

WOMEN, LAND AND SEEDS

Experiences from SD=HS
FFS on seed production
and marketing



Women Land and Seeds: Experiences from SD=HS FFS on seed production and marketing

This Brief was written by Barbara Codispoti, Connie Formson and Stephanie May. The Brief is an analysis of a survey carried out in Nepal, Peru, Uganda and Zambia in the context of the farmer field schools on seed production and marketing in each country. This work is part of the Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security program Phase II (2019-2023). Funding for the program is provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

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Cover picture: © Diana Mapulanga/CTDT Zambia. Picture depicts Lonis Muchelenga (L) and Evergirl Luyando (R) from Hamuwele FFS hand weeding their common bean seed crop during seed inspections by SCCI in Chikankata district.

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INTRODUCTION

Sowing Diversity=Harvesting Security is a global program being implemented by a consortium of civil society partners in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The program facilitates empowerment of smallholder farmers to manage crop diversity in their field. A part of this work is the focus on ensuring that smallholder farmers have access to good quality seed that meets their needs, on time and at affordable prices.

Within the program, the implementation of Farmer Field Schools on seed production and marketing is one of four program approaches focused on facilitating crop diversity, improved seed availability¹ and access² to adapted seeds and varieties that meet the diverse socio-cultural needs of smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples. In particular, the **seed production and marketing** component of SD=HS sets out to *enhance the livelihoods, income and seed security of indigenous peoples and small-holder farmers through improved production of and market access to high quality seeds of diverse crops and varieties, adapted to farmers' needs.*

Access to land is therefore a fundamental precondition for participation in SD=HS. As a program, participation by both men and women farmers has been based this key criterion. **It should however be noted that access to land and land rights are not the same thing.** Consequently, the status of land tenure and land rights can directly impact the enjoyment of other rights sought by the SD=HS program, as well as its potential and sustainability.

Although access to land is an important program requirement, to date there has been no examination of the status of land tenure relations, and land tenure security among participating farmers, both women and men. *What then are the rules (rights and duties) over land use in the SD=HS program? Who can use which resources, for how long and under which conditions?*

Women's participation is a priority within SD=HS, and a large proportion of FFS members are women. However, in some contexts women's **meaningful** participation in the program remains challenging. Consequently, *to what extent does the land tenure situation influence women's participation? Can improving women's land rights be a key catalyst to meaningful participation in future programing?*

These are a few questions that merit consideration in a program such as SD=HS in which access to land is fundamental to participation, but where land rights and land tenure security are key for program sustainability and upscaling. For seed business in particular, secure land tenure is crucial and encourages farmers' investment in commercial seed production as a livelihood.

This rapid assessment therefore profiles (both women and men) farmers against land tenure security in the SD=HS program and zooms into the extent to which female farmers aspiring to make a livelihood in seed production and marketing have access, use and control rights over the land used for SD=HS activities.

To date limited research has been done on women in seed business and by extension on the nexus of women, land rights and seed business. This assessment is a cursory look at the extent to which women participating in seed business within SD=HS have land rights. In doing so, it provides initial insights into this important intersection of factors that have an impact on pathways towards gender transformation and women's empowerment.



17

The analysis in this brief is based on primary data and secondary programming data from within SD=HS. A basic survey instrument was developed to guide primary data collection within Farmer Field Schools on seed production and marketing within the program. The survey included questions about the type of tenure and property rights, perceived security of tenure, knowledge about land rights, changes of land tenure rights as (indirect result) of SD=HS, all with a focus on gender disaggregated analysis.

A total of 31 FFS were sampled in Nepal, Peru, Uganda and Zambia. The survey results were presented in a first [webinar](#) held on 22 June 2023. Based on the inputs from the webinar and the survey, a second webinar was held to discuss future programmatic interventions and concrete actions.

Specifics on country Data

- **Nepal:** 10 FFS were sampled, consisting 262 farmers. Of these were 202 women and 60 were men.
- **Peru:** 4 FFS were sampled consisting 20 farmers. Of these 11 were women and 9 were men.
- **Uganda:** 7 FFS were sampled consisting 188 farmers. Of these 114 were women and 74 were men.
- **Zambia:** 10 FFS were sampled consisting 47 farmers. Of these 37 were women and 10 were men.



Diana Mapulanga , CTDZ-Zambia © Veronica Halula checking on her groundnuts seed crop, after field inspections by the SCCI in Chikankata



Diana Mapulanga , CTDZ-Zambia © Mercy Shibekele in front of her local maize seed crop, after CTDZ field monitoring and backstopping of FFSS in Shibuyunji.

WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

'Gender inequality exists in land rights: different women experience inequality in different ways in different places, yet there are common patterns that emerge both from available quantitative data and from examples of laws, program, and practices in land relations in different contexts. In general, across these different data sources, the patterns suggest male preference in land relations. Women own or have rights to less land than men and to land of lesser quality. In addition, women are not able to acquire the same rights as men in the same context, and the rights that they can acquire are less secure. Women are also less able to exercise the rights they have and are less able to protect rights when they are under threat. These patterns of inequality in turn relate to gender-unequal social and power relations that are evident more broadly in societies.'³

Land rights are inherently linked to women's position in their families, communities, and societies. Deeply held systems of discrimination—such as economic structures that concentrate wealth, patriarchy, power imbalance, and structural violence—disconnect women from the land.

