



SECURING WOMEN'S
RESOURCE RIGHTS
THROUGH GENDER
TRANSFORMATIVE
APPROACHES



IFAD

Investing in rural people



STRENGTHENING RURAL WOMEN'S CAPACITY TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR LAND RIGHTS

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS
AND CASE STUDY
FROM THE GAMBIA





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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 the 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 WLR through rural development interventions. This co-creation process ensures that each tool is fit-for-project purpose and endorsed locally, while at the same time contributing to a GTA toolbox that can be adapted for land-based 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 land rights more explicitly and further the gender transformation agenda. 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

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Scope and Background

The Women's Land Rights Initiative (WLR) is implemented in the context of IFAD projects in 6 countries worldwide. The goal of the initiative is to promote and strengthen women's land rights through **piloting gender transformative approaches (GTAs)** and sharing learning to improve policies, tools, and practices. In the case of The Gambia, the Initiative partnered with the Resilience of Organizations for Transformative Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ROOTS), and the pilot GTA consisted of developing a process to strengthen rural women's capacities to advocate for land rights and opening spaces and opportunities to do this before authorities at different levels.

This document describes the process led by ActionAid International The Gambia (AAITG) to build rural women's capacities to advocate for land rights in The Gambia, and provides guidance for scaling the approach in other contexts.

About ActionAid and the Rural Women's Rights Assembly

ActionAid is a global justice organisation working to achieve social justice, gender equality and the eradication of poverty. AAITG has a strong gender, children and youth focus and engages Gender Action Groups and Women Pressure Groups across the country which has helped them raise awareness amongst women and communities on human rights, gender issues and legal instruments. AAITG works with a long-standing network of national partners to implement their advocacy projects.

In August 2022, AAITG launched a five-day Land Rights Caravan Campaign with the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) to engage women and smallholder farmers on access, ownership, and control over land. Given their local reputation and strong networks in advocating for women's land rights, AAITG was identified as the ideal partner to implement the women's land rights pilot project in The Gambia.

The RWA is a women-led community-based organization with a country-wide presence, working around issues of climate change, food security and land tenure security. As key stakeholders representing the needs and interests of Gambian women, they were engaged to lead the land rights campaign in communities by facilitating discussions between women, local leaders, and other community members.



Context of Women's Land Rights in The Gambia

The Gambia is governed by a complex system of interlinked statutory and customary regulations and practices, in which religion and ethnicity play important roles in influencing how women and men can access land and resource rights. Existing practices follow a patrilineal property system wherein fathers bequeath land to their sons, and women's access to land is highly mediated by social and marital status, as they must access land through their fathers, brothers, and husbands. In certain localities matrilineal inheritance may be allowed but is rare. Almost all of the land in The Gambia is governed under the customary system, except for Banjul and Kanifing Municipalities which are considered Freehold as a legacy of colonialism.

There are three main systems of land holding under the customary law:



Household holdings are usually managed by the family head (kabiloo). This land is generally allocated to individual families by the village chief (Alkalo) and parceled to family members for production.



Communal land is managed by the Alkalo who portions land for the general benefit or use of the community (e.g., prayer grounds, burial grounds, bantabas [traditional meeting and relaxation spots], schools, seed stores and hospitals).



Individual ownership is formalized through registering parcels of land allocated by the Alkalo with the relevant government ministries. The individual owner can pass such land onto their family or community; less than 4% of individual women owned land in The Gambia in 2020.

Learn more in the Legal Guide to Women's Land Rights produced by the Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia (FLAG), and in the socio-legal analysis, *Women's Land Rights in The Gambia: Securing Women's Resource Rights through Gender Transformative Approaches* produced as part of the pilot project.



Design

The WRR Initiative aimed to establish a viable Multi-Stakeholder Platform to advocate and campaign for policy changes that benefit rural women's land rights. Based on their experience ActionAid proposed a decentralized and grounded approach to building the Platform, drawing on the strength of their existing networks, specifically the Rural Women's Assembly. The approach aimed at building local capacities across the country to lead and coordinate mobilization and advocacy activities on women's land rights. The Rural Women's Assembly (RWA), would be the base of the Platform and lead a campaign with support from ActionAid and the ROOTS project.

