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*RECIF/ONG-BF, Réseau de communication, d'information et de formation des femmes dans les ONG au Burkina Faso*

BURKINA FASO

Françoise Bibiane Yoda has a degree in information and communication technologies. In 2002, she participated in the Young Apprentices for Development initiative, organised by UNV. In October 2003, she was recruited by RECIF/ONG as person in charge of the Documentation and Internet Centre, part of its Communication Department, where she is responsible for the following tasks: management of the documentary fund, the website and the IT network of RECIF/ONG; management of the RECIF membership list and of the internal competencies list; drafting of articles for the organisation's newsletter; organisation of ICT training sessions for the members of RECIF/ONG; on the ground follow-up of projects in the following areas: ICT training, promotion of rice from Burkina Faso, documentary film on Burkina milk, women's access to land, HIV/AIDS, etc.; participation in national and international discussion and exchange fora. Françoise is member of several women's and youth organisations in Burkina Faso and abroad.



# Gender inequalities in land access in Burkina Faso: a status report



Toziri Sambaré, who comes from the central-east region of Burkina Faso, moved to a village in Kéné Dougou province in 2005 to be a farmer. To do this, he went to see the village's land chief, accompanied by his tutor, who comes from the area, to ask for a plot of land. His request was accepted, but there was one condition: he is not allowed to plant a tree on the land. Doing so may cause him to lose his rights to work the plot. Before beginning his activities, Toziri was supposed to give the land chief a chicken, some kola nuts and some tobacco.

Denis Kaboré and his family decided to move to Kouritenga province in 2007. Mr Kaboré, who was being mentored by someone from the village, wanted a piece of land to build a house and do some farming for his family. The landowners demanded that he give them a goat, a cockerel, two chickens, some tobacco, some dolo and a range of other gifts that varied in size depending on the requester's status. The land is still only granted in the form of a permanent loan that gives the person working it extensive rights, excluding the right to plant (to be negotiated), give up the land or sell it to someone else unilaterally.

## 1. Problems women face in accessing farming land

The issue of gender equality in rural land management seems to be a more specific manifestation of the general problem of land access. Creating conditions allowing disadvantaged groups (particularly women in rural areas) fair access to land is a real challenge. 52% of Burkina Faso's population is female, and most of these women live in rural areas. Women make significant contributions to production activities, but in some rural areas, they fall victim to harassment and looting when exploiting land and using natural resources. Now, with the advent of agribusiness, the situation regarding rural women's access to farming land threatens to become more complicated than ever.

In rural areas, women's access to land is governed by

customs in which the social relationship for women is unequal, dependent, unstable and full of negotiations. Women are not allowed to own land – they may only work on it.

In areas managed by the state, specifications do not always take account of women's particular characteristics. Women have very few opportunities for access to better-quality land and irrigated areas.

## 2. What do legal texts have to say on the subject?

Article 62 of law no. 14/96/ADP of 23 May 1996 on Agricultural and Land Reform (RAF) states that "urban and rural land forming part of Burkina Faso's national property is allocated to physical persons, regardless of their gender or marital status, and to legal entities, subject to the conditions set out in these texts". One key aim of the Policy on safeguarding rural land ownership (PNSFMR), adopted by the government in October 2007, is to ensure that all rural stakeholders have fair access to land.

## 3. Despite the adoption of a range of legal texts aiming to grant fair access to land, women are still faced with injustice. Why is this?

### a) The influence of tradition

Since land is sacred, women cannot manage it. If women were to have access to the land, all records of land tenure would be lost. We would no longer know to which family a certain piece of land had belonged. It would be the death of tradition. Women's status means, for example, that they cannot trace their ancestry. These arguments, which were voiced by various communities, have been included in the guide on securing land ownership rights for rural women in Burkina Faso. The guide was produced by the Groupe de Recherche et d'Action sur le Foncier (GRAF – Tenure Action and Research Group) in 2006, and its target audience was extension workers for grassroots organisations and human rights NGOs.





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In a film on women's access to land, made by Franceline Oubda in 1992, Naba Sapilma, the chief of Koupela (in the central-east region of Burkina Faso), had a definite opinion: "A woman doesn't get married to meddle in land issues – she gets married to serve her husband's family. Throughout human history, women have never staked a claim on the land. They can suggest ways to use the land, but they can never apply their ideas directly. Land belongs to the family. Should we divide it up every time someone gets married? The situation is very difficult when a woman who has joined another family by marriage inherits a piece of land. I don't see how we can let women enjoy an inheritance that will simply end up in another family when she gets married. In Africa, succession is through the male line".

