



# SUCCESS STORY

## ILAW: HOW ONE MAN'S CHANGING PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER RESOLVED A FAMILY DISPUTE OVER LAND



*Michaël and his sister, Lydie, share a meal at their family home.*



*Michaël attends a USAID training.*

Changing long-held beliefs and traditions around gender and land can be challenging, but using a community-based approach, families and communities in Côte d'Ivoire are already experiencing tangible changes in women's access to land.

Mr. DOUÉ Michaël had never questioned the traditional attitudes around women's land rights—and gender roles more broadly—that were prevalent in his community in Western Côte d'Ivoire. "Before, I thought that only men could inherit from their parents," he shared. "I considered men to be superior to women."

Thus, when their father died, Michaël and his sister, Lydie, faced a dispute: Michaël espoused the belief that he and his brothers were the sole heirs to their father's property. But this didn't sit well with Lydie, who wanted full land rights and recognition of her value as a member of the family.

It wasn't until attending a training provided by USAID's Improving Land Access for Women (ILAW) project that Michaël began to see the other side of the issue. Through the training, he heard his sister recount in a video how her inability to access the family land caused her economic and emotional hardship. Michael also learned about the benefits of sharing property with female family members, who are often in charge of household expenses.

With this new perspective, Michaël consulted with his brothers and decided to give Lydie a portion of the family land. The decision not only gave Lydie greater means for survival, but it also strengthened their relationship.



*A staff member of ILAW's grantee CAHD facilitates a GALS training.*

The training that Michaël received is part of the work of ILAW's grantee *Conseil pour l'Assistance Humanitaire et le Développement (CAHD)*, a human rights and development organization based in Western Côte d'Ivoire. CAHD provided trainings in the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), which includes exercises such as the "Vision Journey" and the "Gender Balance Tree," in which participants reflect on power in their households.

CAHD hopes that this community-based approach will lead to long-term change for women's land rights in their region. As one staff member put it, "by putting local organizations, local communities and ourselves at the heart of this work, there is more chance that what we are doing will last."

For Michaël, the benefits of his decision expand beyond the limits of his own land. "I never thought that I could do so much good thanks to this decision. For myself, it freed me. It made it possible for family unity to return. And in the village, I'm considered a role model."

Changing social norms around gender is no easy feat but ILAW's approach shows that it is possible. As Lydie expressed, "Michaël... [now] understands that women are important in his life. I know this because there were others who had tried to reason with him in our land dispute, but nothing changed. It was USAID that made it possible, and today my brother has become himself again."

Click [here](#) to watch a video about Michaël and Lydie's experience.



*Michaël and Lydie on their family's land*