

Women and Vulnerable Groups' Access to Land (SDG 5) and Their Participation in Land Administration Systems

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Key words: Cadastre; Capacity building; Land management; Rwanda; gender equality; SDG5; land governance; women's land rights

SUMMARY

1. Background

Land is a fundamental asset for economic empowerment, social stability and sustainable development in Rwanda. Equitable access to land and inclusive participation in land administration are critical for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) on gender equality and women's empowerment. Rwanda has made significant progress in mainstreaming gender into land governance through progressive reforms, beginning with the 2004 National Land Policy and the 2013 Land Law, later strengthened by their revisions in 2019 and 2021. These reforms institutionalized joint land ownership for married couples and ensured women's legal rights to land. However, persistent challenges such as limited awareness of land rights and socio-cultural barriers continue to affect widows, women living in illegal marriage, single mothers and people with disabilities.

2. Objectives

The study explores how Rwanda's legal, policy and institutional frameworks, along with capacity-building efforts, have improved land access and participation for women and vulnerable groups. It focuses on the Capacity Building in Land Management Project (2018–present), implemented by the National Land Authority, Lantmäteriet and Haguruka NGO. Covering 17 districts, the project promotes gender-responsive land governance through training local leaders and land officers, community dialogues, land clinics and boundary correction activities, enhancing transparency and conflict resolution in land management.

3.

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Significance

This study highlights the transformative impact of linking gender-responsive policies with practical capacity-building initiatives. Rwanda's holistic approach combining legal reform, participatory governance and community engagement offers a replicable framework for other countries pursuing inclusive land administration. Continued investment in these initiatives will be crucial for consolidating gender equality gains, preventing land conflicts and advancing Rwanda's Vision 2050 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4. Results

Findings reveal that land reforms in Rwanda and capacity-building project have strengthened policy implementation and grassroots participation. Women now own 18.9% of registered land parcels and 49% are jointly owned by couples. The project enhanced local authorities' ability to enforce inclusive land laws, raised community awareness of land rights and reduced conflicts through land clinics and boundary correction. Women's representation in land committees has increased and vulnerable groups are more empowered to claim and defend their land rights.

5. Conclusion

Rwanda's experience demonstrates that realizing SDG 5 in land governance requires not only progressive legislation but also sustained capacity development, community empowerment and institutional collaboration. The partnership among NLA, Lantmäteriet and Haguruka provides an effective model for integrating gender equality and social inclusion into land management systems.

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