



Developing Gender Transformative Approaches to Strengthen Women's Land Rights in **Bangladesh**

FOUNDATIONAL GENDER ANALYSIS



Research Summary Brief

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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.

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

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BANGLADESH

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IFAD project network



Colombia
Building Rural
Entrepreneurial
Capacities
Programme:
Trust and
Opportunity
(TOP)
(2012 - 2022)



Niger*



The Gambia
Resilience of
Organizations for
Transformative
Smallholder
Agriculture
Programme
(ROOTS)
(2019 - 2026)



Uganda
National Oil Palm
Project (NOPP)
(2019 - 2029)



Ethiopia
Participatory
Small Scale
Irrigation
Programme
(PASIDP-II)
(2017 - 2024)



Kyrgyzstan
Access to
Markets Project
(2018 - 2023)



Bangladesh
Char Development
and Settlement
Project IV (CDSP IV)
(2010 - 2024)

Introduction

This series of briefs summarizes the key learnings from gender analyses conducted across six countries: Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, The Gambia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Colombia. As part of the IFAD Global Initiative for Gender Transformative Approaches, these briefs will facilitate co-learning processes, knowledge exchange and capacity building, the scaling out of good practices and lessons learned, and the integration of evidence into advocacy and policy processes.

BACKGROUND

Innovative approaches are needed to achieve the United Nation's Agenda 2030, including reducing gender and other social inequalities. Land rights, understood here broadly as bundles of rights to access and make decisions over the use of land, is one area where inequalities are particularly prevalent. In development practice and policies, interventions that aim to support gender equality and land rights have often failed to effectively address the root causes of inequality. Integrating Gender Transformative Approaches (GTAs) into these interventions can improve land rights practices and outcomes.

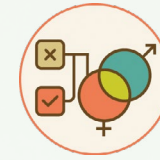
Access to land and resources, as well as control over them, are crucial for women's empowerment. However, women face barriers such as inadequate legal frameworks, ineffective policy implementation, and discriminatory cultural attitudes, which limit their access, control, and use of land and resources. If not recognized and proactively addressed, investments and development initiatives in the agricultural sector can reinforce or even exacerbate such inequalities. Addressing these institutional barriers is therefore essential to achieve gender equality and secure women's rights and access to land.

Gender transformative approaches challenge the underlying barriers that sustain gender inequality by identifying factors that enable equitable involvement of women in decision-making and resource control rather than addressing the symptoms (e.g. unequal income). By fostering lasting and pervasive changes, GTAs aim to create enabling environments for women's empowerment. Integrating GTAs in rural development programs and interventions can help address inequalities in land access, rural services, and markets, thereby enhancing women's livelihood outcomes and ensuring the recognition, protection, and enjoyment of their rights. Such an integration will require understanding gender dynamics surrounding land rights, but also engaging intimately with broader programmatic design and implementation strategies to identify entry-points for effectively transforming policies and processes that (re)produce discriminatory gender relations.

THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

To advance the recognition and protection of women's land rights, IFAD initiated the three-year Global Initiative for Gender Transformative Approaches (2021-2024). IFAD collaborated with the Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry Centre (CIFOR-ICRAF), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to integrate GTAs in IFAD projects across six countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, The Gambia, and Uganda. The initiative aims to scale up GTAs by sharing knowledge and improving policies, tools and practices.

The initiative team worked collaboratively with IFAD project personnel in each country to share, add value and learn from ongoing efforts. Appropriate and relevant approaches have been identified for scaling women's land rights initiatives. Each IFAD project is unique, entailing different phases and timelines of project implementation, approaches to addressing gender, and issues concerning rights to land and resources. While few of these projects explicitly focus on land and resource rights or gender equality, these issues underpin project implementation with multiple entry points for intervention. The initiative works across a diversity of projects and contexts to harvest lessons and promote cross-learning. The lessons are shared with a wider pool of approximately 30 IFAD supported projects and beyond.



Gender Analysis

This series of briefs summarizes key gender analysis learnings from six countries, facilitating co-learning processes, knowledge exchange, capacity building, scaling out of good practices, lessons learned, and integrating evidence into advocacy and policy processes.

