



The gender gap in land rights



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There are two important dimensions for conceptualizing and measuring gender gaps in terms of access to land. The first dimension focuses on the bundles of land rights held by individuals, such as the rights to sell, bequeath, manage or control the economic output from their land. These different concepts of land rights are often used interchangeably, although they differ. The second dimension focuses on the indicators that are used to provide an accurate picture of the inequalities in land rights between women and men.

This information brief highlights the key concepts around land rights, the various indicators that are needed to understand the gender gap, and the statistics available for each indicator. The brief discusses the concepts and measurement behind each of the statistics and offers potential policy responses for improving women's land rights and the monitoring of those rights.

Introduction

For rural women and men, land is often the most important household asset for supporting agricultural production and providing food security and nutrition. Evidence shows that secure land tenure is strongly associated with higher levels of investment and productivity in agriculture – and therefore with higher incomes and greater economic wellbeing. Secure land rights for women are often correlated with better outcomes for them and their families, including greater bargaining power at household and community levels, better child nutrition and lower levels of gender-based violence. However, in many parts of the world both men and women have inadequate access to secure rights over land. Women are particularly disadvantaged in this regard.

Reliable, sex-disaggregated data on land is crucial for highlighting disparities in land rights between women and men. This helps us improve policy formulation and monitor progress towards gender equality in agriculture and land tenure. Although there are significant efforts underway to collect better and more relevant data on land rights, there is still a lack of understanding as to what data are available and needed, and what they can tell us about women's land rights.

Key messages

- ➔ Regardless of the type of indicator used, evidence shows that **women are significantly disadvantaged relative to men with regard to their land rights**. This is true for all dimensions of land rights associated with agricultural land: ownership, management, transfer and economic rights.
- ➔ **Globally, less than 15 percent of all landholders are women**. The distribution of women landholders ranges from 5 percent in Middle East and North Africa to 18 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- ➔ **Women constitute a significantly smaller share of all landowners**. The proportion of women out of all landowners ranges from less than 20 percent in Honduras to slightly over 50 percent in Malawi.
- ➔ **Women reported owners are less likely than men to have a legal document proving ownership** of their plots or to have their names on the land ownership document.
- ➔ **Women own a smaller share of all agricultural land than men**.

Key concepts

➔ **A landholder** is defined as the person who makes major decisions regarding resource use, and exercises management control over the operation of an agricultural holding (which includes all plots and livestock). The holding often overlaps with the family farm and therefore the holder is often the household head. This is a measure of management, not landownership, and the data on landholders are typically collected through agricultural censuses.

➔ **Landownership** includes the rights to alienate or transfer, manage or make improvements, exclude others and control the proceeds from the land. The right to alienate or transfer are the strongest rights, and are often used to define ownership. Particularly when these rights are not available to individuals, the strongest bundle of rights possible in that context is often treated as ownership rights. Landownership may be documented through land title, deed, use rights certificate, will or a sale receipt. However, in many developing countries, reported ownership (based on survey questions about who owns the land) is often used as the indicator of landownership.

➔ **The right to manage land** is the right to decide how to use it. This includes decisions on whether to plant crops or to leave the land fallow; which crops to plant; what inputs to apply; and when to harvest. These decisions affect the productivity of the holding. Knowing the sex of land managers is important for understanding gender differences in farming and how these differences affect agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. The information about the sex of land manager is often collected through household and agricultural surveys. Some surveys also include information on all male and female decision-makers in the household, unlike agricultural censuses that only collect information for the main manager of the holding.

➔ **The right to transfer land** includes the right to sell, bequeath and rent the plot. In many countries, women and men may have the right to bequeath their plot, but not to sell or rent it out.

➔ **Economic rights over land** are the rights to derive economic benefits through accessing agricultural production or selling the plots. Control over the use of these outputs captures whether women or men (or both) have the right to derive economic benefits from land.

➔ Ownership, management and economic rights do not necessarily overlap so these concepts should not be used interchangeably.

The status of women's land rights at a glance

This section explains the indicators that are used to understand the gender gap in land rights across countries and regions and some of the key statistics available. No single indicator can provide the full picture of women's land rights, therefore a broad range of indicators is proposed.

1. Distribution of agricultural landholders by sex

This indicator measures the percentage of female and male agricultural landholders out of the total population of agricultural holders. The indicator focuses on the primary managers of agricultural holdings with the understanding that they may not be the legal owners of the holdings.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of female agricultural landholders across countries. The map highlights large inequalities across regions and across countries in the same region. Women are far less likely to be landholders than are men.

Fewer than 15 percent of agricultural landholders around the world are women and 85 percent are men. The largest gender inequalities in access to land are found in North Africa and the Near East, where only around 5 percent of all landholders are women.



