

Gendered Land Rights

Equality for women and men under the law

Land reform in Rwanda catalyzed a major increase in women's ownership of land. And while gendered land rights are enshrined in law, public acceptance of those rights is uneven. Here's a look at recent research:

Signs of progress, based on public opinion...

Strong support for women in formal marriages:

94% believe that widows should have the same rights to land as their husbands did.

Importance of fair dispute resolution:

79% said a woman seeking divorce should be able to bring a complaint directly to the Abunzi.

High acceptance of daughters' entitlement to umunani:

93% said that they would be unhappy if parents denied their sister umunani and would try to convince them otherwise.

...but challenges remain.

Only 43% believe women in informal marriages should have those rights.

But 35% believe that land should not be divided equally in the event of divorce.

But 33% said daughters should get a smaller portion than the sons. An equal number think daughters should inherit less than sons.

"Most of the time women fear to report [gender-based] violence because they think that they may face more problems or simply because others tell them that culturally, the way households are best managed is when nobody talks: *niko zubakwa*."

Focus group participant, Gisozi, 2015

"Unless men can be persuaded of the justness of gender equality, so that they embrace gendered land rights as 'good for the community as a whole' rather than as a threat, women will likely continue to struggle to realize their rights."

Institute of Legal Practice and Development report, September 2015

Who is most vulnerable?

Women in informal marriages, who are not protected under the law.



38% of those surveyed said these women have to rely on "moral authority" over their children to retain land after her husband dies.

Women facing violence in their family.



Among disputes involving women, **25%** said that the dispute resulted in verbal abuse, physical violence and/or death threats.

Strengthening the system for the benefit of all



National sensitization

Continue nationwide education and awareness-building to promote acceptance of women's land rights and eliminate violence toward those who seek them.

Equality under the law

Revise the draft Succession law to recognize the property rights of informally married couples, clarify the rights of all widows on inheritance, and ensure fair treatment of divorced women.

Women's leadership

Support skill-based trainings for women on how to communicate effectively, negotiate in the household, and be leaders in their communities.

Dispute resolution

Improve women's access to fair dispute resolution mechanisms, such as allowing women to bypass families and bring complaints directly to local authorities.

Reduce violence

Build the skills of Abunzi, local authorities and lower tiers of the courts to counsel disputing parties against gender-based violence as part of the resolution process.

This document is based on three research reports produced by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Rwanda Land Project together with partners including the Institute of Legal Practice and Development and Radio Ishingiro. Download these reports at www.rwandaland.org.

This document was made possible by the support of the American people through USAID. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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