To achieve the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and reduce gender inequalities in land rights, integrating Gender Transformative Approaches (GTAs) into development interventions is crucial. GTAs address root causes of gender inequality by fostering lasting changes in decision-making and resource control, offering a strategic framework to enhance women's empowerment in accessing and managing land resources while challenging discriminatory cultural attitudes and institutional barriers.

IFAD's three-year Global Initiative for Gender Transformative Approaches (2021-2024) collaborates with partners to integrate GTAs into projects across six countries: Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, The Gambia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Colombia. The initiative aims to advance women's land and resource rights by sharing knowledge, improving policies, and identifying diverse entry points for intervention in IFAD-supported projects and beyond.

In-depth gender analyses were conducted in all six countries to examine the intricate relationship between local context, gender dynamics, and land rights. The methodology, based on stakeholder engagement and innovative tools, explored factors influencing women's access to land, including legal rights, customary practices, and gaps between recognition and implementation. By employing diverse data collection methods such as Community Profiles, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of gender inequalities in women's land rights, informing IFAD project design and implementation to advance gender equality and women's empowerment across diverse contexts. For a more detailed description of the gender analysis methodology, please refer to the Gender Analysis Methodology report.



GTAs address root causes of gender inequality by fostering lasting changes in decision-making and resource control, offering a strategic framework to enhance women's empowerment in accessing and managing land and production means, as well as natural resources.



For a more detailed description of the gender analysis methodology, please refer to the **Methodology and Key Insights Report**.

Gender Analysis Methods

The gender analysis methodology utilized qualitative case studies and adapted protocols from GENNOVATE and Pro-WEAI to gather data. Various data collection methods were employed:



KEY INFORMANT
INTERVIEWS (KII)
WITH PROJECT STAFF



Introduction and project approach to gender.



Identify existing barriers and normative constraints to women's land rights.



Survey existing and potential interventions, good practices, risks, and failures.



KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS
TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY
PROFILES THROUGH GROUP
AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS



Provide social, economic, agricultural, and political background information about the community, and the current situation in terms of use and access and control over key resources



Gain an understanding of community-level factors that generate or reinforce gender norms that hinder the full recognition and enjoyment of resource rights



FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS
(FGD) WITH RELEVANT
STAKEHOLDER GROUPS



Perception of community context: describe conditions in community from FG participants' point of view.



Existing rights: increase understanding of how participants conceptualize property rights within the community and norms related to those rights.



Challenges and barriers to rights: gain understanding of operation of local rights (formal and customary) to identify patterns/drivers of security and insecurity.



Potential interventions: Understand participants' perceptions of interventions focused on resource rights equity and potential actions the could target existing challenges.



Learnings from Bangladesh

PROJECT CONTEXT

IFAD has been actively engaged in Bangladesh for nearly four decades, with a current approach that addresses multifaceted challenges faced by poor rural women and men. The overarching objective of IFAD's country programme in Bangladesh is threefold. Firstly, it aims to empower individuals in vulnerable areas, enabling them to adapt their livelihoods in the face of climate change. Secondly, the programme seeks to bolster the prospects of small producers and entrepreneurs by enhancing value chains and expanding market access. Lastly, IFAD is dedicated to the economic and social empowerment of marginalized groups, with a particular focus on uplifting poor rural women. By fostering resilience, improving market engagement, and promoting inclusivity, IFAD's efforts in Bangladesh strive to create sustainable and positive impacts on the lives of those in need.

The project chosen for the Global initiative, the **Char Development and Settlement Project (CDSP)**. Following a series of phases starting in 1979, it is currently in its Bridging Phase (CDSP-IV), implemented between 2010 and 2024. Originally an infrastructure project, CDSP has evolved to become a comprehensive and integrated approach to uplift the livelihoods of impoverished communities residing on recently formed coastal islands, locally referred to as

chars. This land is a critical resource in Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world. This project is strategically designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by these vulnerable populations and has mainstreamed gender throughout all the activities, with an emphasis on women's participation in field level institutions (FLIs) as well as decision-making and responsive infrastructure. The project's core components have included enhancing water resource management to safeguard against tidal and storm surges, enhancing drainage and land accretion, financing climate-resilient infrastructure, and improving overall accessibility to markets, potable water, and sanitation. Furthermore, the project emphasizes socio-economic development by offering technical assistance and training to farmers, as well as micro-credit and human and legal rights training to women.

