informal community networks within which women support one another also mattered. For example, women living in more urban villages – where women are more connected through markets, and usually have less traditional gender roles – tended to be more active. In all cases, the sense of agency and

solidarity elicited by social capital proved to be a determinant in women's 'power to speak up' in the initial DCF planning stage.

Shared local beliefs affected women's ability to speak. Local perceptions regarding the equality and importance of women's voices in decision-making helped shape DCF investment priorities in several villages. In villages where women's satisfaction with their participation in DCF decisions was high, women felt comfortable expressing their needs and opinions in village meetings, with adequate time and space provided to these ends. At the other end of the spectrum, a key barrier to women's participation in village forums translated into primarily male village institutions making decisions without proper consultations, leaving women without time or space to speak. These dynamics were mirrored when it comes to intra-household dynamics: women who perceived men in their household as respecting their voice reported being more publicly active.

3.3 Lessons learnt

The above factors intersect to provide women with an increased sense of confidence and security when it comes to participating in local decision-making. However, these outcomes were not observed systematically across DCF investments, with women's priorities and needs absent in several investment processes. Based on the BRACED DCF project and related research, two clear lessons arise from the gender-inclusion approach used in Senegal:

Active engagement of women is needed at all stages of planning. Applying a 'gender lens' to programmed activities and conducting sporadic engagement with women, even if structured at key stages, is not enough to ensure that women's priorities are taken into account across all investment decisions. Women who were able to make themselves heard were often part of a larger group able to support its members through resources and access to information. Every step of a governance or decision-making process counts, meaning that women's views and needs must be actively included.

More resources and time are needed to engage women, both individually and collectively. An ongoing constraint on local engagement during DCF was the sheer number of communities involved. This limited the time and resources available to reach out to women and provide them with access to information, such as meeting times and consultation periods. Addressing this requires not only building women's individual skills, but investing in collective initiatives that will provide trainings and skills development, as well as a support network within which women can find and amplify their voices.

3.4 Next steps

The DCF approach piloted in Senegal has shown that well-planned stakeholder engagement can lead to increased inclusion of vulnerable actors across all stages of the planning cycle. However, it also shows that continued engagement *at every stage* of the planning cycle is essential if the voices of the most marginalised are to be heard throughout. DCF mechanisms should therefore continue the approach of working through existing institutions while increasing horizontal integration of minority voices at all stages – not merely the beginning – of the DCF process.

To achieve this aim, sufficient resources must be budgeted to truly enable women's participation. Enabling transformational social inclusion requires renegotiation of the cultural and informal social norms that exist between and within communities. This in turn means building trust and new relationships, which takes time. Projects and donors must recognise that more resources are needed if long-lasting social inclusion outcomes are to be realised.

4

Ghana: strengthening individual and collective agency through enterprise

Rural institutions, such as forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs), can play a critical role in advancing women's economic empowerment at various levels of society. As well as providing women with an important entry point into the labour market, they play an important representative role within policy and market spaces, where women's voices are often underrepresented (Bolin, 2020). One initiative directly supporting FFPOs at a global level is the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) programme, which operates across ten countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.⁶ In each country, women's FFPOs are targeted, with gender-related activities constituting nearly 50% of budget allocations in-country. Despite this, women's access to and control over productive assets, such as capital, land and natural resources, remains a critical challenge. One way that FFF has been supporting FFPOs tackle these issues is by using internal and external policy engagement platforms to facilitate dialogue on women-specific constraints. Such platforms help create space for women's voices to be heard on the more 'strategic

6 The FFF is a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), IIED, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Agricorn that operates in Bolivia, Ecuador, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Nepal, Tanzania, Togo, Vietnam and Zambia.

needs' crucial to changing the status of women in public and political life (see Holmes and Jones, 2013; Molyneux, 1985). This case study explores some of the strategies adopted by FFPOs in Ghana, through a recently formed national federation, to overcome these challenges.

