



**SECURING  
WOMEN'S  
RESOURCE RIGHTS  
THROUGH GENDER  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
APPROACHES**



Investing in rural people

# **GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S LAND & RESOURCE RIGHTS**



INTERNATIONAL  
FOOD POLICY  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE

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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.org/wlr>  
[https://www.ifad.org/en/gender\\_transformative\\_approaches](https://www.ifad.org/en/gender_transformative_approaches)

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## 01

Women's lack of secure rights to land and resources are linked to and reinforced by underlying and deeply rooted barriers that drive and sustain gender inequalities, including discriminatory systems, formal policies and informal institutions like social norms.



## 02

Interventions to strengthen women's land and resource rights may consider shifting their focus from 'empowering' individual women (or 'fixing women') to catalyzing gender transformative change – leading to deeper, more lasting and pervasive changes to women's rights ('fixing the system').

## 03

Gender Transformative Approaches must go beyond treating the symptoms of gender inequality to identify and address the structural barriers to women's land and resource rights. No singular approach can address the multiple and overlapping barriers to women's land rights.



## 04

Locally generated and context-specific strategies that work across multiple scales, in different arenas, and with a variety of partners and stakeholders to effect change will more likely foster transformative changes for gender equality more broadly and women's land and resource rights as part of that.

# INTRODUCTION

International standards and policies are clear about women's right to equality in the enjoyment of all their rights, including rights to access, use, inherit, control and own land. Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.a specifically calls for reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to, ownership and control over land and natural resources. Securing women's land and resource rights is a critical goal in and of itself - and also a crucial factor in achieving many of the other SDGs.

But despite continued efforts, many rural women continue to lack recognition, protection and enjoyment of their land and resource rights. Women's limited land rights and tenure insecurity are increasingly recognized as a barrier to economic growth and to reducing poverty and food insecurity, with profound implications for the resilience of food systems in the midst of climate change, deforestation and biodiversity loss. Furthermore, unequal land rights shape gender dynamics in households, communities and beyond, with impacts on women's agency, social status and political power.

The obstacles to women being able to access, control and use land and resources vary in different countries and communities, but often include some combination of inadequate legal frameworks, ineffective implementation of policy at national and local levels, contradictions between formal and customary regimes, exclusion of women from decision-making and governance systems and discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices that limit the recognition of women's legal rights. Political buy-in to create and reinforce policies that

would increase gender-equal access to resources is also limited.

Program interventions can reinforce or even exacerbate gender and social inequalities including women's insecure tenure if they do not recognize and proactively address them. It is thus vital for those responsible for designing and delivering rural development programs to understand and address the multiple and overlapping barriers underpinning gender inequality and women's limited land rights.

Mainstream gender approaches are not proving to be up to this task. A growing body of research and practice advocates instead to integrate Gender Transformative Approaches (GTAs) into rural development programs, with a focus on identifying and addressing systemic, underlying drivers of gender inequality to enable deep and lasting change.

The understanding and application of GTAs to promote gender equality in resource tenure systems remains limited. This brief aims to fill this gap by exploring GTAs in relation to women's land and resource rights.

*Stronger women's rights to land and productive assets are linked to enhanced status, improved living conditions, better nutrition and food sovereignty, improved health and education outcomes, higher earning and individual savings, and better access to credit, as well as better protection from gender violence.*

*Women's land rights are critical to democracy, peace, justice, sustainable development and security for all. Secure land rights for women set off powerful, continued ripple effects that go a long way toward realizing gender equality and a range of critical Sustainable Development Goals and human rights.*

Statement by the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner

# DEFINING TERMS

## GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

As Gender Transformative Approaches are developed, piloted, refined and applied to different sectors, the definitions vary and are contested. However, there is general agreement that Gender Transformative Approaches are different from other gender integration approaches in their design, implementation and intended outcomes. For a start, GTAs require processes that enable those targeted by initiatives (for example, grassroots women and their allies) to lead or be meaningfully included in defining the changes sought and accompanying strategies. Other commonly recognized characteristics include that GTAs:



Seek to remove structural barriers to gender equality and challenge the distribution of opportunities, resources, rights, and allocation of duties between men and women, boys and girls;



Aim to foster more equitable gender relations within households, communities and organizations and promote the relative position of women and girls in society;



Help to understand, reflect on, challenge and change rigid gender norms, unequal power dynamics and discriminatory social structures by creating safer spaces to try new ways of being and relating;



Facilitate critical reflection, dialogue, trust and behavioral change at and across multiple levels (individual, household, community, organizations/institutions and systems);



Recognize that women and girls often experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination;



Explicitly engage with men and boys as allies for change and advocates for gender equality; and



Use participatory, experiential and decolonial learning methodologies.