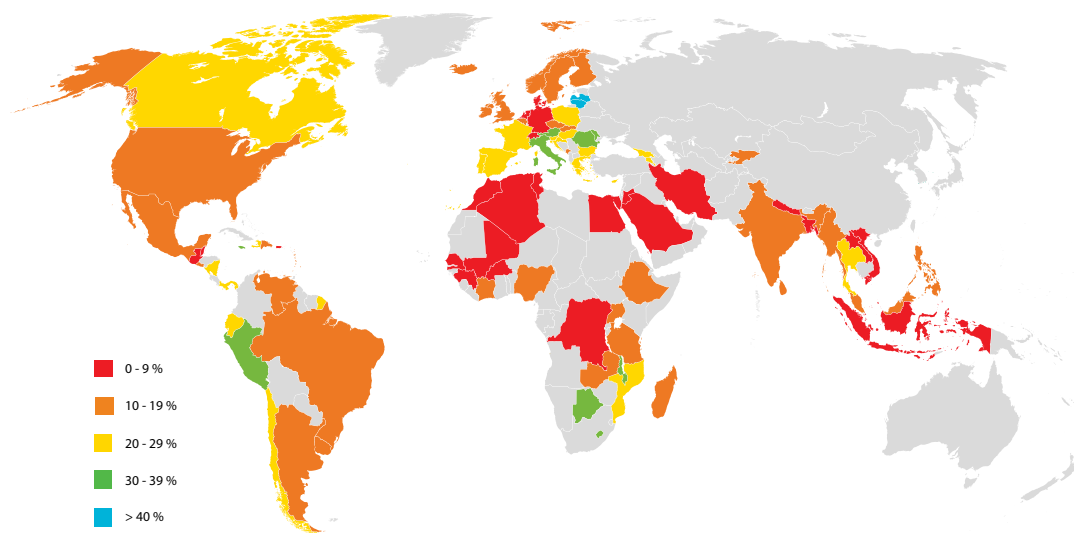


Figure 1. Distribution of agricultural landholders by sex, global and regional averages

Source: FAO Gender and Land Rights Database. The statistics are based on 104 countries, for which census data were available: 20 from sub-Saharan Africa, 2 from North America, 20 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 from Near East and North Africa, 14 from Central, East and South Asia, 34 from Europe, and six from Oceania. The regional averages are weighted by the total number of landholders in each country.

2. Distribution of agricultural landowners by sex

This indicator measures the distribution of agricultural landowners by sex, defined as the share of female and male landowners out of all landowners. In some countries, statistics capture documented owners, while in others they capture only self-reported owners. With few exceptions and despite their active engagement in agriculture, **women constitute a significantly smaller share of all landowners** (Fig 2). In the nearly 20 countries for which we have information on the distribution of landowners by sex, the share of women landowners ranges from less than 20 percent in several countries, such as Nigeria, Tajikistan and Peru, to slightly over 50 percent in Ecuador and Malawi.

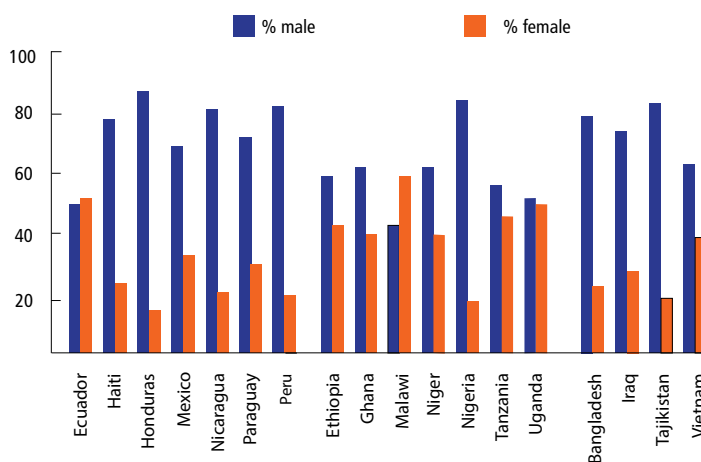


Fig 2. Distribution of agricultural landowners, by sex

3. Percentage of men and of women who own land

This indicator adds further nuance to the sex-disaggregated statistics on land by showing the percentage of the population that owns agricultural land. The indicator captures the share of women out of all women in a country and the share of men out of all men in a country who own agricultural land. Where data are available, the indicator can include only whether

men and women own land at all, whether solely or jointly (Fig 3) or whether they own land solely (Fig 4).

Gender inequalities in land ownership are greater in the case of sole ownership. Simply stated, more men than women own land. And even when men and women own land jointly, that does not necessarily mean that rights and benefits are shared equally, the meaning of joint ownership varying across contexts.