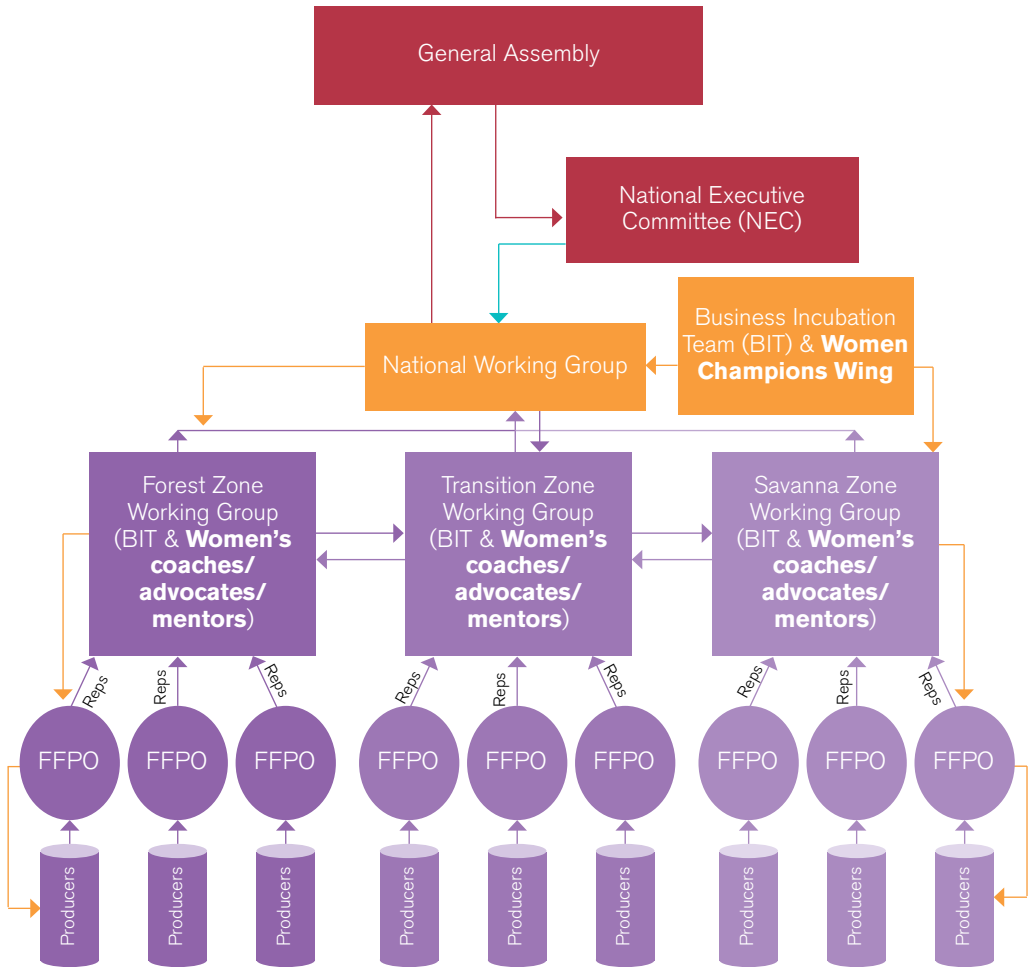
Ghana is host to one of the highest concentrations of women entrepreneurs in the world. Nearly half of all businesses are owned by women, with their collective entrepreneurship recognised as a driving force in the economy (Mastercard Foundation, 2018). In rural areas, women constitute nearly half of the active labour population deriving a living from natural resources, and a staggering 92% of workers in the informal economy. However, much of this work represents self-generated employment undertaken to reduce poverty, rather than being the outcome of opportunity (Mastercard Foundation, 2018). Despite playing a vital role in the productive economy, women face disproportionate challenges in accessing many of the material foundations – such as finance, land and natural resources – they need to thrive in their businesses. Many of these issues cannot be tackled through the everyday workings of an FFPO, but require a dedicated forum for women to organise and collectively pursue their priorities. In rural areas, producer organisations can help tackle these market and governance failures through investing in and performing a range of economic, social welfare and political functions for their members. This includes representation in multi-sectoral decision-making forums at various levels of governance.

4.1 The approach

Within this context, FFF have been supporting FFPOs across Ghana to organise into a national federation. Although this was not initiated with women's empowerment as its main focus, one of the first things the Ghana Federation of Forest and Farm Producers (GhaFFaP) did was to draft a ten-year strategy and gender policy – the GhaFFaP Agenda 2030 – which it immediately began implementing (GhaFFaP, 2020). The strategic agenda lays out a vision and operational structure for Ghana's smallholder farmers and forest users to have their voices heard at multiple governance levels, from the grassroots to national decision-making, with particular attention paid to women's needs. Within a year, by the end of 2020, GhaFFaP had mobilised a membership of 12 second-tier FFPOs, representing just over a million forest and farm producers (46% are women) across Ghana's forest (south), transition (middle) and savannah (north) ecological zones (see Figure 3). Prior to the federation, women's strategic needs – such as access to productive resources – were dealt with in silos by each organisation, making it difficult for women to organise and be heard at a community and policy decision-making level. Where GhaFFaP is really making a difference is through its ability to create a critical mass of women's voices at multiple governance levels – horizontally and vertically – and then link the priorities raised to government law-making and budget allocations. Through GhaFFaP, women and men producers convene on a regular basis in local-, zonal- and national-

level dialogue platforms to discuss members' needs and identify strategic priorities. Working groups have been established at each level to advance day-to-day activities, and within each working group a business incubation team (BIT) is supporting members with business development and coaching services. Members' voices and agency are coordinated across the zonal working groups to ensure information, advocacy and market engagement efforts flow effortlessly.