## RESOURCE TENURE

Tenure rights are defined as the social relations and institutions governing access to and use of land and resources (von Benda Beckman et al., 2006). Often referred to as a "bundle of rights", resource tenure arrangements define the set of rights and responsibilities over who uses, extracts, manages and controls natural resources (e.g., soil, water and wood) or land. Resource tenure covers more than formal property rights recognised by governments, such as land titles or state forests. It also refers to customary systems as well as the unwritten, informal practices through which rural people gain (or are restricted from) access to natural resources<sup>1</sup>.

## LAND RIGHTS

A broad set of formal and informal rules, norms and practices that regulate the ways in which women and men access, manage and benefit from land under different tenure arrangements. These factors influence the ways in which women access land, and also their abilities to make decisions over land, the security of tenure, and their abilities to benefit from their land rights.

### UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AND TENURE SECURITY

The varying policies and programmes that aim to strengthen women's land tenure security demonstrate that there is no consensus on how to understand women's tenure security. Furthermore, it is critical to be able to distinguish between a situation in which a woman has access to land and one in which she has the right to access land. As Doss and Meinzen-Dick (2020) argue,

“the distinction is whether her ability to access the land is a right or simply that she is allowed to do so by the person who holds the right. Can her access be withheld at the whim of someone else? If so, it is not a right.”

Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan (2002) have referred to this latter form of access as “tolerated use”.

<sup>1</sup> For a training manual on tenure and access to forests, see <https://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/3894/>. For more on access as distinct from property rights, see <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00133.x>

# APPLYING GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO WOMEN'S LAND AND RESOURCE RIGHTS

Access to and control of land and resources are vital components of strengthening women's agency, but are not sufficient to ensure that women equitably benefit from land and resources or that their rights are secure. This is mitigated by the greater socio-cultural context that determines the roles, responsibilities and values of women in the broader society, in addition to intersecting social identities and status.

For example, including a woman's name on a land title by itself is not transformative, nor is a national policy that assures women's names are on all land titles. While necessary, these changes are unlikely to endure without a social infrastructure that supports and reinforces her ability to secure a livelihood from that land, to participate fully in household and community decisions and to shift local norms of inheritance. Enduring change of this kind, for example, is unlikely without collective action.

**Gender Transformative Approaches are critical to identifying and fostering the enabling conditions for equality.** By design, GTAs attack the underlying drivers of tenure inequality for women. This means addressing obstacles at the multiple scales that influence women's rights: national laws and norms on tenure and on gender; how these are implemented and relate to traditional practices and lineage systems; sub-national regulations and community norms; and household dynamics, relationships and attitudes. Women's land rights will be affected by the laws shaping rights for men, women and communities (the role of customary law; communal lands) more generally, but also specific laws and norms affecting women's tenure rights, such as inheritance norms, and women's participation, decision making and leadership rights, such as whether women are seen as full community members (e.g. have an independent vote and voice in community affairs) or can hold office. The social norms and biases that influence the attitudes, priorities, behaviors and practices of government officials, technicians and NGOs also affect women's rights, given their roles in implementing laws and regulations and providing assistance to communities. This is captured in the framework for understanding gender transformative change, depicted in Figure 1.

With respect to tenure specifically, transforming rural women's rights to land would need to address the rural land and resource rights in general, and those of women specifically. It would be reflected in the ability to obtain land and secure the right to it through an adequate and accessible documentation mechanism;

the long-term security of the rights to land and resources, such that they are recognized, respected and protected by the state, especially in case of conflict; the ability to access and earn a dignified livelihood from those resources over time, including access to the enabling conditions that make this possible (e.g. credit, a large enough parcel); the ability to make resource use and management decisions on their own terms, free from imposition of arbitrary or unjust rules; as well as access to grievance or other accessible justice mechanisms for defending these rights against encroachment or usurpation. The specifics will vary between individual and collective systems, and between formal and customary systems. For traditional peoples, for example, this would mean asserting and securing tenure claims grounded in their own definitions, customs and history, while challenging customs that are discriminatory.

