PARTICIPATORY SENSE-MAKING TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

Securing women's resource rights through gender transformative approaches initiative

CIFOR

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ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

SECURING WOMEN'S RESOURCE RIGHTS THROUGH GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

In 2020, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) invited a consortium of the Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to work with selected IFAD projects to promote and strengthen women's land rights through the integration of gender transformative approaches (GTAs) in rural development interventions by improving policies, tools and practices.

Following a detailed gender analysis to identify contextual factors across projects and geographies, as well as bottlenecks and opportunities for promoting women's land rights, the initiative used collaborative learning and design approaches to develop and test innovative gender transformative approaches (GTAs) and complementary methods that can support the achievement of women's land rights (WLR) through rural development interventions. This co-creation process ensured that each tool was fit-for-project purpose and endorsed locally, while at the same time contributed to a GTA toolbox that can be adapted for rural transformation projects across the IFAD portfolio.

This collection of tools include GTAs already developed and applied by IFAD projects and partners across targeted countries, as well as a suite of new tools to integrate women's land rights more explicitly and support gender transformative outcomes. These tools entail different strategies to address inequalities at the individual, household, community, policy and institutional domains, as well as to catalyse and transform harmful and discriminatory norms, perceptions and attitudes, and behaviours and practices at the identified levels across targeted countries. We share this toolbox with the IFAD community to continue testing, contextualization and sharing learnings across countries.

https://www.cifor-icraf.org/wlr
https://www.ifad.org/en/gender_transformative_approaches

INITIATIVE CONTACTS

Anne M. Larson,
Theme lead for Governance, Equity and Wellbeing

a.larson@cifor-icraf.org

Marlène Elias,
Gender Lead

marlene.elias@cgiar.org

Tshering Choden,
Technical Specialist for Gender and Social Inclusion, Gender Team

t.choden@ifad.org

Rikke Grand Olivera,
Lead Technical Specialist, Tenure Team

r.olivera@ifad.org

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Overview

This tool aims to:

- Introduce the participatory sense-making approach
- Provide guidance to researchers or practitioners interested in using the approach
- Detail how sense-making was used in the context of a women's land rights initiative in The Gambia

What is participatory sense-making?

Sense-making is a form of validating research data with research participants. It is not only important from an ethical and beneficence standpoint to return data back to the people and communities who have been involved in research where possible, but it can also help to cross-check and add nuance and depth to the initial findings, making them more robust.

A participatory and inclusive sense-making process in communities can help to foster community understanding and ownership over the data. Participatory sense-making typically involves a practitioner presenting findings from primary data collection and analysis and facilitating discussions among community members to probe these findings. As with other participatory exercises, sense-making in communities is more likely to be empowering for community members if it is part of an open and ongoing process and not a one-off extractive intervention solely to legitimate the research (Cornwall & Pratt, 2009).

Participatory sense-making specific to gender analyses can be effective at elevating women's voices in communities and encouraging wider awareness and dialogue on restrictive social and gender norms. When used in the context of women's land rights research in The Gambia, a participatory sense-making exercise provided new reflection and understanding in communities of context-specific barriers and potential solutions to securing women's land rights.

> Sense-making helps to cross-check and strengthen the evidence, gives participants a voice and ownership, and encourages stakeholders' systemic learning and collective responsibility.
> (Heinemann, Van Hemelrijck & Guijt, 2017, pg13)

Members discuss challenges in their community in The Gambia.

How to do participatory sense-making?

Participatory sense-making seeks to provide an opportunity for a diverse range of community members to engage with research findings.

It is not a radical new approach to validating research but follows in the tradition of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which is a family of approaches and methods that enable rural people to share and analyze their experiences and conditions, and to plan and to act.

Like PRA, it often involves working with groups in communities to make and analyse shared visual representations, which can help to make sense-making more engaging and accessible to all populations. Visual representations can include mapping, diagramming, matrices, modelling, ranking with seeds or stones, or otherwise. The specific method or tool should be chosen based on the questions of interest.

'Good quality' sense-making requires researchers to listen openly and deeply, and be open to challenging and changing their own understandings and biases.

How to get started?

STEP 1	Prepare initial research findings

Participatory sense-making should be done following an initial data collection phase, and before finalizing data analysis. Consider creative and visual methods to communicate the initial analysis, making the findings more accessible and supporting engagement from diverse community groups.