ActionAid's approach drew on local experience and expertise, and was inclusive of regional variation and diverse voices, responsive to stakeholders and relevant to the context, and likely to be sustained over time.

The result was an engagement process carried out in 6 main steps, each feeding into the next, and culminating in a national-level event that brings together key actors around the central theme of increasing women's land rights. This approach was facilitated by the Rural Women's Assembly with support from AAITG and was operationalized through a series of consultations which drew out target communities in which to engage in discussions on women's land rights to catalyze change.



Engagement Process



The objective of this activity was to identify key actors and contact points in target regions, interested government and other stakeholders, and potential participants to join the AAITG advocacy training, detailed in Step 4. Stakeholder mapping ensured no one was left out of the conversation.

AAITG has a robust network of partners across the country and the ROOTS project had been engaging with communities and local leaders in the targeted regions. Their combined knowledge of the institutional landscape and the community composition allowed them to conduct the first round of stakeholder mapping.

 Participants	 The following stakeholders were identified
ActionAid International The Gambia and ROOTS project technical teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ROOTS Project Regional Steering Committee Members• ROOTS STAFF• Alkalo (Village Heads)• Women Representatives of the ROOTS Supported Garden/Rice Interventions• Rural Women’s Assembly (RWA)• District Chiefs• Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)





These meetings helped identify the districts targeted for the platform activities and provided the first opportunity for women to voice their experiences, as well as the experiences of their relatives or neighbours, in trying to exercise their land rights in the presence of local authorities.

The following criteria were employed in the selection of districts:

- Must have a ROOTS Project intervention site
- Majority of women in the district are smallholder farmers
- Evidence of women having challenges in owning and controlling land in the district (based on testimonials from local women)
- Interest in challenging the status quo expressed by residents

The meetings revealed that the platform activities may not have a significant impact in the West Coast Region (WCR) because cultural barriers to women’s land ownership are not a major challenge in WCR, but rather pressure on land in the peri-urban area which makes land less available. The leaders decided to approach two districts in the Central River Region instead.

 Participants	 Key insights
<p>240 people participated in these meetings.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">43%</div> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">57%</div> </div> <p>• Women • Men</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ROOTs Project Regional Committee Members • ROOTs Project Staff • Village Heads • Women representatives of ROOTs Project supported Gardens/Rice interventions • Rural Women’s Assembly Executive Members • District Chiefs • Civil society organizations/ Community-based Organisations 	<p>Mansata Fatty, one of the first women to be a member of the District Tribunal in Niamina East, said that land inheritance is the major issue affecting women. According to Mansata, when a father dies leaving both sons and daughters behind, all properties are shared as dictated by shariah (2 shares for men, 1 for women) except for land. The denial of women from inheriting land is not dictated by shariah, but some men vehemently do it for their own interest.</p> <p>Amie Mboob from Sandu Misira stated that “one project wanted to support us with a garden and the ‘Alkalo’ (village head) gave us land, but it was not documented. When he died, one of his sons wanted to get the land from us. Although he did not get the land from us, but it was very tough for us and delayed our vegetable production that year.”</p> <p>Seefo Yaya Jarjusey, the Chief of Jarra West expressed his support for women to have access to land. He said there shouldn’t be any issue with women accessing land to cultivate in his community since they are the backbone of agriculture in the country.</p>





The target communities for each district were identified during these meetings. The villages were selected based on the magnitude of the barriers to women’s land ownership and control as shared during the Regional Consultation meetings. Again, women harnessed the opportunity to share their experiences with local authorities.

These were the districts selected:

- 1 Lower Badibou in North Bank Region
- 2 Naini in Central River Region South
- 3 Upper Fuladou in Central River Region
- 4 Tumana in Upper River Region
- 5 Jarra East in Lower River Region

Following the District Consultation meetings, a list of individuals were identified in each community, to become the Platform coordinators and be trained to lead the advocacy and campaigning activities envisioned for the platform.