Figure 3. Organisation of GhaFFaP and its 12 second-tier members organisations



4.2 Implementation and outcomes

4.2.1 Creating a critical mass of women producers to influence decision-making

One of the main factors propelling local women's voices *en masse* up to the national level is **the role of women advocates and coaches**. At all levels of the federation, women advocates and coaches play a key role in encouraging and mentoring female members. This emphasis on peer-to-peer support and mentoring, together with the spaces that roundtable dialogues create for women to organise, boosts women's self-confidence, creating a favourable environment in which they can express their voices. Overseeing this approach is a women's champions wing, which has been established within the national working group to coordinate with three main types of women champions across the organisation (GhaFFaP, 2020):

- **Women advocates** lead awareness raising within the federation, ensuring all members are informed on how closing gender gaps in agriculture and forestry value chains can be a win-win situation for all. A key aspect of this work is building a critical mass of women advocates through identifying the gender concerns of a variety of value chains members and promoting women leaders at the grassroots, zonal and national levels.
- **Women coaches** identify 'women champions' with different areas of experience and track records (e.g. production, marketing, finances) to serve as coaches to other women.
- **Women business mentors** provide business mentoring to other women members and play a critical role in ensuring women have access to, and benefit from, GhaFFaP's ongoing business facilitation efforts.

The women's champions wing also organises **roundtable discussions to highlight specific issues that require attention within zonal and national dialogues**.

Through this bottom-up structure, issues that may previously have been regarded as 'women's issues' are now treated as priorities within the federation. As a result of this dedicated process, the roundtable dialogues have helped spotlight three key strategic areas that have been GhaFFaP's focus throughout 2020: access to 1) land; 2) markets; and 3) finance. In the following sections we explore how women's economic empowerment has been a driving factor in each of these areas.

4.2.2 Prioritising women's access to land and natural resources

Women's access to collectively-held land – where key resources needed for their businesses, such as baobab and shea trees, are located – emerged as a key priority during one of the roundtable discussions in the savanna zone, as these resources had come under unprecedented pressures.

Given the intensity and multiplicity of pressures, traditional chiefs were struggling to stop encroachment. Though this issue had provoked concern even before GhaFFaP, the dialogues held at the local and zonal level have helped bring a broader socio-economic perspective to bear. The presence of a critical mass of women shea and baobab producers, who expressed how degradation of these resources is having a grave impact on local economies and customs, played an important part in this. This was made possible through the dialogues, which provided the space and opportunity for these issues to be discussed. Crucially, they helped bring together key stakeholders such as the charcoal producers (who were cutting the trees), local chiefs and law enforcement agencies to help broker an agreement on how to better protect the unauthorised use of the baobab and shea trees.

4.2.3 Strengthening women's economic bargaining power

Nearly all GhaFFaP's members, especially the women, are members of a local village savings and loans association (VSLA). Though typically informal, these provide a key source of social finance for families when school fees, healthcare or burial costs need to be – sometimes urgently and unexpectedly – paid. Women play a key role in mobilising other women for these initiatives. Another important function of VSLAs is providing capital for women's enterprises. However, the informal nature of VSLAs, with members' savings kept in a cash box in the village, makes them highly vulnerable to theft. Moreover, it means that much of the financial agency exerted by women, as well as their participation in capital formation, remains hidden from outside actors, including government agencies and the financial sector. For these reasons, a key priority for GhaFFaP during 2020 was supporting the formalisation of members' VSLAs into credit unions. This began with GhaFFaP members collecting data across the zonal working groups in order to gain a better understanding of the collective scale and potential of these groups. It quickly became apparent that members' VSLAs constituted a significant grassroots movement and source of capital. In one of the zones, annual savings amounted to more than US\$ 300,000, with women collectively saving more than US\$ 4 million annually across 10 FFPOs. For GhaFFaP this was an eye-opener – the sheer scale of these collective savings holds potential opportunities for something more, especially as women entrepreneurs generally struggle to access finance for businesses investments. For example, by turning VSLA records into formal financial accounts, members could

demonstrate their financial prudence and diligence, which would come in handy when approaching an investor.

