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Women's Land Rights & Climate Change

Options for National Assessments under the Belém Gender Action Plan

Photo: Visual Voyager

About this note

This information note was prepared by Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) with technical support from members of the Women's Land Rights Initiative particularly; Landesa, Huairou Commission, International Land Coalition, TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, Stand for Her Land, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), and UN Women. It does not represent official guidance from the UNFCCC. Please contact mwanahamisi@wedo.org for more information.

Why national assessments?

The Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP), adopted at COP30, provides a nine-year framework (2026–2034) to advance gender-responsive climate action. Priority Area A focuses on capacity-building, knowledge management and communication, including strengthening the evidence base on gender and climate change. Under Deliverable A.3.9, Parties and relevant stakeholders are invited to submit national assessments by March 2027 examining the intersections of gender and climate change with issues such as health, violence against women and girls, care work, and other emerging issues. This information note makes the case for recognizing women's land rights as a critical emerging issue and offers guidance for its inclusion in national assessments.

Women's Land Rights and Climate Change

The climate crisis is also a crisis of gender equality, land justice, and human rights. Women's and girls' experiences of climate change are shaped not only by their exposure to climate hazards, but also by their access to and control over the resources needed to anticipate, withstand, and recover from climate impacts. Land is the most foundational of these resources — providing a foundation for livelihoods, food production, housing, access to water and other natural resources, cultural identity, and social and economic security. Women who have secure land tenure and control over natural resources have stronger voices, agency, and leadership in private and public matters. For many women, particularly Indigenous women, rural women, smallholder farmers, pastoralist

women, and women from local communities, land is also integral to their knowledge systems, collective identities, environmental stewardship, and leadership in climate adaptation. Yet women's rights to own, inherit, use, control, and make decisions about land remain constrained in many contexts by discriminatory laws, unequal customary practices, patriarchal power relations, and barriers to accessing justice and land administration systems. Where progressive laws and policies to facilitate gender equality in land governance and control over natural resources exist, they are often not implemented or enforced.

Climate change can intensify these inequalities. Drought, floods, sea-level rise, desertification, land degradation, and other climate-related hazards can diminish land productivity and availability, undermine livelihoods, provide breeding grounds for predators, and increase competition over natural resources. Where women's land rights are insecure, these pressures may leave women with fewer resources to adapt, recover, or rebuild their livelihoods and often load them with additional care work. Women may also be excluded from decisions about land use, resettlement, compensation, and climate adaptation investments, even where their livelihoods and communities are directly affected. These impacts can be compounded when husbands or other male relatives migrate to cities to seek work, leaving women to care for families and the land without the rights to manage that land. Services and government programs often require proof of land rights to benefit or be included; this can unintentionally exclude women, who are significantly less likely to hold documentation.

The relationship between climate change and women's land rights is not unidirectional. Existing inequalities in land ownership and tenure security shape women's vulnerability to climate impacts, while climate-related shocks and responses can further weaken or strengthen women's rights. Land acquisitions, resettlement programmes, conservation initiatives, infrastructure development, renewable energy projects, and land restoration measures can create opportunities for climate resilience, but they can also reproduce or deepen gender inequalities when women's rights and participation are not adequately protected. Gender injustice related to climate change and land governance exacerbates social, economic, and environmental injustices, with women and girls shouldering the highest consequences.

The Belém Gender Action Plan's Deliverable A.3.9 invites submissions on national assessments of issues related to gender and climate change at the nexus of other emerging issues, "such as, but not limited to," health, violence against women and girls, and care work. Women's land rights can therefore be examined as an additional, interconnected issue under this open-ended scope. Assessing this relationship can help identify how land tenure systems, climate policies, and adaptation and mitigation measures affect women's rights, agency, livelihoods, and capacity to contribute to climate action. National assessments should treat women's land rights as a substantive dimension of gender-responsive climate action, rather than as a separate land administration concern. Understanding the relationship between land rights and climate change is essential to identifying structural barriers to resilience and adaptation, preventing maladaptation and dispossession, and ensuring that climate action advances rather than undermines gender equality.

Relevant themes to provide further analysis on the interlinkages

Climate impacts, land tenure, and women's resilience

Assessments can examine how acute climate hazards and slow-onset changes affect women's land rights and the security of their livelihoods. Drought, floods, storms, coastal erosion, desertification, and land degradation may reduce the availability or productivity of land, damage homes and agricultural assets, and disrupt the systems through which land rights are recognized and protected. Where women have limited independent rights or depend on land access mediated through male relatives, these impacts may undermine their ability to maintain livelihoods, access recovery support, or re-establish their homes and farms.

Relevant questions may include:

- How do climate hazards affect women's access to, use of, and control over land?
- Are women able to retain land rights following displacement, loss of livelihoods, or the destruction of land records?
- Do land tenure arrangements enable women to access adaptation support, agricultural services, recovery assistance, and compensation?
- Which groups of women face the greatest barriers to secure tenure and climate resilience?