The trainees were selected based on expressions of interest and availability during the consultation meetings.

 **Participants**

145 people participated in these meetings

46%	54%
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• **Women** • **Men**

Including:

- ROOTs Project Regional Committee Members
- ROOTs Project Staff
- Village Heads
- Women representatives of ROOTs Project supported Gardens/Rice interventions
- Rural Women’s Assembly
- Executive Members
- District Chiefs
- CSOs/CBOs





The platform coordinators of the land rights campaign were trained in AAITG’s Human Right Based Approach (HRBA)¹ to advocating in and engaging with rural communities on the rights of women. ActionAid’s HRBA is a pro-poor strategy that centres on supporting rights holders to organise and claim their rights, and to hold duty bearers, decision-makers, and those in positions of power to account.

The HRBA training took place over 5 days and aimed to build the capacity of Platform coordinators to conduct an effective and efficient advocacy campaign.

The training involved:

- Introduction to the Concepts, Principles and Pillars of HRBA
- Training on the steps for organizing a campaign, and necessary elements for sustainability.
- Group planning exercise to incorporate learnings into the work plans and identify a corresponding budget. These were presented to the group for feedback.

 Participants	 Key insights
<p>36 people were trained as platform coordinators</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="background-color: #00728f; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">39%</div> <div style="background-color: #76b82a; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">61%</div> </div> <p>• Women • Men</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 ROOTS project staff • 10 Rural Women’s Assembly members • 4 Regional Gender Focal Persons • 5 representatives from community based organizations • 6 local authorities 	<p>The open discussion triggered a debate around how people are marginalized and exploited by Leaders or people in authority, and how this applies to women’s land rights in The Gambia.</p> <p>Fatou Jammeh, (ROOTS Project extension staff member, LRR), opened the conversation saying “this is what men used to make sure women remain underdeveloped for the longest of time.”</p> <p>Some participants agreed, but Janko Sighnateh, Councillor of Saba Ward countered: “Not every community is facing this issue, in our communities in Baddibu, women are given their due rights, they have their access to land without much difficulty.”</p> <p>The discussion highlighted that women’s land rights are highly nuanced from community to community.</p>

¹ActionAid. (2010). ActionAid’s Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) Resource Book.