The question, then, is how to standardise and professionalise such processes in order that they can be effectively linked to formal financial institutions, which can then offer the larger amounts of finance needed to make investments? Experiences from the Banking on Change project, implemented in several countries – in Ghana by CARE in collaboration with Fidelity Bank and local VSLAs – offer some positive lessons that GhaFFaP can build upon. Crucially, without such investments many of the women FFPOs will remain primary producers, with the main value captured further up the value chain by a few processing companies. One solution is to establish a financial cooperative union consisting of VSLA members, which would act as a sister cooperative to the main production and marketing FFPO. This would likely enhance women's participation in the formal financial sector, giving them greater exposure to new skills and leadership development, in turn strengthening their voice and agency in other socio-economic spheres.

In 2020, two such financial cooperative unions were established by KANBAOCU and Tele-bere, building on nearly a decade of VSLA activities by their members. Experiences and lessons from these are now actively being shared through the GhaFFaP structure with the intention of supporting the remaining VSLAs make the transition to a cooperative union. Understanding the broader knock-on effects of this formalisation process will also be important from a women's economic empowerment perspective.

4.3 Lessons learnt

It important to find common ground upon which shared interests can be established. A key reason why protecting access to baobab and shea resources has been successfully taken up by all key actors is a recognition that, although the initial focus was on women, they are not the only ones whose interests are at stake. Other actors who stand to benefit include the husbands of women engaged in these value chains and traditional chiefs concerned about the loss of important traditional values and customs tied to these resources. As for local authorities, FFPOs can be major sources of employment and important taxpayers, with KANBAOCU accounting for 12,376 women in the region and generating an annual US\$ 72,000 in income tax alone (Sulemana and Awaregya, 2020). Meanwhile, simultaneous initiatives launched by GhaFFaP – such as the creation of a Green Market label – provide opportunities for the male charcoal producers to distinguish themselves in a niche market, provided they comply with local bylaws that stipulate they source their wood from woodlots rather than shea trees, which are preserved for women's businesses and traditional use. Similarly, the Green Market label provides opportunities for women entrepreneurs, who will, through the legal

strengthening of community bylaws, be able to demonstrate the sustainable origins of their products.

Working with women's collective enterprises can help strengthen rights and access in other strategic areas.

Why is it these women's voices in particular are being heard on such complicated matters as land and resources? One reason could be that FFPOs such as KANBAOCU can point to a number of demonstrable successes arising from the collective agency of their members. As mentioned above, KANBAOCU operations generate considerable tax revenues paid to district authorities, as well as providing other benefits, such as improved social security through VSLA schemes (Sulemana and Awaregya, 2020). In the past, 35 of the 42 cooperative society members have successfully engaged their local community leaders (chiefs, assembly persons and members of parliament) in advocating for the national electricity grid to be extended to their communities (Sulemana and Awaregya, 2020). Access to electricity is a necessity for those wishing to operate successful businesses. Understanding the role of economic success in creating bargaining power, which in turn can generate outcomes with wider implications for women (not just cooperative members) is also important.

4.4 Next steps

Ensuring the legally binding protection of land and natural resources for the benefit of women is an ongoing process. Continued monitoring and analysis of the experiences outlined above are likely to yield important lessons not just for Ghana, but elsewhere.

As for strengthening women's voices and economic bargaining power, the GhaFFaP-initiated structure for advocacy, coaching and business incubation, combined with efforts to formalise the VSLA schemes, are just the beginning. They are, in effect, necessary steps on the path to unlocking other strategic needs for these women, such as accessing the type of finance needed to add value to and grow their businesses. If this can be achieved, they will then be able to collectively generate the volume required to capture a greater share of baobab and shea butter value chains.

Unpacking these questions of women's economic empowerment and how it can trigger empowerment in other areas of public and political life requires further targeted research and data collection. Findings from these detailed explorations of empowerment at various institutional levels will be of relevance both to ongoing women's economic empowerment research and policy-making across countries and programmes.

5

Lessons and recommendations

Through analysis of the three case studies above, we have inductively identified factors that enable rural women to effectively participate in and influence decision-making processes related to land, climate finance and forest entrepreneurship. In this section, we map out the cross-sectoral pathways that enable rural women to make their voices heard in decision-making processes affecting their livelihoods. Drawing on this, we review the key constraints and challenges highlighted by the case studies, and provide recommendations for programming.

5.1 Enabling factors

The key enabling factors identified in the case studies resonate with the existing literature on women's participation and can be grouped into three main categories: 1) enabling structures, rules and processes; 2) a supportive local environment; and 3) promoting individual and collective capacities to reach critical mass. These categories resonate with the Gender Equality Conceptual Framework developed by CARE, which focuses on agency, relations and structures (CARE, 2019:7).