Formal structures can shift, but they will not bring meaningful change if they do not challenge the underlying logics of gender bias.

Women holding secure land tenure rights are not only better positioned to exercise their fundamental human rights – such as access to food, health, housing, work, and education – but their secured rights also have far-reaching implications for broader societal benefits. Evidence shows that securing women's land rights boosts agricultural productivity, enhances global food security, and propels sustainable development.

For instance, research indicates that women with land rights participate more robustly in agriculture. This enhances household food supplies and strengthens overall food security. Secure access to land also influences women's health outcomes. Studies point out that women with land rights can make independent, critical healthcare decisions, including those about reproductive health.⁸ Secure land tenure also safeguard women from arbitrary eviction, ensuring a stable living environment.

Furthermore, land rights can also amplify women's decision-making power within their households and communities, particularly over land use. This empowerment facilitates their engagement in agriculture or entrepreneurial activities, thereby improving their working conditions.⁴



Diana Mapulanga, CTDZ-Zambia © Lonis muchelenga (L) and Evergirl Luyando (R) during field inspections by the SCCI in Hamuwele.

WOMEN IN SEED BUSINESS

Gender relations shape seed access, use and outcomes.⁵ Women are the custodians of seed and household dietary nutrition in many societies. As seed guardians' women ensure diversity in crops and food now and for the future.⁶ Their roles in seed systems can be strengthened and their incomes increased if they apply their knowledge to become commercial seed producers. In addition, because they work in a male dominated sector, women commercial seed producers must establish themselves as capable and knowledgeable actors in their value chains. Beyond the technical knowledge required, commercial seed production also requires more land and a lot of capital. However, women's access to assets and capital is often limited.⁷

Gender disparities in asset ownership, access to resources such as land and finance, and financial capital are therefore major obstacles to women's investment in the seed industry, just as they are in the agriculture sector. Women's meaningful participation in agriculture, and by extension the seed sector remains complex and is shaped by social, cultural, and economic norms. Consequently, if seed systems are to directly impact women's empowerment and gender equality, barriers to women's access to resources such as land, must be addressed.⁸



Carlos Zapparoli © Left to right: Cleta Ramírez López, Susana Matías Ortiz, Ana Martín Jeronimo and Isabel Matías holding maize seeds. Los Ramírez Aldea Chaluitz Community, Todos Santos Cuchumatanes in Guatemala



WOMEN'S LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Women play a critical role in protecting and upholding traditional knowledge. This can include knowledge about seed, plants, local ecosystems and medicines produced from the local environment, as well as knowledge of sacred sites or environmental and cultural history. Indigenous women play a particularly important role

*"When the man forms his family, he will be the main source of subsistence of the household, while the woman will be economically dependent on the man."
FFS participant in Peru*

The survey provides information on the general land tenure situation in targeted localities of the SD=HS program intervention zones, as well as the specific status of land parcels currently in use for SD=HS activities.

A general analysis shows that farmers involved in SD=HS activities hold land primarily under customary and traditional systems. In certain localities SD=HS activities take place in communal land (shared by FFS under customary regimes). However, in some instances there remain unresolved competing claims and related land conflicts. In such contexts, the increased value of land due to SD=HS activities has the potential to revamp latent conflicts or exacerbate existing one.

In nearly all countries surveyed, there is a low level of awareness regarding legislative provisions pertaining to the formalization of rights. In addition, in almost all countries, there is a perception that there is a risk of losing the land due to strong external intervention (such as from authorities or foreign investors).

Although there are some notable variations (with less prominence in Peru, and more significant in Nepal), land tenure insecurity presents a major impediment to farmers participating in SD=HS. Moreover, competing claims over resources often leads to disputes over boundaries and conflict. Growing fragmentation of land holdings and the impact of natural disasters reduces availability of land, with further exclusion of less powerful groups.

In general (with some differences according to localities), women have limited secure access to land, including on the parcels used for SD=HS activities. They have limited:

- **Use Rights** – Women's capacity to access the resource and exploit it for economic benefit (in the case of seed business accessing land for seeds multiplication) depends on the relationship with male family members, who administer land holding of the family. Men can therefore hinder actual access to land of women, or access to better quality land, or to larger amounts of land for SD=HS activities.

- **Control Rights**- Women have less substantive power and a meaningful role in making decisions about how land is used, managed, or transferred. In the contexts where full control is expressed through ownership (e.g. Nepal), or as taking a key role in the governance of customary land (e.g. Zambia and Uganda), women are far less likely, than men, to be landholders/title holder, or part of local land governance mechanisms. Less control over land results in women benefitting less from harvest, proceeds or profits from land (in the case of SD=HS from seeds production sales), than if they have equal control rights over the resource. Moreover, the lack of economic capacity does not allow women and youth to acquire land through other means, such as renting or purchasing.