Fig 3. Percentage of women and men who own land solely or jointly

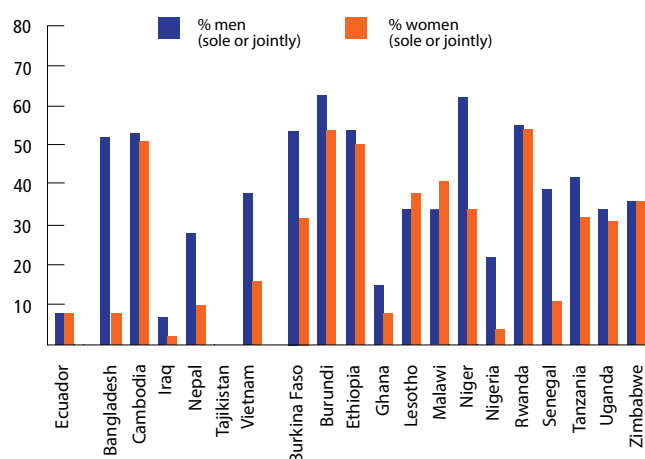
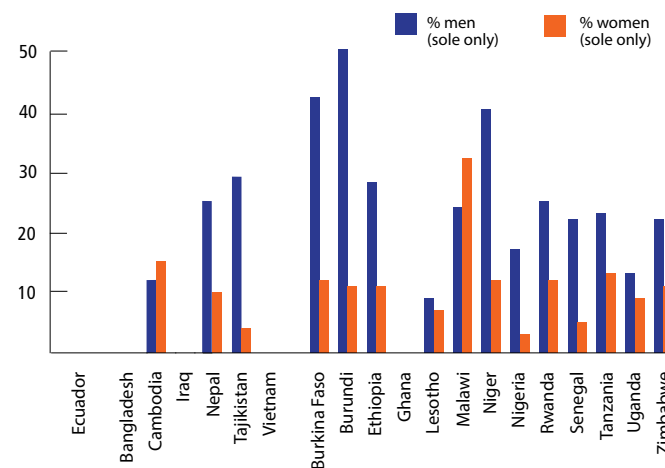


Fig 4. Percentage of women and men who solely own land

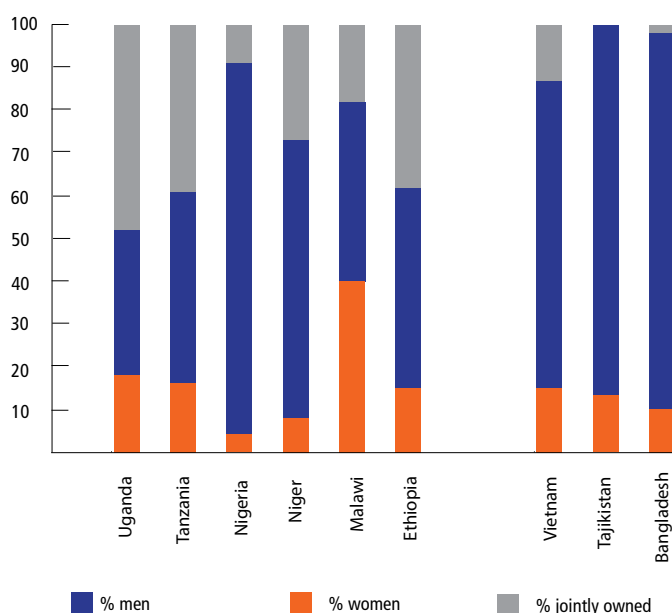


4. Distribution of agricultural land area owned by sex

This indicator measures the distribution of agricultural land by sex, capturing the share of all agricultural land that women and men actually own. While the indicator does not tell us how many men or women own land, it provides a good measure of how the land area is distributed between them.

Even when women own land, they tend to own less land than men. In the nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia for which data are available, women own a significantly smaller amount of agricultural land. This is even true in countries, such as Malawi, where women constitute a larger share of all landowners (Fig 5).

Fig 5. The distribution of agricultural land area owned, by sex



Recommendations

- ➔ **Reliable statistics on men's and women's access and control over land are critical** for providing an accurate picture of women's land tenure, improving policy formulation and monitoring progress towards the attainment of women's land rights.
- ➔ **Data on who holds the various rights are needed.** While some efforts have been made to collect data on land ownership, substantial gaps remain. The rights to transfer land through sale, bequest and rental; land management; and economic rights over land are important aspects of women's and men's access to land, but information on these rights is rarely collected in household or agricultural surveys.
- ➔ **Land rights statistics need to be interpreted in the context of the national legal framework.** The patterns of which rights men and women hold may vary depending on the national legal frameworks regarding equal rights to land, customary laws and practices, cultural and social norms, and marital and inheritance regimes.
- ➔ **Gender-sensitive policy and legal frameworks (including their implementation) are fundamental for advancing women's land rights.** Legislation that guarantees rural women's equal rights to land, irrespective of their civil and marital status, is crucial.

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