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## SUCCESS STORY

# ILAW: GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO MANAGE LAND CONFLICTS PLEDGE GREATER GENDER SENSITIVITY



*Photo 1: The subprefect of Man addresses the participants at a three-day workshop for government officials in western Côte d'Ivoire on gender sensitivity.*



*Photo 2: The Ivorian Mediator of the Republic discusses the importance of women's participation in mediation sessions, even when they are not direct parties to a conflict.*

“To deprive women of the land is to deprive Côte d'Ivoire of food.” This was one of the arguments advanced by the Director of Rural Land Tenure of the Ministry of Agriculture, during the two 3-days gender sensitivity training sessions targeting government officials involved in land management and regional directors of the Ministry of Women, Families, and Children (MFFE).

Most of the participants – ranging from territorial administrators and court officials to regional directors – were convinced of this statement by the end of the 3-days gender sensitivity trainings conducted for 52 officials in Yamoussoukro from September 13-15 and 20-23, 2022. The trainings were organized by the USAID Improving Land Access for Women (ILAW) project, implemented in Western and Northern regions of Côte d'Ivoire from 2021 to 2024.

“The quality of the presentations, the quality of the trainers and the relevance of the themes have enabled us to see the gender issue from another angle,” said the sub-prefect from Guehibly. “Before, we heard about gender, but we often thought it was just about the number of women in meetings. Now we understand that gender is a development approach that is about social inclusion.”

During the training sessions, participants shared cases from their day-to-day work. These included women who were excluded from inheritance by their brothers, widows who lost access to plantations following their husbands' deaths, and women involved in village disputes that led to women losing access to lowland areas generally devoted to food crops production.

“It is imperative today to grant a place of choice to women in the management of the village, in decision-making or in the interests of the village,” said the sub-prefect of Man. “Women need to have their say. It is therefore important to tell the village chiefs to take into account the needs and interests of women without, however, trampling on the interests of men.”

USAID ILAW organized the workshops following the results of the Political Economy Assessment (PEA) that showed that women's rights are most vulnerable during land disputes where unequal power dynamics and negative social norms around women can lead to their losing access to land. Government officials play both formal and informal roles in dispute management, and their gender sensitivity can be decisive in preserving women's land rights.

### Telling Our Story

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Participants understood their influence and came away with tangible commitments. For example, the Mediator of the Republic said he would insist on women’s participation in mediation sessions even if not directly involved in a conflict. The regional director of construction in Korhogo said that henceforth he would insist that women participate in the village committees that manage new urban subdivisions and would also promote women in his service to have a more active role in supervising these new subdivisions. He also said he would now disaggregate title and permit data by sex.

The regional director of agriculture from Mankono, who early in the workshop had said he thought gender was a “thing for Europeans but not us,” said he now understood how important it was, noting that chiefs are biased and completely ignore women’s needs. His colleague from Korhogo committed to talking about gender at his weekly meetings, designate a gender focal point, designate women land conflict investigators and mediators to be role models in communities, and on a personal level to work on his own biases and become a role model to reduce sexual harassment against women in the workplace.

“After this workshop we now understand that gender is not a word but an action,” said the sub-prefect of Korhogo. “We are committed more than ever to returning to work and moving the lines.”



*Photo 3: The subprefect of Guehieby leads the restitution portion of a three-day gender sensitivity training with village chiefs and community leaders.*