The lack of involvement of men who hold and administer (family) land where SD=HS activities take place reduces men's interest in increasing women's land allocation for SD=HS activities. This limits the possibility for women to obtain more land for seed multiplication, to take decisions on which crops to be cultivated and finally in benefit sharing from marketing activities.

Despite this, in some localities (e.g. Uganda) SD=HS activities had a positive impact on land based relations. Increased consultations at the household level (men involvement) has led to better land use planning. Women have been able to either purchase or rent out land. These consultations also led to a reduction in land disputes over boundaries.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMING

The survey shows that unaddressed land relations can reduce the potential impact of SD=HS on the economic and social empowerment of women. The survey also demonstrates that men’s engagement, and the consensual agreement on (family) land allocation for SD=HS activities, can lead to positive impact on both recognition of women’s access, use and control rights, as well on positive impact on land use planning for SD=HS activities. Drawing from this rapid assessment, the recommendations below provide tangible actions points towards addressing land tenure and security within SD=HS.

Proposed solutions	
Current	Proposed for the future action
‘Access to land’ is a pre-condition	<p>Change the narrative. Consider ‘availability of land’ as a pre-condition; and embed ‘secure’ access to land and enjoyment of land rights as necessary condition for successful SD=HS initiatives. This can’t be a pre-condition at the start, but the program can contribute to it. Proposed operational strategies should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of the land tenure situation, and land tenure regimes, with specific attention to women and youth land rights ▪ Identification and engagement of local land governance mechanisms/actors. ▪ Identification of SD=HS partners that have capacities and knowledge on land issues. <p>In alternative situations proceed with capacity needs’ assessment and capacity building programs.</p>
No intervention by the Program on the processes leading to decisions regarding allocation/granting of land for SD=HS initiatives	<p>Then consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting consultations, leading to consensus and agreements, with participation of both women, men and youth regarding access to land for SD=HS initiatives. ▪ Involving local land authorities in charge of land governance, in the decisions regarding allocation and use of land for SD=HS initiatives. ▪ Mobilization and awareness raising on women and youth land rights, using the SD=HS program as a virtuous example to strengthen women’s land rights <p>Where possible, consider supporting processes of securing land rights (different mechanisms, according to the contexts) of land used under SD=HS.</p>



END NOTES & REFERENCES

1. Availability refers to having sufficient quantities of adapted crops and varieties within reasonable distance on time for critical planting/sowing.
2. Access in terms of having the income/resources to purchase/batter for seed, and the physical access to multiple seed sources meeting needs of farmers.
3. Scalise 2021. The gender gap. Assessing and measuring gender related land inequality. Part of collaborative research on Land Inequality series [ILC \(landcoalition.org\)](http://ILC.landcoalition.org)
4. [Grounding Women's Land Rights: Towards equity and climate justice - Oxfam Policy & Practice](#)
5. Puskur et al. 2021. Moving beyond reaching women in seed systems development.
6. Puskur et al. 2021. Moving beyond reaching women in seed systems development.
7. Vice Versa. 2017. Farmers Gain Access to and Control over Seeds. Food and Business Knowledge Platform, March 12.
8. Puskur et al. 2021. Moving beyond reaching women in seed systems development.



REFERENCE MATERIAL

Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security

SD=HS is the joint effort of Oxfam Novib and the world's leading civil society organizations with a firm track record in the field of plant genetic resources to empower smallholder farmers. We enter into partnerships and invest in alliances with likeminded NGOs, government institutions, academic bodies and national breeding and research institutes. And we bring together expertise in quality seed development, policies and regulation, local seed enterprise development and public-private partnerships.

 <https://sdhsprogram.org/>



STRATEGIES and POLICY PAPERS

- [Women's rights from the ground up | Oxfam International](#) – A strategic approach to women's land rights (2020)
- [Grounding Women's Land Rights: Towards equity and climate justice - Oxfam Policy & Practice](#) – A policy paper (2023)

TOOLS:

- [Transformative Leadership on Women Rights Training Manual on Women Land Rights | Oxfam International Pan Africa Program](#)
- [Training of Trainers Module on Gender Sensitive Community Engagement in Large Scale Land based Investments in Agriculture | Oxfam International Pan Africa Program](#)

MANUALS:

- [Farmer Field Schools Guide on Seed Production and Marketing](#)
- [Gender Journey Module](#)

WEB SITES

- **Global land program:** [Land rights \(oxfam.org.uk\)](#)
- **SD=HS:** <https://sdhsprogram.org/>

WEBINAR RESOURCES

- Women land and Seeds 22 June 2023: [SD=HS Knowledge product land rights & gender](#)
- [Gender and equity in SD=HS Journey Module \(16 November 2022\)](#)
- [Demonstrating results: Gender Journey Module \(25 January 2023\)](#)



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Diana Mapulanga , CTD-T-Zambia © Evalet Kanyama weeding her groundnut seed crop.