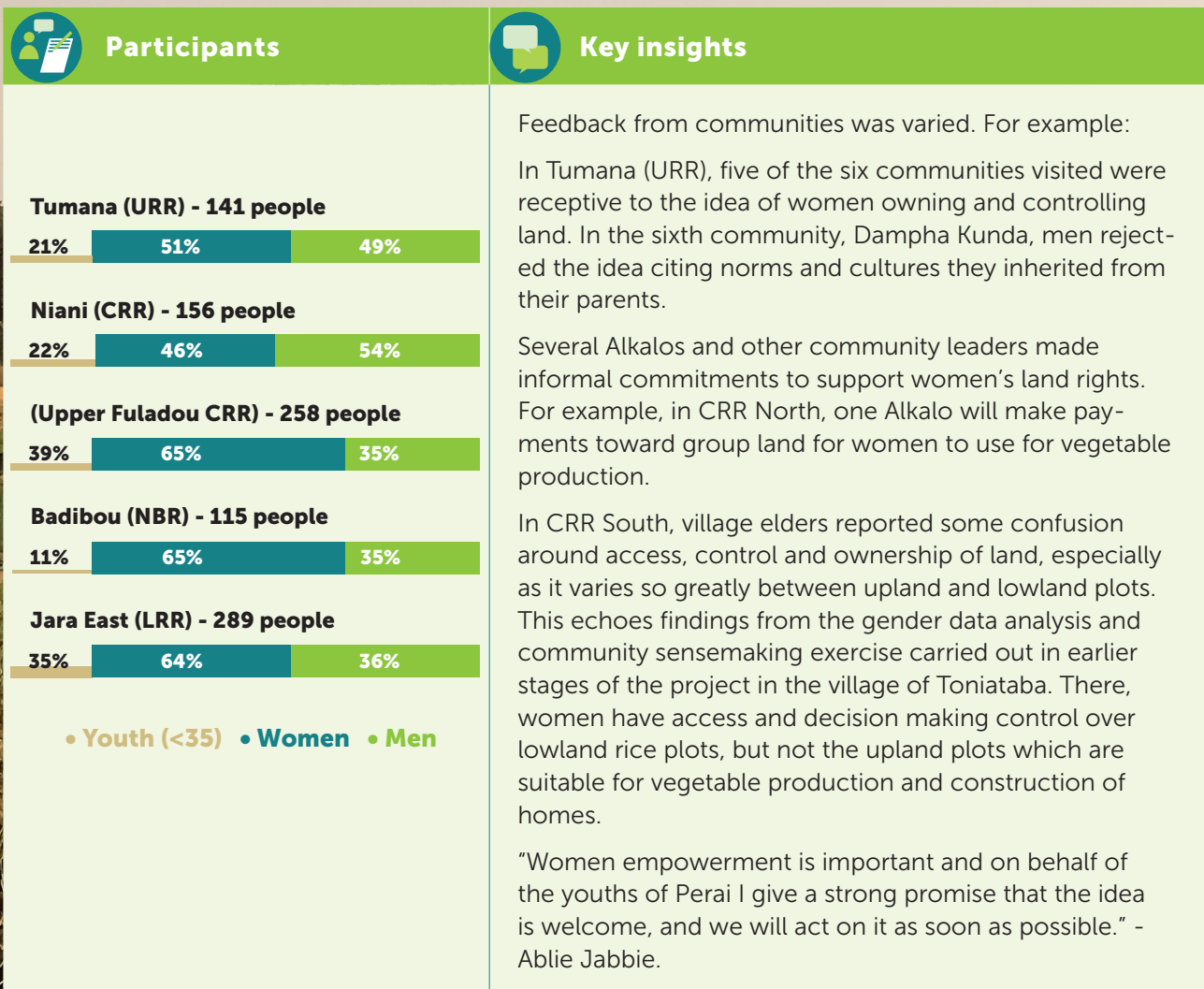




STEP 5
CAMPAIGN LAUNCH AND
ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

Platform coordinators visited 29 communities in the five project districts to advocate for women’s land rights and gather first-hand accounts of the experiences and challenges women face in exercising their rights. During the campaign, the platform coordinators engaged communities in dialogue using the skills they strengthened during the campaign trainings, discussed the role of women landowners in community development, and elicited verbal commitments from village leaders (Alkalo) to support women in accessing land in their communities.

Some villages were more receptive to changing the status quo than others, but the campaign received overall positive feedback from the communities. Many of the individuals who engaged in the discussions shared that they hadn’t thought about women’s land rights in the past and were pleasantly surprised to hear that women have equal access to land under Gambian law. These discussions catalyzed communities to reflect upon and evaluate the ways women are disadvantaged in land security, and it was particularly effective for these discussions to be led by their peers who were trained in the HRBA approach.







The pilot culminated with a national knowledge-sharing event, which brought together key stakeholders from relevant government offices, members of the RWA, platform coordinators, ROOTS project staff, AAITG staff, and more to reflect on the Platform’s campaign.

The main portion of the event was a panel discussion with platform coordinators from each of the districts included in the campaign. Panellists shared their observations on women’s land rights in The Gambia and called for action. The RWA members who participated as platform coordinators reflected that they felt confident and prepared to engage communities in dialogue about women’s land rights, and that the *Legal Guide to women’s land rights in The Gambia*, produced by The Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia as a parallel component of this process, will be instrumental in supporting women through enforcing their land rights.

The speakers also called on the government to increase support toward awareness raising and upholding women’s land rights. Government officials who were present expressed great interest in the campaign and shared their intention to involve AAITG and the RWA in the process of creating The Gambia’s first land policy, which is in its early stages of development and consultations.