STEP 2	Select communities for sense-making

Communities should be selected in partnership with local stakeholders who have an established and trusted presence in them. Participating communities can comprise all of the original communities in the research sample or a sub-sample maximizing diversity of experiences related to the topic.

STEP 3	Define the objectives of the sense-making

Work with key stakeholders to collectively define the objectives of the sense-making exercise. On their own, researchers may only be concerned with validating their findings. However, relevant project teams or civil society organizations may be interested in supporting the sense-making to support community action or otherwise make the results actionable.

STEP 4	Plan the sense-making activities

The objectives of the sense-making will help to determine what kind of methods or tools to use and who to engage.

In the Women's Resource Rights Initiative in The Gambia, for example, the research team identified the need for more context-specific challenges and preferred solutions to strengthen women's land rights. For example, what potential interventions would women in communities prefer?

Visual ranking exercises were selected to enable community members, especially women, to identify and rank their barriers and potential solutions[1]. Key Informant Interviews with local leaders were also used to provide additional depth to the analysis.

The following are activities that constituted the participatory sense-making on women's land rights.

ACTIVITY 1	Ranking activities

Objectives

a. Identify the range of barriers to women's land rights in the local context

b. Identify and prioritize potential solutions with women in all their diversity and other relevant stakeholders

Materials:

✓ 100 beans
✓ Notecards, post-its or other paper stationery
✓ Marker
✓ Camera*
✓ Recording device*
✓ Notepad and pen

Participants:

● Community groups
● Local and traditional leaders
● Women, youth, people with disabilities, and other diverse populations in communities

*Note: Obtain informed consent prior to recording audio, video or taking photographs. For this and other ethical considerations consult a relevant research ethics codes (such as the CGIAR Research Ethics Code, 2020).

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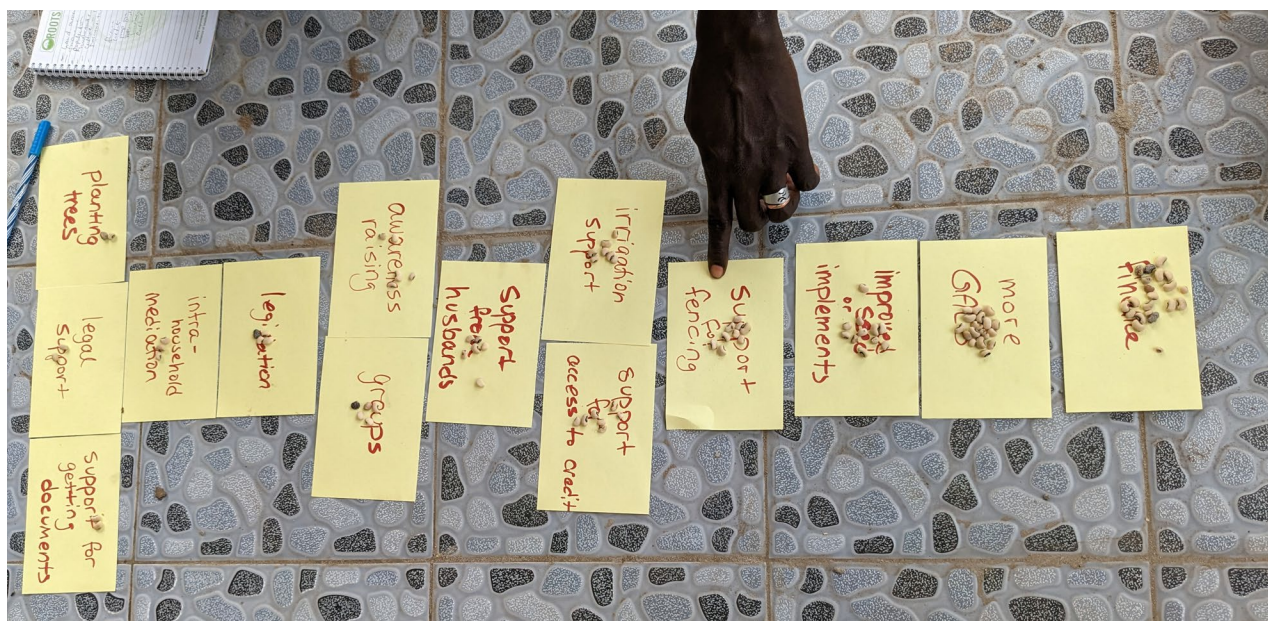[1] Drawing inspiration from Appel et al. (2012)