Land dispossession, displacement, and climate-related recovery

Climate-related displacement, planned relocation, resettlement, and reconstruction can create risks for women whose rights are not formally documented or recognized by decision-makers. Women may be excluded from compensation or replacement land when eligibility depends on formal ownership, household-head status, or documents held by other family members. Widows, women-headed households, women with disabilities, Indigenous women, and women living under customary and collective tenure arrangements may face particular barriers, depending on the context. Assessments should examine whether climate-related relocation and recovery processes recognize women as independent rights-holders, recognize and protect all legitimate tenure rights (including collective and customary rights, provide accessible grievance mechanisms, and ensure that compensation and replacement land arrangements do not reproduce existing discrimination.

Climate action, land-based investments, and the risk of maladaptation

Climate policies and investments can have significant consequences for land rights. Initiatives involving renewable energy, critical minerals, carbon markets, forest conservation, protected areas, ecosystem restoration, and large-scale agricultural or infrastructure development may infringe on rights to land and natural resources. Such initiatives may contribute to climate objectives while also creating risks of displacement, restricted resource access, loss of customary rights, or exclusion from benefits if gender equality and tenure security are not integrated into their design and implementation.

National assessments can examine whether land-based climate initiatives:

- Adhere to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and other international human rights standards applicable to land rights.
- Recognize women's statutory, customary, and collective land rights.
- Ensure women's meaningful participation before decisions are taken.
- Identify and prevent risks of dispossession, displacement, and loss of livelihoods.
- Provide accessible grievance mechanisms and effective remedies.
- Ensure fair and transparent benefit-sharing and compensation.
- Monitor the distribution of costs and benefits across different groups of women.

Legal frameworks, customary tenure, and access to justice

The existence of gender-equal provisions in land legislation does not necessarily guarantee equal rights in practice. Contradictions between statutory and customary systems, discriminatory practices, limited legal awareness, registration costs, and barriers to legal assistance can prevent women from exercising their rights. Assessments should examine the relationship between formal law and customary practice, including whether customary governance arrangements enable women to participate in decisions about land allocation, inheritance, use, and dispute resolution. They should also consider whether land administration services, formal and informal justice institutions, and government and funder programmes focused on adaptation and resilience measures are accessible to rural women, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, displaced women, and women facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

Women's leadership and participation in land governance

Women are not only affected by land-related climate risks; they also contribute to land stewardship, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and community-based adaptation. Their participation may nevertheless be constrained by unequal decision-making power, limited access to information, unpaid care responsibilities, financial barriers, or intimidation, harassment, and gender-based violence. Assessments should identify whether women participate meaningfully in land governance and climate decision-making at household, community, local government, and national levels. They should also examine whether women-led organizations and Indigenous and local women's groups have the resources and institutional support required to influence land-related climate policies and investments.

Intersections with care, violence, health, and livelihoods

Women's land rights intersect with other issues relevant to A.3.9. Insecure access to land and natural resources can increase the time women spend securing food, water, fuel, and income. Displacement and loss of livelihoods may increase economic dependency and expose women to exploitation or other forms of harm. Land disputes and resistance to dispossession frequently also involve intimidation, harassment, or violence against women environmental defenders. These relationships should be investigated rather than assumed. National assessments should identify context-specific

pathways, consider protective factors, and ensure that women can participate safely in research and policy processes.

Understanding Women's Land Rights

Women's land rights encompass the rights of women and girls to access, use, own, inherit, control, manage, and make decisions about land, individually or collectively, on an equal basis with men. They include the security and enforceability of these rights, protection against unlawful dispossession, and access to effective remedies when violations occur. These rights may arise through statutory law, customary tenure, collective or Indigenous governance systems, family and marital property arrangements, or other nationally recognized forms of tenure. Their precise content varies by legal and social context.

For national assessments, it is important to account for, protect, and ensure gender equality in all aspects of land rights and governance:

- **Access to land and resources:** the ability to obtain and use land for housing, agriculture, pastoralism, livelihoods, cultural practices, or other purposes.
- **Ownership and control:** the ability to make decisions about land, benefit from its use, transfer rights where permitted, and exercise meaningful authority over its management.
- **Tenure security:** the degree to which land rights are recognized, protected, and enforceable, including against arbitrary eviction, dispossession, or discriminatory claims.
- **Inheritance and marital property rights:** the ability to acquire and retain land through inheritance, marriage, separation, divorce, or widowhood, without discrimination and on an equal basis with men and boys.
- **Collective and customary land rights:** the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women's participation and decision-making within collective tenure systems.
- **Participation in land governance:** the ability to influence land-use planning, land allocation, resettlement, compensation, restoration, conservation, and climate-related decisions at all levels.
- **Access to justice and remedies:** the ability to claim rights, challenge violations, obtain legal assistance, resolve disputes safely, and secure appropriate remedies.