5.1.1 Conducive structures, rules and processes

As illustrated by the cases studies, full and effective participation in decision-making women's processes starts with enabling institutional structures and rules. While these findings resonate with the wider evidence base on factors enabling women's voices in decision-making processes (see Domingo *et al.*, 2015), the case studies cast light on the specific role played by local institutions and rules in giving voice to rural women.

Local-level institutions with inclusive, participatory and bottom-up processes enable rural women's direct participation. Whether we are considering public (as in the Tanzania case study) or private (as in the case of GhaFFaP in Ghana) governance, the institutional framework within which participation unfolds plays a key role in providing the space and opportunity for rural women's voices to be heard. In particular, heavily decentralised institutional frameworks with clear bottom-up participatory processes are an important factor in enabling rural women to influence decision-making. In the case of Tanzania, democratic, participatory village-level institutions – such as the village assembly – provided an opportunity for rural women to voice their concerns to local authorities. Local governance frameworks do not always establish institutions at a village level, which denies rural women the opportunity to express their opinions directly. In Ghana, the establishment of an integrated structure that allows women to organise both vertically and horizontally provides the necessary foundation for raising concerns, extending from the grassroots all the way up to the national decision-making level.

Norms promoting women's participation or prescribing a minimum number of women in local-level decision-making bodies are an important starting point. There is a general consensus in the literature that though gender quotas can guarantee women's representation in governance bodies, they are not *per se* sufficient to ensure full and effective participation. While this is confirmed in the case of Tanzania, the study also demonstrates that having national rules stipulating quotas for women in local decision-making bodies can be an important starting point when complemented by additional strategies. The existence of such a framework provides legal grounds to any approach aimed at strengthening women's participation in decision-making processes, thereby granting it greater legitimacy and normative leverage. The Tanzania case study also demonstrates that the participatory adoption of local rules – such as bylaws – that reiterate and complement national provisions on women's quotas offers a means of 'bringing the law home', and is an important step in making these measures more effective. It should be stressed, though, that such an approach must be fully participatory if it is to ensure local ownership, as well as paired with complementary strategies aimed at strengthening women's ability to voice their concerns. Such learnings could easily be transferred to private governance decision-making forums – such as producer organisations – in cases where women are underrepresented.

Where producer organisations – here understood as member-based organisations representing forest and farm producers, whether women only or mixed gender – have prioritised gender equity at an early stage of their organisational history, this has led to significant gains for women's empowerment in political life (FECOFUN and RRI, 2018; Jhaveri, 2020). Although it is yet too early to draw conclusions on GhaFFaP's early commitment to gender equality, the results thus far have been promising. Similar decisions by other mixed-gender organisations to adopt regulations ensuring women

are represented at every stage of the decision-making chain would be a positive step in allowing women to participate more actively in the governance of natural resources.

Recommendations

To create enabling structures, rules and processes, interventions should:

- Promote robust local governance frameworks with inclusive and participatory processes.
- Advocate for cross-level legislation that stipulates a minimum number (ideally 50%) of local government body members are women, and support adoption of local rules reinforcing and complementing national provisions. Similarly, encourage legislation stipulating a minimum percentage of women members in the decision-making bodies of private entities such as cooperatives and producer organisations.
- Work with local businesses, cooperatives and other local bodies to establish guiding principles and rules promoting gender equality, democratic decision-making and equity.



5.1.2 A supportive local environment

While enabling institutional and legal frameworks are essential, paving successful pathways for rural women to fully and effectively participate in decision-making processes also requires a supportive local environment. Such an environment relies on adequate timing and location, the establishment of appropriate spaces for interaction and exchange, and support from men and community leaders.

Timing and location matters. A supportive environment starts with addressing the factors that prevent rural women from attending meetings. The Tanzania case study highlights that, despite longstanding evidence that women's participation is often impeded by practical details, meetings and village assemblies frequently take place at times where women are busy with domestic work or childcare. It is therefore crucial that meetings are organised at times that suit women, and in accessible locations that are not risky for them to attend. Adequate notice of meetings should be given, along with targeted messaging, thereby allowing women to organise themselves in their communities and households. It is also important to recognise that women juggle multiple activities and responsibilities, meaning that sometimes they may not have time to attend meetings, regardless of when they are scheduled. Here, social services – such as care services for the young and the elderly – can help free up women's time. Beyond family or other community members offering support with childcare and related domestic work, producer organisations themselves – especially those with a large female member base – often step in to create

such services (see Bolin, 2020). GhaFFaP member KANBAOCU, for example, has established homecare and afterschool services to support families where both parents need to attend cooperative meetings (see Sulemana and Awaregya, 2020). At a global level, however, such services remain largely underexplored (UN Women, 2015), partly due to sectoral programming.