BARRIERS FACED IN SECURING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

1. Introduce the range of barriers to securing women's land rights across the sample (from the initial findings). Ask them what is missing, and what is a barrier for women specifically?
2. Write the challenges that participants agree are relevant in their community on cards
3. Give the group 100 beans and ask them to distribute them onto the cards amongst themselves, placing more beans on the challenges they think are most important/ most difficult to overcome, and fewer beans on those that are less important/easier to overcome
4. When they are finished discussing and distributing the beans between them, ask participants why they distributed the beans this way
5. Take a photo of the cards and collect the beans

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

1. Introduce the range of solutions identified by participants across the sample (from the initial findings). Ask them what is missing, and what are solutions for either men or women? Write the solutions that participants agree are relevant in their community on cards and place them on the ground
2. Give the group 100 beans and ask them to distribute them onto the cards amongst themselves, placing more beans on the solutions they think are the most impactful and fewer beans on those that are the least impactful
3. When they are finished discussing and distributing the beans between them, ask participants why they decided to distribute the beans this way
4. Take a photo of the cards and recollect the beans

Key Informant Interviews with local leaders

Objectives

a. Reflect on the barriers and solutions identified in communities with local leaders and change agents
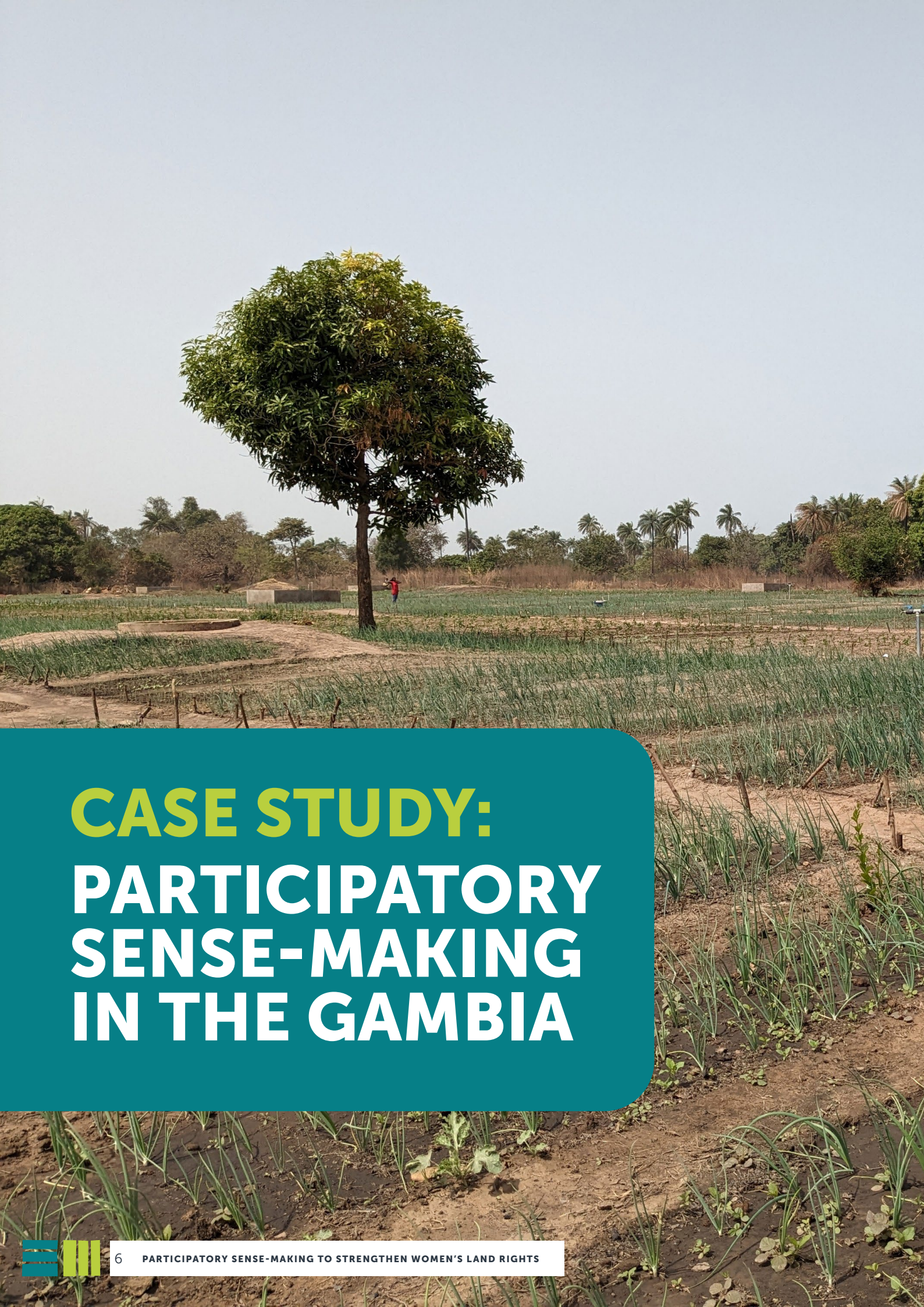b. Encourage buy-in and ownership of the community-level analyses to support action