For women, this would include all of these factors, as well as the ability to lead and to make decisions about the future of land and resources, free of the threat of violence (domestic or otherwise), in relevant household, community and external forums and entities; and to inherit, own and earn a living from land on par with men.

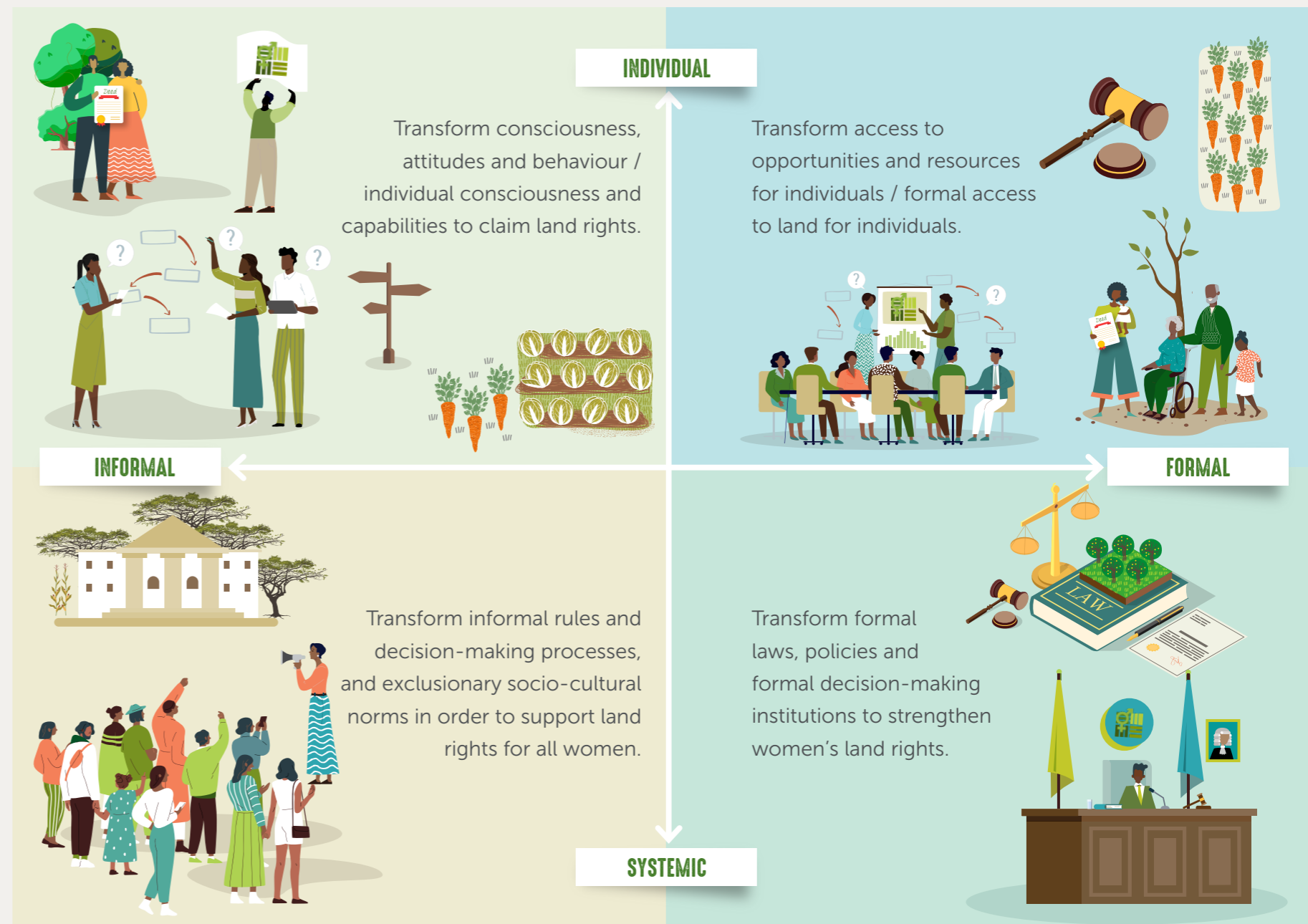
In addition, those deploying Gender Transformative Approaches need to recognize that in many cases, land and resource tenure systems themselves are already transforming as a result of policy, economic, or demographic forces (e.g., land titling programs, urbanization, or increasing value of land). Such transitions can create threats to women's land and resource rights but may also offer opportunities for shifting systems to create greater gender equality and women's empowerment.

