

RESEARCH PAPER

TOWARDS A GENDER-
RESPONSIVE
IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE UNITED
NATIONS CONVENTION
TO COMBAT
DESERTIFICATION



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UN WOMEN

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The views expressed in the discussion paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

This discussion paper, *Towards a Gender-Responsive Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*, was commissioned by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) to serve as a background paper for the capacity-building workshop on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The workshop was co-organized by the UNCCD Secretariat, UN Women and the UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification (GC-RED).

The workshop—the first of its kind—was organized in view of the increasing interest of Parties and stakeholders to the UNCCD in gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Convention and in future work aiming towards a gender-responsive land degradation-neutral world. Unlike prior contributions to land degradation and gender analysis, this discussion paper aims to elucidate key linkages between gender equality, the empowerment of women and their human rights and land-related issues in the context of the UNCCD. A gender-responsive approach takes into account existing service-delivery structures affected by gender inequality and seeks to overcome and remove laws and policies that impair gender equality, women’s human rights and women’s empowerment.

This discussion paper incorporates key takeaways from workshop case studies and accounts for outcomes

from the UNCCD 13th Conference of the Parties (COP 13) that took place in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, China in September 2017. The paper sets the context by presenting the gender dimensions of land degradation and the global norms on gender equality, land and natural resources. It then links the discussion to the UNCCD by analyzing key entry points for the integration of gender perspectives in norm-setting as well as in the implementation of the Convention and in future work of Parties to the Convention and other stakeholders. Gender-responsive practices at local and country levels and promising trends from the other Rio Conventions and their implementing entities are presented to highlight promising examples and lessons. The paper concludes with select recommendations for action directed at specific stakeholders informed by the latest adopted COP decisions of September 2017.

DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

More than a third of the earth's land is currently degraded, affecting 2.6 billion people in over 100 countries, according to the Global Environment Facility.¹ The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat warns that on average 12 million hectares of land are lost annually.² Widespread and unprecedented rapid degradation of lands, including desertification, threatens food production, water availability and quality, biodiversity and energy security worldwide. Land degradation also contributes to climate change, deepens poverty and induces displacement and migration.³

Myriad factors drive land degradation, including land-use conversion to agriculture, over-extraction of natural resources and climate change. These drivers are intensified when they are coupled with insecure land tenure, poor land management, unsustainable farming systems and shortsighted policies.⁴ According to the UNCCD Science Policy Interface, poverty is “a root cause, and at the same time a consequence, of land degradation, and gender inequality plays a significant role in land-degradation related poverty.”⁵ The SPI further concludes that in “most developing countries, land degradation impacts men and women differently, mainly due to unequal access to land,

water, credit, extension services and technology,”⁶ underscoring the need to address the persistent gender inequalities that fuel women's extreme poverty.

The bulk of the world's population living in extreme poverty depends on land. When land is degraded and becomes scarce, women are uniquely and differentially affected, given their substantial role in agriculture and food production. Although they often serve as environmental stewards, women tend to face exclusion from conservation and management of land, lack access to agricultural extension services and institutional credit and encounter barriers to participation in the processes

UNCCD and Gender Equality

To effectively implement the UNCCD and address land degradation more broadly, the diverse realities and experiences of women and men must be identified and addressed. Governments at all levels, policy-makers, the UNCCD Secretariat and national focal points, implementing entities, financing mechanisms, civil society and communities all share the task of taking actions to address gender inequalities in social and legal systems,

structures and processes that affect men and women in agricultural, pastoral and indigenous communities affected by desertification, drought and land degradation. That is, gender analysis and gender-responsive, human rights-based approaches must inform any policy, strategy or programme that addresses land degradation and related issues, and gender equality must be dealt with as a stated, explicit and non-negotiable goal.

of development, planning and policymaking. Unequal power relations and gender-based discrimination in statutory and customary systems in many societies deny women even user rights to plant trees, control soil degradation and enhance soil fertility. Unlike men, women also often have less access to information, resources and legal rights to the land. Without secure land rights, which women typically lack, they are left without resources and incentives to improve the productivity of their land in the face of changing climate conditions. Weak legal and social protections for women's land rights thus increase the likelihood of land degradation.

Gender roles and perspectives

While in some contexts it is difficult to separate tasks by gender, women and men often play different roles in agriculture and food production, land use, conservation, land rehabilitation and restoration, water and energy access, household and care responsibilities and livestock-based livelihood. A recent analysis of existing empirical evidence on gender differentiation in land use found that women tend to prefer crops that meet household consumption and dietary food requirements (with low-value subsistence farming), while men prefer high-value commodities and "cash crops" for income security.⁷ In many cases, where women do not legally own their land or where customs and practices prevent their ownership of land, they are not recognized as farmers or "value-chain" actors. As a result, they are excluded from access to extension services and inputs available to bona fide farmers, most of whom are men. Due to gender bias, rural women are frequently less able to access new agricultural technology and make investments for

poorly remunerated."⁹ Moderate or severe impacts of drought alone affect a striking 52 per cent of agricultural land.¹⁰ Such impact on food availability impacts intra-family food distribution, reducing the nutritional intake of women and children, and women in particular.¹¹ Women generally do most of the unpaid and undervalued work of collecting water, cooking, cleaning and taking care of children, the elderly and sick. According to studies across diverse countries, nearly 90 per cent of the time spent on household food preparation is women's time, which limits their ability to generate income, engage in public life or merely recharge.¹² In some contexts, climate change-induced scarcity is changing established gender roles; men are beginning to collect non-timber forest products alongside women to supplement sparse crops and assisting with water collection, while women are taking up greater roles in natural resource management, albeit in limited situations.¹³

Land rights include some or all of these rights:

- Access (the right to be on the land)
- Use (the right to plant crops and produce food)
- Withdrawal (the right to take something from the land, such as water, firewood, fibers, or produce)
- Management and control (the right to change the land in some way; make decisions about land use)
- Exclusion (the right to prevent others from using the land)
- Alienation (the right to transfer land to

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