Participants:

- Local leaders and elders with decision-making power

Example questions:

- What reflections make sense to you?
- What were you surprised to hear?
- Is there anything missing?
- Which actors are active in addressing any of these barriers?
- Going back to the potential interventions/solutions, do these make sense as solutions? How impactful would they be?
- Would they be more effective in some areas than in others? What would be more effective where?
- How do you think women should access land for production?
- Should women own land in your community? How should they obtain it? Why?
- How can you support women to have access to land in your community?
- What support do you need to do that?

CASE STUDY: PARTICIPATORY SENSE-MAKING IN THE GAMBIA

Background

The Resilience of Organizations for Transformative Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ROOTS) project in the Gambia was one of the IFAD projects selected to pilot ways to integrate Gender Transformative Approaches to secure women's resource rights.

The pilot in the Gambia consisted of a mix of co-created research and interventions to test new tools to secure women's land rights in agricultural development. Where possible, the pilot sought to build on the existing efforts of the ROOTS project to use the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology, a participatory methodology and change process aimed at empowering men and women (IFAD, 2022).

In November 2022, the ROOTS team and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT conducted a research study on the gender dimensions of land tenure in The Gambia, specifically exploring how customary and formal tenure systems interact at the community level, and their implications for women. The gender analysis methodology utilized qualitative case studies and was adapted to the context of The Gambia. Data were collected through:

Learn more in the methodology report.

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**
  - with ROOTS Project staff
  - with community leaders

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGD)**
  - sex-disaggregated focus-group discussions with community members

The study was implemented in four communities in different regions of The Gambia, which were identified by the ROOTS project team to reflect varying contexts. Table 1 provides more information about the communities selected. More details are available in the gender analysis report (North, Paez Valencia & Morgan, 2023).

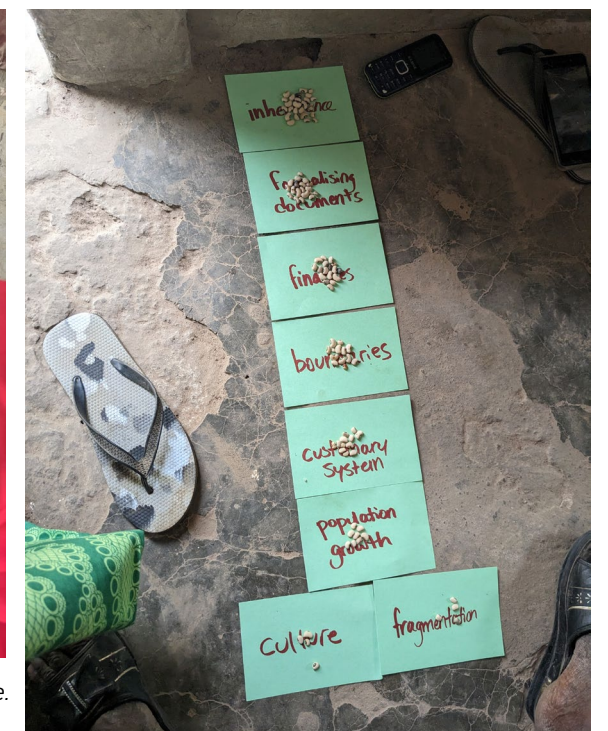*Challenges to women's access to land from the exercise.*

Table 1: Characteristics of communities selected by ROOTS to participate in the gender analysis:

Community	Community 1	Community 2	Community 3	Community 4
Region	*Upper River Region*	*West Coast Region*	*Lower River Region*	*North Bank Region*
Criteria for selecting communities	• Close proximity to Basse town • Irrigated rice value chain • Women are traditionally the key actors in rice production, but men are now extremely active in the use of developed irrigated rice plots	• Close proximity to peri-urban areas • Vegetable value chain, with active participation of women and youths in production • Potentially high pressure on land for agriculture and other uses	• Inland village • Rice value chain (upland and tidal) • Not close to major urban markets (but relatively close to Soma which is on the Transgambia highway) • Potentially low pressure on land as there very little competition with non-agricultural demand for land	• Vegetable value chain • Potential pressure on land due to high livestock population • Women mainly responsible for managing small ruminants whilst men are responsible for managing cattle

During the sense-making exercise, participants were asked questions about land rights in their communities. Below are some examples of questions asked to identify barriers to securing women's land rights and potential solutions.

Table 2: Example questions to communities to identify barriers and solutions to women's land rights.

Barriers to women's land rights	Possible solutions to women's land rights
• What makes land rights secure? • What makes land rights insecure? • What proportion of households in community own land? • Generally speaking, who typically owns the land in landholding households? • How will young men and women in the community get land in the future? (ask specifically for young men and young women) • Whose land rights are more secure: men's or women's? • If a woman has a conflict involving land, where should she find assistance to resolve the problem?	• What kinds of services or support could help residents improve access and control over land? • What kinds of services or support could help women improve access and control over land? • Are there any programs or services currently assisting community members with access and control of land? • Over the past 10 years have there been any programs or services currently assisting community members with access and control of land? • What has contributed to changes in women's access and control of land in the last 10 years? • In the last 50 years (since your grandparents were born)? • What do you think could be effective initiatives to strengthen the rights of men to resources? And what about the rights of women? • What might be required to make these happen?

The data analysis showed that land tenure systems vary between communities and that there is a knowledge gap in rural communities regarding the difference between customary and legal tenure systems. Often, these communities rely heavily on their traditional leaders (Alkalos) to make decisions over land tenure and perceive the allocation of land from Alkalos as sufficient to demonstrate ownership. However, this does not provide secure land ownership as formal land certification overrides an Alkalo's allocation, and there is always a possibility that one's land could be reallocated. Further, Alkalos traditionally allocate land to families whose, usually male, heads of household then allocate sub-plots for women to use for production. This creates another level of land tenure insecurity for women who are often disadvantaged in household decision-making. Often, women abstain from investing their time and resources into long-term, higher-value crops like agroforestry systems, lest their efforts be wasted upon land reallocation.

The initial data analysis identified the following barriers to women's land rights and suggestions for possible interventions to improve women's access to and control over land:

Challenges	Possible Solutions
• culture/attitudes • inheritance distribution system • customary system • obtaining an Alkalo signature • fragmentation of land • boundary disputes • population growth • lack of finances • obtaining formal documentation	• support for obtaining documents • awareness raising • support for purchasing land • training on land rights • support for irrigation • support for permanent fencing • more GALS training • legislation • intra-household mediation • group organisation • support for consultation with Alkalos • improved seed or implements • planting trees

Participatory sense-making in The Gambia

Following the gender analysis, it was important to share the initial findings with the ROOTS project staff and communities who had been involved. The aims were to improve the research findings with research participants and project staff, as well as inform the design of future gender transformative interventions.

The ROOTS project selected three communities in which to trial the sense-making exercise, two of which had participated in the gender analysis and one which had not. In all three communities, ROOTS supported women's garden groups and had piloted the GALS methodology. In total, 24 women participated in the ranking activities across the three communities highlighting their specific challenges and potential solutions to securing land rights (see Table 3).

Sense-making on the gender analysis was also conducted with village Alkalos, government representatives, NGO representatives, farmers' organizations and ROOTS project staff.

The sense-making process proved useful in deepening the research findings, building awareness among project staff and stakeholders on women's land rights, and identifying the appropriate interventions and partners to work with.