In sum, **resource rights are deeply embedded in social institutions as well as in political, policy and legal institutions. To transform towards more equitable land and resource rights thus requires interventions that aim to change formal and informal institutions across multiple scales, from the individual and household, to the community and collective, and to the larger society.**



“ Gender Transformative Approaches are critical to identifying and fostering the enabling conditions for equality.”

FIGURE 1 Conceptual Framework: Gender Transformative Approaches to Strengthening Women's Land and Resource Rights<sup>ii</sup>



<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from the Gender At Work Framework: <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework>

# SUPPORTING THE DESIGN OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

An adapted Gender at Work framework (figure 1) provides a useful conceptual tool for mapping the various formal and informal dimensions across scales.



There are many uses, including:

1

To map the multiple, overlapping barriers to strengthening women's land rights (many of which are discussed above) to provide a more holistic understanding of the context;

2

To map existing and planned program interventions to identify gaps. For example, if all the interventions focus on only one quadrant of the framework (such as on developing individual capacities or on changing social norms), what other complementary interventions in other quadrants would help to support or sustain those efforts? What other work or partnerships may be required to take a more holistic approach?

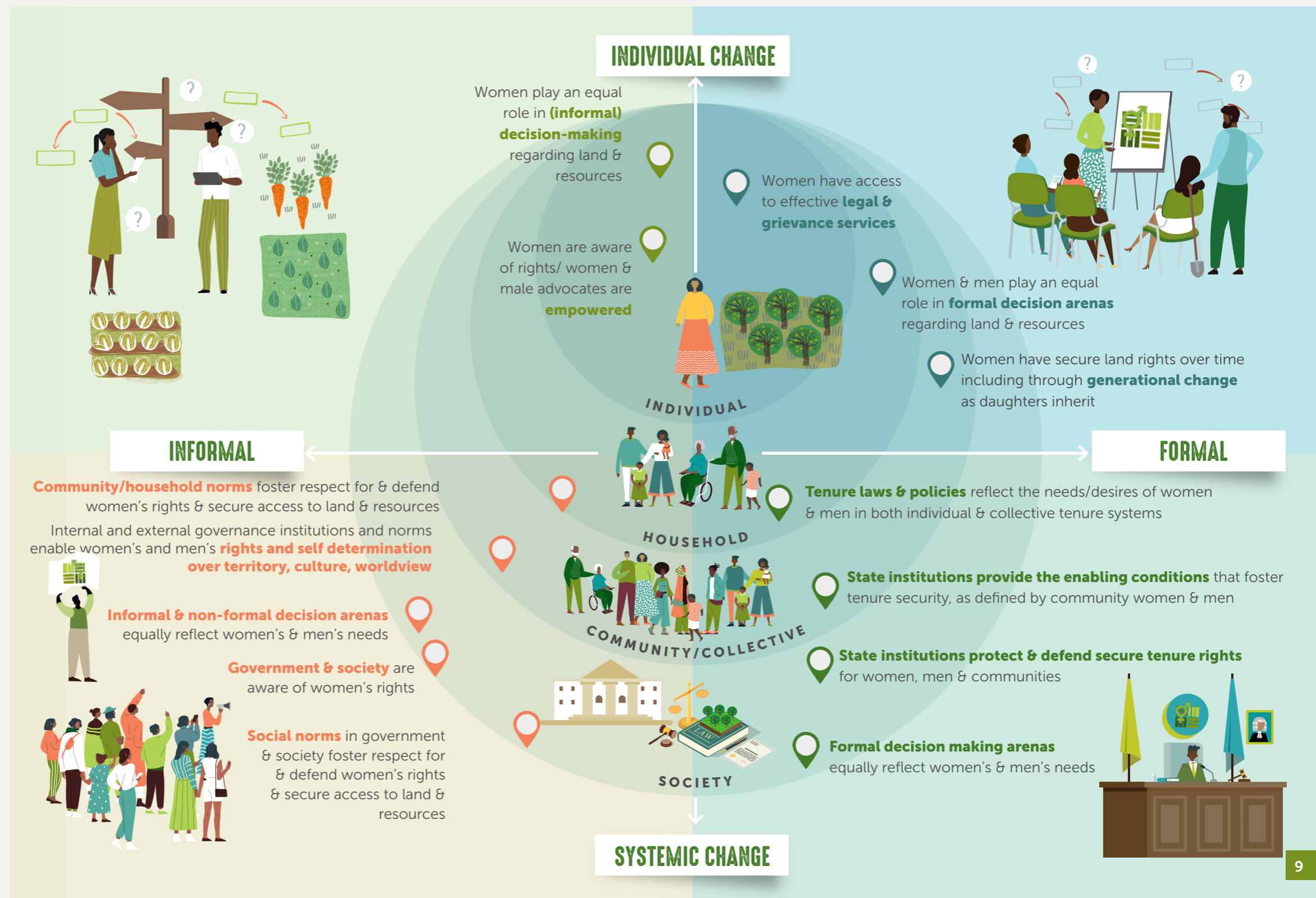
3

To identify the range of possible programmatic outcomes that would deliver deep and lasting change (focusing on targeting root causes and structural barriers). Again, if all the planned outcomes cluster in one quadrant, there needs to be more reflection on if/how outcomes in one quadrant can be sustained without changes in other quadrants. Figure 2 provides examples of potential outcomes which are more likely to lead to deep, lasting and pervasive change on women's land and resource rights if they are combined or seen as a whole, rather than selecting any of them on their own.

Mainstream gender approaches have not been effective at tackling gender equality as they have tended to focus on the individual level, such as increasing women's awareness (top left) and increased resources (top right). Focusing solely on this too often results in a 'fixing women' approach. Similarly focusing only on social norms or policy changes are not sufficient on their own.

Gender transformative change in women's land and resource rights is complex and cannot be achieved by targeting any one quadrant of the framework. Rather it requires understanding and addressing the system as a whole and targeting deeply-rooted and structural barriers to change.

FIGURE 2 Range of potential gender transformative outcomes on women's land and resource rights



## HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN SECURING WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS?

*In 2022, International Land Coalition members representing communities from across Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean met at a global learning exchange to improve their shared understanding of how Gender Transformative Approaches can help to secure land rights for women. This is their combined vision of what it means to 'transform' women's land rights in their respective communities.*

