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Equitable governance and resource rights: Pathways to inclusive and resilient agrifood system-based livelihoods

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Abstract

Agrifood systems are central to the livelihoods of marginalised women and men in low- and middle-income countries, yet gender and social inequalities in the governance, rights, and use of critical agrifood resources limit the benefits women derive from these systems. Gender gaps in tenure over land, water, and natural resources constrain women's productivity and undermine economic, food, and nutrition security outcomes. These inequalities are compounded by factors such as ethnicity, age, and marital status, resulting in multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage for some groups of women.

This study, submitted as part of the proposed hybrid panel session Gender equality and inclusion in food, land, and water systems by 2050: Projections and solutions, organised by the CGIAR Gender Equality and Inclusion Accelerator and co-organised by the CGIAR Science Program on Multifunctional Landscapes, examines which strategies, interventions, and initiatives (i.e., ‘solutions’) effectively promote equality and inclusion in the governance of, and rights and access to land, water, and natural resources. We also ask under what conditions these solutions are effective, and identify actions needed from agricultural research for development and policy actors to support contextual adaptation and scaling.

Drawing on a review of peer-reviewed literature, we present solutions with robust evidence of effectiveness, organised using Njuki et al.'s (2022) Gender in Food Systems framework. This framework highlights the need to address both formal barriers (policies, regulations) and informal barriers (norms, beliefs, agency) to equality, across individual to systemic levels.

We show that system-level reforms, including gender-responsive land titling and quotas in resource user committees, can strengthen women's rights and influence in governance. However, these approaches are insufficient without addressing discriminatory norms. Behaviour change communication, community dialogues, and engagement with male champions and traditional leaders can support attitudinal change and acceptance of women's rights to resources. At the individual level, rights-awareness initiatives, governance training, and

leadership development can strengthen women's agency to claim rights. Critically, collective action and feminist social movements are key for advancing resource rights. We conclude that solutions catalyzing change across multiple levels and domains—driven by diverse actors, especially women themselves—are essential for sustained progress toward equality.

Keywords: And water systems, collective action, food, gender, inclusion, land, rights