




Women's Housing and Land Rights and Covid-19

A Webinar Report



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Rural women make up a quarter of the world's population, but many face legal and social barriers that limit their ability to access, use and benefit from the land they tend and depend on for their livelihoods. While women play an indispensable role in the rural economy, feeding families, conserving resources and contributing to community well-being, fewer than 15 percent of rural women have secure land rights, which impedes agricultural productivity and poverty alleviation and leaves women less empowered, economically and socially. Securing these rights is crucial to achieving a more equitable and sustainable world.

From large land acquisitions that displace communities without due compensation, to the encroachment of mining on indigenous lands, to the brunt of climate change and natural disasters, to everyday land and property deprivation by kin or state, women are typically more harshly impacted by land tenure insecurity due to discriminatory laws and lingering social bias. The Covid-19 virus threatens to exacerbate a highly unequal situation.

This webinar will focus on women's land rights and the implications of Covid-19 on vulnerable communities and groups who may face additional burdens as a result of the virus. In many countries, women are hesitant to participate in activities and to make claims related to women's land rights. There is a fear that a consequence of the virus will be that women will be even less likely to make claims (especially related to inheritance) or register their land rights.

This webinar explores a range of issues, including women's engagement and the degree to which women will be subject to familial land grabbing as a result of the local virus. It also looks at land governance and administration with respect to women's land rights. Additionally, it considers concrete policy and program options that address the rising levels of gender-based violence - especially in light of restrictions obligating people to stay at home, thereby exposing vulnerable women to more violence.

Moderator:

Karol Boudreaux, Landesa

Presenters:

Ellen O. Pratt, Liberia Land Authority (panelist)

Patricia Chaves, Espaco Feminista (panelist)

Nana Ama Yirrah, COLANDEF (panelist)

Victoria Stanley, World Bank (panelist)

The recording of this webinar is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySuWgyWK150>



Key Takeaways

- In the current Covid-19 situation, many women are having to choose between protecting themselves in isolation and providing for their families. Furthermore, many women have been unable to farm and their lands are often being reclaimed.
- With the current Covid-19 crisis, very little attention is being paid to women's land rights and much policy work has been put on hold with regards to women's land rights.
- The importance of a gender equal response team with a bottom-up approach with interventions participatory and community driven is important with regards to the current Covid-19 threats.

Webinar Summary

1) HOW IS COVID-19 AFFECTING WOMEN IN YOUR COUNTRY AND COMMUNITY?

- While COVID numbers are fairly low in Liberia, we do see a threat to women's land rights particularly in rural areas. There is a challenge now of maintaining the momentum gained from the passage of the land rights act which includes significant protection for women's land rights.
- In Ghana, stay at home orders place a lot of stress on women in caring for the household. Furthermore, information on COVID 19 and support packages are communicated in mediums that are not accessible to women. Finally, the Task Force leading the management of COVID 19 in Ghana is almost an all-male team.
- In these situations, women can lose their access and their rights if their spouse dies, if they can no longer afford to pay rent or if others take advantage of the situation to evict women and their families.
- The dilemma for many women in Brazil right now is between protecting themselves and keeping isolation in horrible conditions, or feeding their families. Our work right now is to save the livelihoods of people from hunger.

2) HOW IS THE VIRUS AFFECTING WOMEN'S ABILITY TO ACCESS AND USE LAND IN YOUR COUNTRY?

- For the past two months many women have been unable to farm in Liberia and this has resulted in additional threats to lands as their plots are being reclaimed. Threats to livelihood creation and increase in food insecurity.
- In Ghana, the current trends in faulty land deals continues without anybody paying attention because of COVID 19. Women risk losing everything including the risk of no compensation.

3) IN ADDITION TO ILLNESS AND POSSIBLE IN-MIGRATION, HOW ELSE IS COVID-19 LIKELY TO IMPACT WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS?

- All advocacy work in Ghana is now on hold, research in women's land rights is now minimal or non-existent. Furthermore, attention to funding is currently mostly directed to COVID 19.

- With no attention to women's land rights in Ghana during this time, the gains made in advancing women's land rights might suffer some reversals. Ghana's land bill is an example of this.

4) WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN YOUR ORGANIZATION TO ADDRESS THESE THREATS? WHAT ELSE SHOULD LAND ADMINISTRATION AGENCIES BE DOING TO ADDRESS COVID-RELATED ISSUES?

- At the World Bank, we are trying as much as we can to pay attention to women's needs across our portfolio, not just in land projects but all projects. Furthermore, things that gov'ts can do are moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures, which applies here in the US as well, and broad measures to ensure no one loses their home. For inheritance, it is important to ensure that women do not sign over their property rights; and that informal marriages are recognized with regard to marital property in case of widowhood.
- At COLANDEF in Ghana, even though we are not able to carry out much policy advocacy work, we have found ways to continue our connection with our stakeholders at all levels to learn what is happening and give advice.

5) WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE BE DOING RIGHT NOW TO ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS? WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING IN THE MEDIUM TO LONGER-TERM TO ADDRESS WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS?

- Land rights should be mainstreamed in all development interventions in agriculture, climate change, afforestation, etc. This will help enlarge the land rights portfolio and get it focused on all issues, both on a broad scale and on a localized scale.
- Gender-neutral laws are not enough. Women need to be supported proactively and it can be done. We need to listen to women as they often know what they need.
- Liberia learned many lessons from the Ebola epidemic that ravaged the nation five years ago. One key lesson was the importance of a gender equal response team with a bottom-up approach with interventions participatory and community driven.

Notable Quotes from the Panelists



“IT IS BECOMING EVIDENT THAT STRONGER LAND RIGHTS AFFORDS WOMEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THE RIGHT ACTION TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN AGAINST MALE PARTNERS WHO DO NOT WANT TO COMPLY WITH PREVENTITIVE MEASURE TO MINIMIZE EXPOSURE TOT HE DISEASE .”

- NANA AMA YIRRAH, COLANDEF



“LIBERIA LEARNED MANY LESSONS FROM THE EBOLA EPIDEMIC THAT RAVAGED OUR NATION FIVE YEARS AGO. ONE KEY LESSON WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF A GENDER EQUAL RESPONSE TEAM WITH A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH.”

- ELLEN O. PRATT, LIBERIA LAND AUTHORITY



“I THINK WE ARE STILL UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19. THE EXPERIENCE FROM OTHER CRISES HAVE SHOWN THAT THESE TYPES OF SITUATIONS CAN LEAD TO THE FURTHER EROSION OF WOMEN’S LAND RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY IF THEY ARE ALREADY INSECURE. ”

- VICTORIA STANLEY, WORLD BANK



“WOMEN ARE VERY MUCH INSECURE IN THEIR LAND RIGHTS IN BRAZIL RIGHT NOW AND THIS IS OFTEN COMBINED WITH RACISM IN THIS SOCIETY. BLACK WOMEN ARE AT THE FRONTLINES WHEN IS COMES TO COVID-19 RESPONSE. THEY ARE NOT ONLY FACING INSECURITIES IN THEIR LAND, BUT ARE DYING BECAUSE OF THIS.”

- PATRICIA CHAVES, ESPACO FEMINISTA



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