Note: Women's land rights should not be measured solely by whether a woman's name appears on a title deed. National assessments should also examine whether women can exercise their rights in practice, whether their tenure is secure, whether they participate in decisions, and whether they can access land-related benefits and remedies.

Policy Directions and Key Messages

1. **Integrate women's land rights into intersectional gender-responsive climate policies and plans.** Parties should assess how land tenure and gender inequalities shape climate vulnerability, adaptation, mitigation, disaster risk reduction, recovery, and resilience. Relevant entry points include Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans, land restoration strategies, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, disaster risk reduction policies, and climate-related investment frameworks.
2. **Strengthen the recognition and enforcement of women's equal land rights.** Review and, where necessary, reform discriminatory laws and administrative practices affecting land ownership, inheritance, marital property, registration, and access to justice. Implementation should address barriers in both statutory and customary systems, including discriminatory norms and practices, in accordance with human rights obligations and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
3. **Prevent climate-related dispossession and maladaptation.** Require gender-responsive land-tenure assessments and appropriate human rights safeguards for climate-related projects and programmes involving land acquisition, carbon markets, land-use change, conservation, restoration, resettlement, or restrictions on resource access. Ensure meaningful participation, transparency, accessible grievance procedures, and effective remedies.
4. **Protect women's rights during disasters, displacement, and recovery.** Disaster preparedness, early recovery, reconstruction, and planned relocation should recognize women as independent rights-holders. Eligibility for compensation, replacement land, housing, and livelihood support should not systematically exclude women whose land rights are undocumented or mediated through other household members.
5. **Improve data and evidence on women's land rights and climate change.** Strengthen sex-disaggregated land rights and governance data, gender-

responsive climate vulnerability assessments, and monitoring of land-related impacts of climate action. Combine administrative data with participatory research and community-generated evidence to identify gaps in formal records and understand the lived realities of women's tenure security.

6. **Ensure women's meaningful participation and leadership.** Establish and enforce inclusive mechanisms that enable rural women, Indigenous women, women and girls from local communities, women with disabilities, and women-led organizations to influence decisions about land governance and climate action, from local to global levels. Participation should be adequately resourced and designed to address barriers to access, representation, and safety.
7. **Mobilize adequate and accessible financing.** Integrate women's land rights into climate finance and relevant public budgets, including support for legal assistance, tenure documentation, community-led mapping, land restoration, implementation of safeguards, and women-led adaptation initiatives. Funding should be accompanied by transparent allocation, monitoring, and accountability arrangements.
8. **Strengthen institutional coordination and accountability.** Promote coordination among institutions responsible for climate change, environment, land administration, agriculture, gender equality, Indigenous Peoples' rights, disaster risk reduction, and justice. Establish clear responsibilities, measurable targets, monitoring arrangements, and accessible mechanisms through which affected women and communities can seek redress.
9. **Recognize women's knowledge and leadership in land stewardship.** Support women's participation and leadership in sustainable land management, biodiversity protection, ecosystem restoration, and community-based adaptation. Climate policies should build on women's knowledge and priorities while ensuring that environmental benefits do not come at the expense of their rights to land and resources.

Conclusion

National assessments under A.3.9 provide an opportunity to identify how women's land rights shape climate vulnerability and resilience, document existing policy and implementation gaps, and establish priorities for

intersectional gender-responsive climate action. Assessments should not be limited to documenting disparities in land ownership. They should examine how climate hazards, tenure security, institutional arrangements, climate-related investments, and women's ability to exercise their rights interact in practice. They should also identify existing protective measures and good practices that strengthen women's agency, leadership, and access to remedies. Where evidence is incomplete, Parties and other stakeholders can identify practical steps to improve data collection, strengthen coordination among relevant institutions, and support participatory assessments led by affected communities and women's rights organizations. Findings should inform concrete policy measures, financing priorities, institutional responsibilities, and monitoring arrangements. Women's land rights should be integrated into climate planning and implementation as a matter of gender equality and human rights, while recognizing that secure and equitable tenure can also contribute to sustainable land management, stronger livelihoods, and community resilience. Advancing women's land rights is therefore not only a land governance objective. It is an essential dimension of ensuring that climate action is equitable, inclusive, and capable of delivering lasting resilience.

Key Resources to Consult

- UNFCCC. Belém Gender Action Plan 2026–2034, Decision 7/CP.30.
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. General Recommendation No. 37 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change (2018)
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources (2013) and second edition (2020)
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Women's Land Rights and Her Land. Her Rights: Advancing Gender Equality to Restore Land and Build Resilience.
- United Nations Statistics Division. Sustainable Development Goal indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 on women's rights to agricultural land
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems (2023).
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The status of land tenure and governance (2025)