GROUNDING WOMEN’S LAND RIGHTS:
Towards equity and climate justice
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This policy paper reveals the urgent need for transformative change to secure equitable land rights for women and marginalized communities. By presenting recommendations for a broad spectrum of stakeholders and analysing macroeconomic factors through a feminist lens, we aim to stimulate discourse and drive forward a more equitable, sustainable future for all.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Cover photo: Ashaninka, defender of the Shintoriato community in the Peruvian Amazon, Junín. Credit: Leslie Searles/Oxfam.
ACRONYMS

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
FPIC - Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GEF - Generation Equality Forum
GLTN - Global Land Tool Network
OHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals
UN - United Nations
UNCCD - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDRIP - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
VGGT - Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure
SUMMARY

This policy paper provides a critical examination of international commitments on women’s land rights, evaluating progress and persistent challenges. It scrutinizes commitments made through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Generation Equality Forum (GEF) Action Coalitions, revealing a substantial disconnect between ambitions and implementation.

KEY FINDINGS

- Despite strong SDG and GEF commitments by governments to ensure equal land rights for all by 2030, tangible on-the-ground progress has been utterly inadequate so far. Land is where it all begins: without implementing women’s land rights commitments the SDGs and GEF ambitions may never be realised. Women farmers comprise 43% of the agricultural workforce despite owning just 20% of land. This represents a colossal failure on the part of governments in achieving the SDG and GEF commitments and targets.

- Data analysis reveals widespread lack of land ownership and tenure security for women and men in most countries, which hinders monitoring of progress based on the commitments made. Of the 68 countries that reported on women’s rights to land ownership and/or control in their legal frameworks by 2022, only about 31% had laws that considerably protect women’s land rights. As land inequality rises, funding and data on women’s land rights remain scarce – policymakers turn a blind eye to the knowledge gaps. Data for the relevant SDG indicator 15.3.1 (‘Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area’) has barely been updated since 2015, with most countries failing to report on it.

- Women’s land rights defenders courageously combat these injustices, despite facing violence and threats in many nations. Even though there is widespread information about the injustices defenders face, these nations and companies are not held accountable. In 2021 alone, 358 human rights defenders were reported killed, with 60% of these individuals being land, environmental and Indigenous rights defenders.

- While the GEF Action Coalitions have put forth valuable principles of transformation, feminist leadership and intersectionality, these terms have become ineffective buzz words and are not realising women’s land rights in practice. The principles call for land governance which respects the rights of women and puts them first and centre in every decision. The principle of intersectionality highlights the fact that women have different experiences and face different forms of discrimination, meaning that applying a decolonial feminist lens is vital.

- Progress on reversing land degradation under SDG 15 has also been insufficient. Up to 1.5 billion more hectares of land could be degraded by 2030, deepening hunger and marginalization. Women stripped of land face increased food insecurity, climate vulnerability, violence and loss of livelihoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The substantial gap between international commitments and on-the-ground implementation of women’s land rights must urgently be bridged through gender-transformative, intersectional feminist policies and concrete action.

- All stakeholders must boldly confront patriarchal norms, enforce gender-equitable legal
frameworks, amplify women’s voices, appreciate the diversity of women’s experiences, and shift away from exploitative neoliberal paradigms.

• A profound transformation is needed in land governance to centre ecological sustainability, gender justice and women’s leadership.

• We must unite to create a world where women’s land rights are unequivocally upheld, fostering an equitable and sustainable future for all. Decisive action is needed now to avoid the irreversible costs of inaction.
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