A key focus of CDSP is to provide legal, dual title khas (public) land to married couples where wives' names are listed first and husbands and wives each own 50% ("50:50 titling"). Notably, the initiative places a special emphasis on distributing land to and reaching the most disadvantaged members, particularly landless households, and abandoned, divorced, or widowed women.



GENDER ANALYSIS

The data collection instruments developed for the gender analysis were adapted to the Bangladeshi country and project context and needs. The study focuses on four Upazilas in Noakhali district, Chittagong Division, where the Char Development and Settlement Project (CDSP) has operated in different phases. Selection criteria for communities within these char areas were based on diverse experiences, observed impacts, vulnerability to river erosion, and accessibility. A diverse set of participants was purposively selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the project's impact across different dimensions such as age, gender identity, household type, community role, land ownership, religion, and ethnicity.

The **data collection instruments** for the Bangladeshi gender analysis comprised four qualitative methods, capturing data from 79 data points across three phases of the CDSP.



Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) involved six CDSP technical staff and donor representatives to gather contextual information on project engagement and gender perspectives.



Three **Community Profiles** were developed through interviews with a total of nine men and women local representatives from each CDSP phase, providing background information and insights into community-level factors influencing gender norms.



Additionally, twelve gender- and age-disaggregated **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** were conducted, involving 86 participants from diverse demographics, to explore local perceptions, rights, challenges, and potential interventions.



Lastly, 52 **In-Depth Individual Interviews (IDIs)**, disaggregated by gender and age, delved into individual experiences related to access, control, and ownership of land. A team of researchers and field associates facilitated data collection, ensuring varied perspectives from participants across the study sites.



Key Learnings

01

WOMEN'S LAND OWNERSHIP:

CDSP's practice of 50:50 titling of khas land to both spouses and targeting previously married women has resulted in widespread female ownership of khas land. Their efforts have also contributed to a general well-acceptance of this practice in the communities. However, the practice of dual titling does not extend to land accessed outside of the CDSP land distribution, where men tend to be sole land owners.

02

LAND CONFLICTS, LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, AND UNIQUE CHALLENGES:

Legal recognition of land ownership, specifically through having a 'piece of paper', have reduced conflicts and unlawful evictions. Men and women's confidence in land ownership rises with land ownership and proper documentation. However, women encounter unique challenges. Husbands may informally sell wives' land without their knowledge and/or consent. Divorced, widowed, or separated women may be disproportionately targeted by hostile neighbours. Resolving conflicts may depend on subjective support from community leaders, who are more likely to help a woman considered modest, well-behaved, or pious.

03

REDUCTION OF NORMATIVE BARRIERS AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES:

Normative barriers to gender equality are gradually diminishing. Gender norms have become more equitable in the CDSP service area where women are intentionally targeted in training programmes, field-level institutions, and leadership roles. Training programmes and active involvement of women in FLIs have encouraged their participation beyond their homes, equipping them with knowledge and access in land matters, legal and human rights, microfinance, agricultural practices, and management skills. These initiatives foster networking and social interaction, empowering women to take control of their land and improve their lives.

04

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NORMS IMPACTING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND:

Legal and human rights training improves women's awareness of their rights, especially regarding land, as well as knowledge and skills leading to increased independence and financial security. However, women still face limited public voice, participation and mobility compared to men. Traditional beliefs and norms about men's role in owning land limit women from acquiring and using land assets. There is social pressure and belief that men should have more ownership over assets. Even if some women make land-related decisions, they tend to hide them from the community because women making land-related decisions is looked down upon.

05

CHALLENGES IN LAND TITLING FOR WOMEN:

While women are entitled to 100% land ownership in the case of a husband's death, divorce or abandonment, women encounter hurdles in the retitling process and may not claim formal ownership to all the land to which they are entitled. Bureaucratic complexities and traveling long-distances to offices undermine interest and confidence. While CDSP is working to address this, women's limited prior involvement in land issues fosters discomfort and reluctance toward legal processes and property decision-making. Traditions and religious practices also influence land ownership. Khas land inheritance legally follow religious doctrine (i.e., Personal Laws). In Bangladesh, a large majority follow Muslim law, under which sons receive more land than daughters, and Hindu law, under which daughters do not inherit any land. As inheritance is the main way to access land in Bangladesh, CDSP serves as a crucial pathway for women to own property.





