



Photo by Huairou Commission

IP women challenge the intersection of gender and land rights inequalities

A Case Study of Rural Women's Resilience Efforts in Analamanga Region, Madagascar

By Mino Ramaroson, Huairou Commission

Key Messages

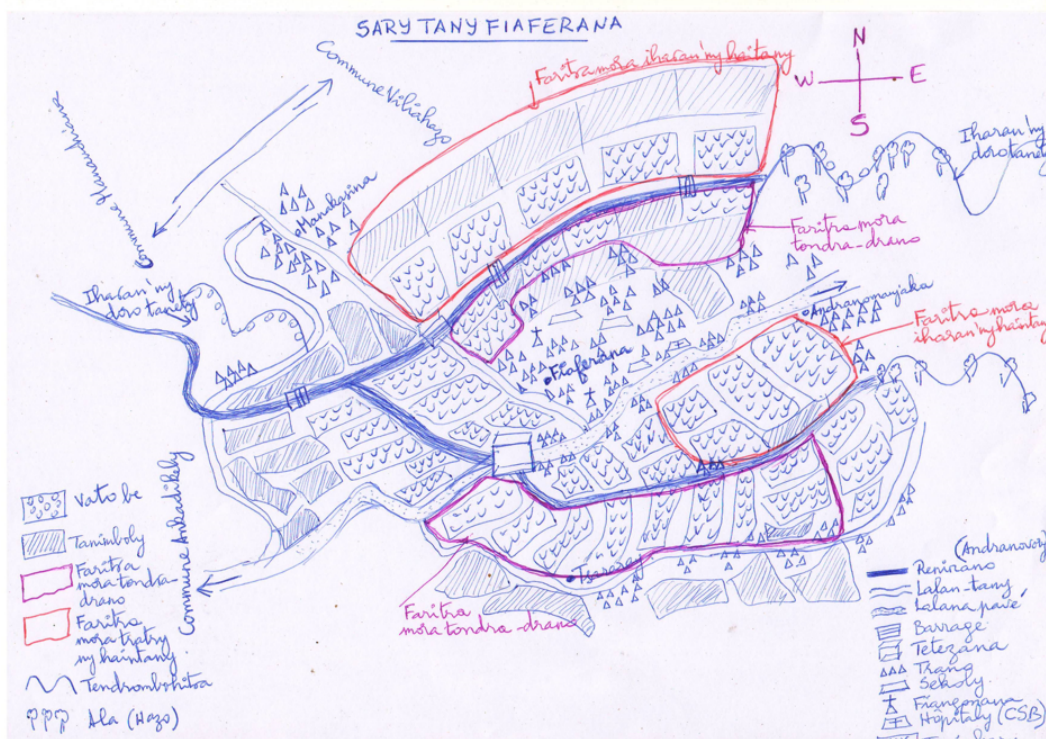
- Gender and land rights inequality pose a two-pronged challenge for the women of Fiaferana. Women are denied inheritance rights, further limiting their access to and control over land resources. A key contributing factor to this disparity is a discriminatory land tenure regime in rural settings which relies heavily on customary practices that are not gender-sensitive.
- At the same time, the tenure security of women is increasingly compromised as climate-related effects intensify. The intersectionality of rural women's vulnerabilities and the climate crisis is creating a complex web of challenges that need to be addressed holistically.
- The current land policy framework in Madagascar, while avowedly gender sensitive, does not incorporate a gender dimension, and neglects the specific challenges and rights of women in the implementation of land reform.
- Integrating customary land tenure systems within formal land governance structures can significantly strengthen community resilience but only if social norms and practices are not gender-biased.
- Fiaferana women have adapted to climate impacts such as hailstorms and cyclone-induced flooding by embracing sustainable land management, including the adoption of organic agriculture, and by replenishing forests and protecting natural habitats, among others.

The Fiaferana municipality in the Anamalanga region is located in the central highlands of Madagascar and is home to mainly the Merina tribe.

According to the 2021 census, Fiaferana had a population of around 7,068 residents. Roughly 90 percent of the population is engaged in farming, and approximately 60 percent of the residents live below the poverty line, with incomes of less than two US Dollars per day.