Table 3: Results of the sense-making exercise

Community	Challenges	Potential Solutions	Discussion Highlights
ONE	1. Finances 2. Access to Credit 3. Population growth 4. Husbands 5. Inheritance, Culture (attitudes) 6. Documentation	1. Finance 2. More GALS training 3. Improved seeds and inputs 4. Fencing/Boundary establishment 5. Support for irrigation, Credit 6. Support from husbands 7. Awareness raising, Group establishment 8. Legislation 9. Intra-household mediation on conflict 10. Planting trees, Legal support, Support for obtaining documents	• The role of the village Alkalo in land transfer proceedings is sufficient to demonstrate ownership of land and that it is uncommon to legalise land in the community. • Women felt that there was sufficient desirable land around them, but the Alkalo felt that there was not enough land to go around. • Participants placed issues like finance for purchasing land, inputs and implements, access to credit, and boundary establishment as the highest-ranking solutions to improving their access to and control over land. • Having finance brings status in the community and being able to demonstrate that they have something to contribute financially to their families would be effective in garnering the support of their husbands to further expand their land and increase their control over it. • Participants would appreciate more training on land rights, but it is time-consuming and adds a burden to their days.
TWO	1. Inheritance 2. Formalising documents 3. Finances 4. Boundaries 5. Customary system 6. Population growth 7. Culture, Fragmentation	1. Support for purchasing land 2. Permanent fencing 3. Irrigation 4. Awareness raising 5. Inputs and implements 6. More GALS training 7. Intra-household mediation 8. Legislation 9. Support for documents 10. 1Support for consulting with Alkalo 11. Training on land rights 12. Groups, Planting trees	• Land fragmentation and population growth are biggest issues in the peri-urban area. • Women are not prioritised in decisions around land due to the perception that they are not necessarily permanent community members due to marriage or divorce. • Purchasing land is very common and many women already own land here. • Participants rated support for obtaining documents and training on land rights as low-priority solutions because the Alkalo's involvement in land issues is generally sufficient to enforce land rights. • Participants noted that boundary issues are usually solved in favour of men, and that decisions are made without the involvement of women, except for in some individual families. • Establishing barriers around plots is a major factor in land issues because of the pressure on land here. If land is allocated or formal leasehold is obtained, it is important to put in fencing or other construction on the land to minimize disputes.
THREE	1. Access roads 2. Farm inputs and implements 3. Finance 4. Land development (mangrove invasion) 5. Salt intrusion 6. Inheritance 7. Culture	1. Irrigation 2. Permanent fencing 3. Training on legal rights, More GALS training, 4. Support for purchase 5. Improve market access 6. Inputs and implements, Groups 7. Intra-HH mediation, Awareness, Support for documents 8. Legislation	• Women have control and decision-making power over the lowland rice fields, but they are more interested in gaining access and ownership over the upland areas for vegetable cultivation and construction of houses etc. • Land is generally allocated to families under the customary system, and formal land purchase is uncommon. • The rice plots allocated to women are far away and only accessible by roads that are in poor condition and unreliable. • Obtaining legal documents is perceived as cumbersome and unnecessary. • Women's groups have better opportunities than individual women, and it is cheaper to register land in the name of a group than an individual.

Note: *Challenges and solutions are ranked in order from the most difficult to overcome/most effective solutions for their communities (1) to the least difficult to overcome/least effective solutions. Challenges or solutions which participants perceive as having equal weight are separated by commas.*

To learn more about the effort to pilot gender transformative approaches to secure women's land rights in The Gambia, consult the following:

- Legal guide and facilitation manual (Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia)

- Engagement process tool (ActionAid International The Gambia)

- IFAD Note

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INITIATIVE CONSORTIUM

The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and World Agroforestry (ICRAF) envision a more equitable world where trees in all landscapes, from drylands to the humid tropics, enhance the environment and well-being for all. CIFOR and ICRAF are CGIAR Research Centers.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and malnutrition. These four interconnected global crises have put at stake the wellbeing of our planet for years. Fueled by COVID-19, their impact on agriculture, landscapes, biodiversity, and humans is now stronger than ever. Reversing this negative trend is a challenge, but also an opportunity for bold choices and integrated solutions. Established in 2019, the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) was created to address these four crises, maximizing impact for change at key points in the food system.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) provides research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition in developing countries. Established in 1975, IFPRI currently has more than 600 employees working in over 50 countries. It is a research center of CGIAR, a worldwide partnership engaged in agricultural research for development.

INITIATIVE CONTACTS

Anne M. Larson,
Theme lead for Governance, Equity and Wellbeing

a.larson@cifor-icraf.org

Marlène Elias,
Gender Lead

marlene.elias@cgiar.org

Tshering Choden,
Technical Specialist for Gender and Social Inclusion, Gender Team

t.choden@ifad.org

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Lead Technical Specialist, Tenure Team

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