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## Gender, Land Tenure, Food and Nutrition Insecurity in Northern Ghana

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### Abstract

Food and nutritional insecurity remains a global challenge, with sub-Saharan Africa bearing a large share of this burden. Despite much policy attention, it remains unclear whether the goal of eradicating worldwide food and nutritional insecurity will be achieved. There is considerable evidence that women's land rights is central in this discourse, and this is especially relevant in the urban zone, where residents continue to face challenges in accessing land to produce food for their households. A mixed-methods study was carried out between October 2013 and November 2014 in urban and periurban Tamale, northern Ghana, to understand the dynamic and recursive links between gender, access to land and access to nutritious food under the communal land tenure system pertaining in northern Ghana. Results show that although women in the northern region of Ghana are expected to provide soups (usually consisting of vegetables such as okra - *Abelmoschus esculentus* or roselle - *Hibiscus sabdariffa*) to accompany starch based dishes (mostly maize - *Zea mays*, pearl millet - *Pennisetum glaucum* and sorghum - *Sorghum bicolor*), they do not own land. In many cases women were given less than 0.5 acres of land at the fringes of the farmland to produce these vegetables. Women also rely on economic trees like the dawa dawa (*Parkia biglobosa*) and sheanut trees (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) to help provide nutritious soups and generate income for basic household needs. These important trees grow on land owned by men, whose permission is needed for access. The dilemma of women worsens if their spouse dies and they are left with the responsibility of providing food for the family, whilst not having land. As a coping strategy, they borrow land from male relatives for cultivation of staple food crops and also engage in trading of food stuffs to improve their livelihood. Finally, they engage in gathering, harvesting and gleaning to improve household food availability. Although women do not own land in northern Ghana, they play a critical role in providing nutritious and diverse diets for their families. Therefore, their innovative methods of food provisioning should be recognised and supported in agricultural and food policy.

**Keywords:** Food and nutritional insecurity, gender, Ghana, land tenure