Safe and supportive spaces for women to interact must be created. Allowing women to deliberate and express themselves in trusted spaces is key to increasing their subsequent participation in decision-making. The establishment of women's committees or champions wings within existing working groups, either through local bylaws (as was the case in Tanzania) or a gender strategy (as was the case in Ghana), can similarly provide spaces for women to consult and prepare ahead of meetings and dialogue platforms.

Support from other relevant actors, including men and community leaders, is essential. If local women's voices are to be heard, the other actors taking part in decision-making processes – in particular men and leaders – must be receptive and ready to listen. Raising awareness of gender equality and women's rights, and discussion of gender roles with men, is essential in ensuring decision-making spaces not only accommodate women, but welcome them as equal participants. In Tanzania, some women initially stated that their husbands did not allow them to attend village meetings. In Ghana, much of the support women receive from both their community and household is a direct result of the respect and status they have gained as a result of their success within their enterprises. How best to obtain support from men and community leaders may vary depending on the context. The Tanzania case study illustrates how championing the adoption of bylaws that benefitted all community members led to support from men and community leaders. In Ghana, meanwhile, traditional leaders joined forces with local government authorities, as well as women and men from the community, due to a convening body (GhaFFaP) identifying incentives and jointly creating solutions for each key stakeholder.

Appropriate resources need to be allocated for women. Ensuring women's full and effective participation in governance cannot be a mere afterthought for projects and programmes – rather, from the design stage onwards, it must be properly thought through and adequately budgeted for. Socially inclusive work takes time and requires a detailed strategy that, from the outset of a project, is aligned with communities' local dynamics and incorporates inclusive activities. Developing activities aimed at ensuring women's participation requires in-depth understanding of the local context, including analyses of the institutional and legal framework, existing power and gender dynamics, social norms, current practices and intersecting identities. Ultimately, appropriate resources must be allocated to creating decision-making spaces for women – lack of budget and insufficient planning for engaging women at all stages meant women's priorities were not always

included in DCF investment decisions. As a benchmark, gender-related activities now account for 30–50% of budget allocations under the FFF programme (Ghana), where gender is not the primary focus but ‘only’ mainstreamed.

Recommendations

To develop supportive local environments, interventions should:

- Ensure that local government, villages and projects hold meetings at times and places accessible to women.
- Allocate more time and spaces to women, with interventions budgeting and planning for women’s participation and needs at all stages of project design.
- Request more gender-targeted resources from donors – sustainable, socially inclusive work takes time and comes with higher costs.
- Invest in engagement and power dynamics analysis before and throughout the intervention, in order to gain in-depth knowledge of the local context, social norms and understandings of gender equality – as well as how these change over time.
- Establish informal consultative bodies that can enable women to share their concerns at implementation stage.



5.1.3 Promoting individual and collective capabilities to reach critical mass

All three case studies point to the importance and complementary role of individual and collective capabilities, including the promotion of collective networks. This is key to creating a critical mass of participation sufficient to ensure rural women’s voices are heard.

Promoting individual capabilities is key to building confidence. All three case studies point to the importance of developing rural women’s skills and capabilities as a means of providing them with the knowledge and confidence to voice their needs and concerns. In Tanzania, for example, technical knowledge and awareness of their rights under national laws and local bylaws gave women a robust basis for advocating on behalf of their own interests. Capacity-building is not, however, merely about gaining knowledge of a specific topic – such as laws or climate vulnerability – but involves building up the confidence to make public use of this knowledge. In Senegal, the women most actively involved in DCF decision-making processes reported that their prior experiences – whether project trainings, formal education or managing a market stall – were key to their engaging with new opportunities. In other words, a

self-perception built around having skills, status and success led them to step confidently into spaces traditionally reserved for men.

Supporting women's entrepreneurship can act as a vehicle for participation. In many situations, women must be economically empowered in order to take up leadership positions. For instance, a woman with control over her disposable income has the means to pay for transport and related costs to attend meetings and trainings, which in turn increases her chances of participating in/being exposed to experiences and networks that foster leadership. As such, entrepreneurship is not just an important strategy for women to achieve financial independence, but for advancing women's interests in other public matters.

Supporting women's groups and networks offers a means of amplifying their voices. Even if a woman has knowledge and a desire to get involved, it still may not be easy for her to access governance processes. Women's groups and networks provide clear entry-points for rural women to become engaged, and to express their opinions amongst peers. In Senegal, for example, communities with a strong women's groups presence tended to be better at selecting and designing investments that addressed women's priorities. This was not only down to information about meetings and upcoming decisions being disseminated regularly, but arose from women drawing on the support of their peers in order to exercise their agency in public settings (Patnaik, 2021). Ghana's GhaFFaP case study shows how collective groups can play a powerful role, and offers examples of how collective gender-positive actions have been realised at various – local to national – governance levels. This includes having different types of women champions (advocates, coaches, mentors), who act as role models for and provide direct support to other women, and the provision of a variety of trainings ranging from business management to public speaking. GhaFFaP also provides spaces for women to convene on a regular basis, which allows them to confer over priorities prior to policy discussions.