06

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DAUGHTERS' LAND RIGHTS AND EQUITABLE INHERITANCE:

The dual titling initiative has shifted attitudes towards daughters' land rights, emphasizing the importance of equitable inheritance. While khas land must follow the inheritance laws, some mothers with supportive husbands make arrangements to share land to their daughters for their financial security. Parents may be more inclined to partition land to daughters who are divorced, separated, or abandoned with children, and those with disabilities. However, this may not include a formal process of registering the land in the daughters' name. This evolving perspective underscores the gradual transformative impact of awareness and empowerment initiatives.

07

PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG MALES AND FEMALES ON INHERITANCE:

Young males and females agreed with the current legal provisions, with young males often justifying a larger share based on gender identity. Young women are well informed of their rights and the opportunities of land ownership, but may decline their inheritance or give to their brothers due to family and community pressure. In the context of patrilocal practices, young women traditionally move to their husband's family, which further limits her ability to claim and control inherited land.

“Normative barriers to gender equality are gradually diminishing.”

08

SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR INCREASED MOBILITY:

Along with land settlement interventions, infrastructural interventions also contributed to creating a safe and secured environment around the char areas. Women now have relatively increased safety and reduced risk of different types of violence or harassment, which has facilitated greater mobility for women. They can now utilize local transportation options to access nearby markets and shops more easily. However, it is important to note that women often undertake these journeys accompanied by men from their households.

09

VISIONING CDSP AS A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECT:

Even though CDSP's gender budget is mainstreamed through other activities, the CDSP team envisions the project as one that ensures equitable access, control, and decision-making over titled lands and resources for all gender identities. Transformation for gender equity would include advancing economic and resource rights, challenging existing norms, extending access to knowledge for everyone, and fostering equal opportunities. The project also envisions a focus on preventing gender-based violence and enhancing social, economic, and political engagement for women.



Recommendations

To address the challenges, strengthen land and resource rights, and enhance the effectiveness of interventions, a range of recommendations have been formulated:

01



Enhance Land Titling Practices:

- Promote and expand the practice of joint titling (50:50 ownership), along with cultural support to normalize women's land ownership.
- Develop streamlined processes for women to register land as individuals.



04



Economic Independence:

- Continue to include women in programmes providing training in skills like agriculture, poultry farming, and adapt them to confront gender-based divisions of labour and decision-making.
- Encourage and support women's involvement in income-generating endeavours.



03



Legal Support and Education:

- Provide legal support and education to women and men, focusing on human rights, and women's property laws, inheritance rights, and land titling.



02



Community Empowerment and Awareness:

- Continue awareness initiatives to challenge traditional norms and gender stereotypes around land, decision-making, roles, and responsibilities including inheritance norms.
- Continue to engage community leaders to strengthen and implement community conflict resolution mechanisms for everyone equally.



05



Inclusive Education and Youth Engagement:

- Extend beyond primary beneficiaries and include the whole household by developing programmes targeting young males and females for a more equitable understanding of property rights and inheritance.
- Increase engagement of women of all ages and diverse views in project design and implementation.

06



Access to Knowledge and Resources:

- Ensure and provide access to knowledge and resources for everyone, including women, minorities, persons with disabilities, girls, and boys.



07



Gender-Based Violence Prevention:

- Integrate strategies to prevent gender-based violence both in private and public spheres, creating safer environments for women.

08



Comprehensive Access and Control:

- Work towards ensuring complete access, control, and decision-making over titled lands and resources for women, in collaboration with men.

9



Overall Holistic Approach:

- Promote a holistic and intersectional Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) that considers factors such as religion, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, caste, ethnicity, age, social norms, and power dynamics on women's resource rights and economic empowerment.

10



Address gender biases:

- Facilitate critical reflections to address gender biases among project implementors that impact project's ability to achieve gender equality in the communities and among the team.
- Implement community dialogue tools with project staff to increase awareness of gender bias as well as support buy-in to gender transformative approaches



Resources

Compendium of good practices for gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable agriculture (<https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1331en>) which was co-produced by IFAD.



Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture

A compendium of fifteen good practices





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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