#### **b) Ignorance and non-promotion of women's rights to land ownership**

Almost 70% of Burkina Faso's population is illiterate, the majority of them women. This means that there is widespread ignorance of human rights, particularly women's rights. Because of this, women are unaware of land ownership laws that promote their rights.

Now that NGOs and rural groups have launched activities to boost literacy, train people and raise awareness, more women know their rights. However, they still have problems exercising them. Women often prefer to suffer injustice and have a peaceful life at home and in the community than to speak out against injustice and end up a laughing stock.

#### **c) Women's low economic power**

Nowadays, many rural women live in poverty, so they wonder why they should demand access to land when they do not possess the resources to work it.

In another respect, some men see women's economic independence as a reason for families breaking up – women have an important part to play in agricultural production, and men are aware of this. If women have free access to land, they will put everything into it and increase their production, which could give them economic independence. Men think that economically independent women no longer obey their husbands, and they believe that this would cause their families to break up.

#### **d) Access to modern production methods**

Not only are women unable to exercise their financial rights to the full, they also have problems (as do men) in accessing modern production methods. For instance, traditional methods are still used in Burkina Faso's two main rice-growing areas (Bagré and Sourou) by both rice producers and the women who process the rice (i.e. who steam it), and this has adverse effects on the quality of the end product. Steamed rice produced by women struggles to perform well on the market because of the debris it contains. This proves that women need access to modern production equipment, including tractors, threshers, shellers, mills, carts, drying areas, fertilisers and better seeds.

#### 4. Consequences of women's lack of access to land

The following are consequences of the fact that women have no access to land:

- The world food crisis: Burkina Faso has been severely affected by this global crisis because the country imports most of its food;
- Though women are the main stakeholders in agricultural production, they have been kept out of land management. This slows production growth and jeopardises food sovereignty;
- Mounting poverty: Burkina Faso came second-last in the UNDP's latest rankings on sustainable development – the issue of land ownership seems to be one of the reasons behind this performance;
- Poverty in families, violence, malnutrition;
- Lack of access to basic social services, such as health-care, education (particularly for girls) and food.

#### 5. Existing or potential information and communication strategies for fighting gender inequality

##### a) Existing strategies

- Activities to inform, train and raise awareness;
- Human rights training, leading to legal recognition of marriages in some areas;
- Involvement in consultation structures;
- Advocacy;
- Social dialogue.

##### b) Different experiences have shown:

- The need to make religious, political and traditional authorities more aware of rural women's role and contribution as regards agricultural production and fighting poverty;
- The need to involve women in decisions on land management;
- Not only should women have secure access to land, they should also be able to benefit from capacity building activities helping them to make the most of it;
- Grassroots organisations and groups must develop information, communication and training activities in rural areas. These activities should focus on land legislation and should be based on simplified versions of the applicable legal texts (RAF, PNSEMR, etc.).

##### c) Potential strategies

- Take women's particular characteristics into account when drafting laws on managing natural resources;
- Adapt procedures for accessing and managing land to the needs of the poorest women, such as widows and divorcees;
- Strengthen projects which provide equipment and training for women farmers;
- Recognise and take into account the profession of women farmers (which concerns most women);
- Advocate dissemination of information through state channels;
- Bear in mind that networks are an appropriate framework for social communication and ensure that they work to improve women's access to land (they are currently more focused on raising awareness of family rights – i.e. the Family Code). There are currently very few projects focused on the repackaging and dissemination of land ownership laws;
- Pay attention to agribusiness;
- Make legal information on land ownership rights available through both traditional (talks, community radio stations) and modern (Internet platforms, CD-ROMs) communication channels. In this connection, old and new technology should be combined to ensure information is passed on right to grassroots level;
- Launch awareness-raising activities aiming to legally recognise marriages with a view to safeguarding land ownership rights;
- Train women who have managed to gain access to land despite the problems they face and provide them with high-performance agricultural equipment to help them serve as positive examples;
- Create local frameworks for building upon experiences and exchanging views on activities for promoting women's access to land;
- Conduct more in-depth research to identify effective social communication strategies to promote women's access to land.



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In September 2008, the FAO-Dimitra project organised its third workshop with all its partners in Brussels, on the theme: “Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality as regards land access and its consequences for rural populations in Africa”.

This document presents a synthesis of the workshop’s activities as well as the different articles which were prepared for the workshop by the participants – the partners of the network and FAO colleagues.

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