Increasing women's collective economic bargaining power can facilitate access to credit and open up further opportunities. Access to productive assets that can generate income and financial independence – such as land, forest resources and investment – is a challenge for women globally, which often puts women at a disadvantage in terms of the collateral requirements that financial institutions stipulate for accessing credit. As such, strategies aimed at increasing women's collective economic bargaining power are needed. In Ghana, GhaFFaP's survey of VSLA savings capacities was a critical first step in making the case for why a transfer to formal credit unions was imperative. Not only is there a need to keep these savings in a safer place than the village cash box, but savings at this scale should open up opportunities for something more. By formalising into credit unions, members are – through their track record of sound financial management and capital formation – more likely to be able to leverage investment from other sources, irrespective of whether they have land as collateral. Combined with other

strategies, such as the monitoring and communication of cooperative contributions to tax revenues and social security to local government (as in the case of KANBAOCU), other constraints arising from having limited access to productive assets can temporarily be overcome. Moreover, it allows light to be shed on the wasted potential arising from a lack of progress in other areas.

Complementary strategies must be developed to achieve a critical mass of participating women. Increasing gender diversity within a decision-making process is, unsurprisingly, accompanied by a greater overall focus on women's issues (Bratton, 2005). Lone 'token' women in decision-making positions do not have the bargaining power required to shift policy agendas, nor can they hope to represent the full spectrum of women's intersecting identities. Thus, a critical mass of engaged, vocal and listened to women are essential if the long-term shifts necessary to enshrine women's rights and priorities across all policy agendas are to be achieved.

A key learning from the three case studies is that to reach a critical mass of participating women, complementary strategies – individual and collective, short and long term – must be pursued. The drivers of women's empowerment operate at diverse intersecting identities, meaning that if potential engagement points are overlooked, opportunities may be closed off that might otherwise be opened up to women.

Recommendations

To promote individual and collective strategies and reach critical mass, interventions should:

- Implement activities aimed at strengthening women's skills and knowledge in the intervention's area of focus.
- Promote women's entrepreneurship not only as an important strategy for achieving financial independence, but as a means of gaining access to resources and capital formation.
- Work with women's networks and groups to engage other and new groups – collective action can help navigate sensitive areas, such as improving the distribution of leadership and access to opportunities.
- Support women to associate and formalise their savings groups in order to scale up investments, thereby providing economic as well as political empowerment.



5.2 Constraints and challenges

The case studies highlight a number of practical and structural challenges standing in the way of women's voices being heard, many of which negatively mirror the 'enabling factors' identified above. Amongst other things, the challenges faced by women include poorly participative and gender-discriminatory structures and norms, lack of knowledge and capacities, lack of resources, and being overburdened with domestic responsibilities. Below, we discuss the issues identified as the most difficult to tackle.

Unsurprisingly, **gendered social norms, social structures and power relations** were identified as perhaps the biggest and most difficult constraint to women's full and effective participation. While this is not a new finding, it is one clearly confirmed by all three case studies. Patriarchal norms and behaviours prevent women from actively taking part in decision-making processes. In Tanzania, for instance, land governance is traditionally viewed as a 'male prerogative', meaning it is not commonly accepted that women should be permitted a say in land allocation processes. Moreover, where control over land and natural resources is at stake, huge resistance from powerholders is likely to be encountered. In Ghana, unequal power relations mean 'women's resources' are often exploited by charcoal producers. Social change takes place over a long period of time, meaning that the activities that take place within shorter-term project cycles are usually not designed to effectively tackle discriminatory social norms or unequal power relations. However, as one of the biggest constraints to women's participation, there is a need to strengthen activities aimed at shifting social norms and power relations.

A starting point would be to engage men and village leaders more systematically in order to develop projects that promote social cohesion as well as to strengthen accountability mechanisms at scale. The case studies point to a **lack of diverse representation** in interventions – specifically, there is a shortfall in how best to understand and capture the intersecting identities of women and girls, and therefore equitably operationalise across them. Women and girls (as well as men) operate across constituting factors such as class, religion, ethnicity, caste, age, sexuality and marital status – in other words, some groups of women are better equipped to wield influence than others. For example, while supporting women's groups is critical, interventions must be careful not to reinforce a 'middle class effect' in participation (Weinberger and Jutting, 2001). The opportunity costs of joining groups, in terms of time and access to meetings, mean the most vulnerable women often cannot afford to join. There are also bargaining power dynamics within groups, with wider inequalities and uneven power relations within communities (not just between women) an important pitfall.

