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“Filling gaps and removing traps  
for sustainable resource management”

## Gender- and Age-Biased Land Tenure Systems and their Impact on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification

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### Abstract

Equitable outcomes are a critical component of working towards sustainability in agriculture. How does sustainable agricultural intensification's tenet of increased productivity on the same area of land relate to prevailing gender- and age-biased land tenure systems? Does the emphasis on a non-expansion of agricultural land imply redistributing control over land and the benefits gained from it to facilitate equitable outcomes? These questions guided a comparative qualitative study in intensification contexts in matrilineal and patrilineal communities in Ghana and Malawi. Using Kabeer's framework of institutional analysis, we go beyond a focus on the household to include other domains (community, market and government processes) that shape smallholders' access to land. We conducted a total of 102 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with male and female community leaders, market and government actors as well as household members. They reveal where respondents observed recent changes in agricultural land allocation and if/how they would imagine a fair redistribution of land. Possible pathways to redistribution mentioned by respondents include more equitable land inheritance patterns which village heads would champion in their families and communities, government control of land prices to ease market access for less well-off social groups, and gender/youth-sensitive legal education in rural areas. In the household domain, some interviewees proposed earlier land transfers from one generation to the next. Questions on a potential redistribution were also met with resistance, especially among advantaged landholders who justified prevailing systems. In general, limiting agricultural land expansion was seen as fostering gender imbalances if it is not mediated. We conclude that investments in agricultural intensification should facilitate equitable outcomes by supporting consensus-based institutional changes and creating positive synergies between multiple domains.

**Keywords:** Age, gender, Ghana, land tenure, Malawi, sustainable intensification