### Our vision is that one day...

“ Legal and policy frameworks support women to secure land rights, and these laws are implemented, enforced and budgeted.

Women know their rights. Women demand their rights to land and fully enjoy them. This means being able to fully use, control, own, transform and make decisions about their land and resources, independently. They are secure, meaning they have formal titles and their right to land is respected by their families, communities and local authorities. Their rights to land are secure over time and they can pass those rights to the next generation. They do not have to fear losing these rights and can live and cultivate in peace. If they have conflicts over their rights to land, they are able to take cases to court and win.

All people – men and women – are aware of the benefits of women owning land and recognize women as farmers and producers and their contributions to their families and communities. Women are confident and know their capacities, including their economic and leadership skills. They strengthen their economic positions, which strengthens their families, communities and their food security.

Husbands and male family members understand, support and champion women's land rights, including their rights to land. Women are able to demand land and property from their fathers, brothers and other family members. They automatically inherit the land that is rightfully theirs. Men write wills that reflect this and brothers are willing to support their sisters' inheritance.

Women are respected. Women are listened to. Women leaders and organizations are in the front row in their communities and active in local platforms that serve to solve land conflicts between men and women.

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Rural women are able to meaningfully engage in dialogues and government consultations and push for reforms. They are respected and are not at risk of criminalization and eviction for defending their rights.

Women occupy decision-making positions at all levels. They contribute in land management institutions and are able to advocate to fight against climate change. They can make decisions that will improve their land and environments.

This vision is not only for educated women but for all who identify as women: for grassroots women, for young women, for older women, for women who are disabled, for women who work as bonded labour, for all women who are marginalized.

Women collaborate and stand up for each other. Women's collective voices influence positive changes that reach all women – improving the lives of their families, their communities and their society.

Everybody gains their rights and dignity: all women and all men. ”

Source: <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/newsroom/gender-transformative-change-tanzania/>

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

FAO, IFAD and WFP (2020) *Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices*. Rome.

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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.

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