A **narrow systems focus** can constrain deeper engagement with gender roles and perceptions. Focusing purely on market or land- and climate-governance systems as a means of upgrading women's participation is tempting, as it offers clear entry-points to

various aspects of empowerment. It also makes sense from a programmatic perspective, where funds are required to deliver a certain level of impact in a relatively short space of time. However, these systems interact with other systems that are equally important when it comes to influencing behaviour and how gender roles are perceived. In the case of KANBAOCU members, for example, cooperative childcare services can only have a marginal impact in alleviating women's workload when their other 'unpaid' work at home remains unchanged. Several studies from both the global South and North highlight the potential trade-offs between empowering 'women to be more like men' – e.g. to be both the breadwinner and homemaker – and their personal well-being and quality of life. To offset these tendencies, it is necessary to identify areas where empowerment for women and men can be mutually reinforcing (Stoian *et al.*, 2018), or, even better, enable men to become 'more like women' (Fraser, 2013) and so allow work and family life to be shared more equally.

5.3 Moving away from silos and stepping up gender transformation ambitions

This report contributes to a wider knowledge base on how women's voices and agency are experienced, and how they can be advanced in decision-making processes on land, climate and market governance. A number of the lessons and constraints identified in this report resonate with previous findings: over recent decades, numerous studies have highlighted exclusive institutions, gendered social norms and power dynamics as being constraints to women's participation and empowerment. Why, then, are societies and communities still facing the same issues? While there have been notable improvements in women's participation globally (UN Women, 2020), gender equality and equity across all societies remains a distant prospect – both in the global South and in so-called 'developed countries'.

It is undeniable that, by being deep-seated in their social fabric, issues of gender equality and rural women's voices are difficult to tackle. Yet we believe the absence of any real paradigm shift is also down to a lack of ambition in programme design and funding priorities. Interventions operate in silos across sectors and across levels, resulting in a lack of linkages between programmes necessary to achieve a critical mass of women's participation. To date, most gender programmes integrate gender issues either as a 'lens' or through targeting a specific group or network of women. Despite women's rights being mainstreamed into international agendas, the budgets and resources spent by overseas development aid or national government programmes on women's priorities remains far less than is the case for men – the fact that this is unintentional only aggravates this reality. In short, women's priorities and gender issues remain marginalised items on the political agenda, despite women constituting half the world's population.

Projects and policies should also pay more attention to grounding gender work into local power dynamics in decision-making processes across all sectors, at the risk of being counterproductive. Powerful interests are often at stake, especially when decisions relate to the control or management of land and natural resources. Understanding where opportunities for change, but also where resistance to change originates across intersecting identities is key to navigating the route to sustainable gender equality in poor, rural areas.

This report shows that, despite decades of work, current approaches to women's voices continue to fall short when it comes to driving progress. Programming must raise both ambitions and budgets in order to focus on multi-dimensional programming that addresses the practical, personal and structural constraints to women's participation across sectors. Rather than be confined to specific project deliverables, women's voices and empowerment should encompass greater engagement in political action and social movements (Patnaik, 2021). Alongside project work, structural reforms are needed, such as changes in legal frameworks and long-term policy measures that improve access to education. Strengthening women's organisations should be at the centre of these efforts.

Finally, perceptions of gender roles and social norms will likely take time to shift. Thus, while interventions addressing women's participation in governance should continue to work on short-term pathways of change, they must also invest in long-term mechanisms, such as basic counting and writing skills for women and girls. This is critical to instilling gender-equal perspectives in the generations to come.

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Research Report

July 2021

Governance; Gender

Keywords:

Land governance, legal tools,
Tanzania, Senegal, Ghana

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified women's unequal share of power and decision-making as a critical area of concern for gender equality. While there have been some improvements in women's formal political participation in the interim, they remain underrepresented in most decision-making processes across the globe. This is particularly the case in the global South, where rural women tend to bear the bulk of the impacts of poverty and climate change, often without any opportunity to voice their needs or priorities.

This report, through a cross-sectoral analysis of three recent case studies from sub-Saharan Africa, maps out the most effective tools and approaches for strengthening rural women's voices in decision-making processes. Specifically, the authors examine which are the key factors enabling or constraining rural women's voices, what the main challenges are that practitioners should be aware of, and how projects can ensure rural women are able to participate in and influence decision-making affecting their livelihoods. In doing so, the report offers both empirical insights and practical recommendations for more relevant, better integrated policy and programming.

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