 Participants	 Key insights
<p>89 people attended this event.</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 8 Local Government Representatives ● 42 National Government Representatives ● 16 NGO representatives ● 12 Representatives from community-based organizations ● Members of the RWA 	<p>During the panel discussion, RWA member Fatou Trawally from CRR South reflected that the advocacy training helped her and her peers effectively engage communities and strengthen women’s land rights in the Regions. “Everyone can understand through dialogue,” she said. “Change isn’t easy, if you want to make change you need a strategic approach through discussion and consensus.”</p> <p>Bakary Jammeh from LRR shared a story of an Alkalo he encountered during the campaign. The Alkalo was resistant to the discussions during the community meetings because he had misconceptions about what the campaign was trying to accomplish. Using the skills he learned during the training, Bakary discussed with him that their goal was to empower women to access land and build food security in the community, not to take anything away from men. He reflected that once he was able to meet the Alkalo on his terms, he was less resistant. Following this discussion, the Chief became an instrumental part of driving the discussion with the wider community, and he was even in attendance at the national event in the audience.</p>



Timeline



Access vs Ownership to Land

Reflecting on the advocacy campaign, AAITG were pleased to witness great strides when it comes to women's access to land in communities across The Gambia. This came as a result of the community dialogues led by the RWA and campaign coordinators and were witnessed in the form of commitments made by local leaders, reflections from community members, and a newfound sense of drive and motivation to support women's access to land. Some examples of this were Alkalos allocating land to women's garden groups, changes in perceptions, and awareness of the disadvantages of Sharia inheritance laws. The next step would be formalizing women's land ownership, as they currently own a very small portion of land across the country.

Parallel to the process facilitated by AAITG, the Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia (FLAG) developed a [Legal Guide to Women's Land Rights in The Gambia](#) with the purpose of raising awareness



of women's land rights and clarifying the process of obtaining legal documentation for rural people, and especially women. The written Guide is accompanied by audio voice overs that will enable stakeholders to deliver training at district and community levels.

On 25 and 26 March 2024, FLAG conducted a Training of Trainers (ToT) to present the information in the guide to those working with women at the village level and facilitate its use. The ToT included activities to clarify concepts in the Guide, walking through the processes for formally registering land and instructions on how/where to find technical support. Participants were highly engaged in the training and left feeling prepared to support women in their districts to register their land.

Building on this, AAITG and FLAG co-designed and implemented step-down trainings for communities in the campaign districts in May 2024. The trainings were carried out by previously trained members of the RWA, who visited the Regions to deliver the content of the Guide to communities. The intention of these trainings is to raise awareness of documentation of land and encourage women who are allocated land to formally register it and secure their tenure.



Discussions underway in Tinkinjo, Upper River Region.
Credit: AAITG Communications



Participants were highly engaged in the training and left *feeling prepared to support women in their districts to register their land.*

Image source: AAITG Communications

Key Lessons Learned



Women know their needs best. Providing a dedicated space for women to voice their concerns in the presence of local authorities catalyzed interest and action for supporting women at the community level. Local authorities who were confronted with women's negative experiences in a public setting were motivated to act on those concerns.



Be strategic about where these discussions are most needed. During the Regional Consultation meetings it was revealed that in the West Coast Region the main barrier to women's access to land is financial rather than normative. AAITG decided to engage in two districts in the Central river region instead to garner greater impacts from the advocacy dialogues. The Legal Guide to women's land rights produced by FLAG will serve as an important tool for women in WCR to secure land they acquire.



Engage local leaders. Engaging local authorities and thought leaders is essential because they often play a critical role in land tenure processes, and having their support drives buy-in and engagement from communities.



Advocate for access and ownership. Women having access to land does not guarantee that that access is secure in the long term. This was discussed at length with community members in the gender data analysis and during the advocacy process. It is great if local norms shift to provide more access to land for women, but that access may be revoked. Scaling ownership through formal documentation procedures addresses this.





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.

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