Climate change has significantly altered the seasons in Fiaferana. Like the rest of Madagascar, but especially in the central highlands, cyclones have become increasingly frequent and more powerful.

In 2019, some 25 houses were destroyed by these cyclones. Every year, these cyclones wreak havoc, bringing floods and hailstorms that damage homes, crops, and farmlands. At the same time, while the rainy season has become more intense, with ruinous effects, it has also become shorter.



Map of Fiaferana as designed by the women's group in the area

Such changes in rainfall patterns, including the incidence of flooding and hailstorms, have had a profound impact on the community's livelihoods.

The women of Fiaferana have reported that they used to be able to rely on their traditional knowledge of when and how to plant their crops.

In recent years, however, these traditional farming practices have been overturned by the unpredictability of the climate. The women said that 20 years ago, they used to be able to plant rice twice a year. Today, because of the risks posed by insufficient rainfall or hailstorms, they can only plant one crop a year. They also either delay or prematurely start planting in anticipation of insufficient rainfall.

Intense rainfall has also led to soil degradation and landslides, diminishing the available agricultural land.

The irrigation systems that once served the rice fields have been destroyed by soil erosion and heavy rains, further reducing the available land for production in the area.

Gender and Land Rights Inequality: Two-Pronged Challenge for Women

The women of Fiaferana labor under a power imbalance in relation to land ownership and rights that is observed across the various tribes in Madagascar.

This disparity is particularly pronounced in some regions, including in Analamanga, where women are denied inheritance rights, further limiting their access to and control over land resources. A key contributing factor to this disparity is a discriminatory land tenure regime that prevails especially in rural settings which relies heavily on customary practices.

Customary norms and traditions govern the land management system, and these often lack a gender-sensitive approach. In general, the current land policy framework in Madagascar, while avowedly gender sensitive,

often fails to incorporate a gender dimension, neglecting the specific challenges and rights of women in the implementation of land reform.

Land Laws and Women's Rights in Madagascar

In Madagascar, where the majority of the population engages in agriculture as their primary livelihood, land is a critical asset. The importance of land in sustaining livelihoods and communities cannot be overstated.

The first significant land reform in Madagascar occurred in 2005, marking a pivotal shift in the perception of property rights. It transitioned from the notion of "State-owned land" to "untitled private property." This reform aimed to overhaul the land management system, emphasizing decentralization and modernization. The decentralization of land management relied on the establishment of a local service, the communal land office, responsible for issuing land certificates for individually or collectively occupied but untitled land parcels. A key aspect of this transformation was the inclusion of the customary land management system within the decentralized land offices.

Building upon the initial reform, a second land policy letter was introduced, incorporating eight of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) principles. This policy letter also advocated for land certification, which plays a crucial role in securing land tenure rights. The adoption of these frameworks within the reviewed land policy led to a more focused gender dimension in the current National Land Policy Letter. The recognition that women are not

homogenous regarding land, that different groups of women have different needs and face different situations, is anchored within the reviewed land policy.

Decentralization thus significantly improved the public land management service. In 2022, after 17 years of reform, 546 land offices were established, and nearly 1,370,000 certificates were issued compared to the estimated 680,000 land titles delivered in the last century.

Despite these advancements, estimates show that documented land parcels in Madagascar still account for less than 30 percent of the total land area. This presents challenges in ensuring land tenure security, particularly in the current context of increasing land-based investments and the adverse effects of climate change. Unfortunately, women continue to face disadvantages in the land tenure process, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive policies and practices to ensure equitable access to and control over land resources.

The tenure security of women becomes increasingly compromised as climate-related effects intensify. The intersecting vulnerabilities of rural women and the changing climate create a complex web of challenges that need to be addressed holistically. This observation prompted the establishment in 2018 of FARM (Femme en Action Rurale de Madagascar), a self-managed and independent movement that enables rural women to fully assume their responsibilities in solidarity within the rural women's movement.

In 2019, FARM began working in Fiaferana, where it has four members' groups, which collectively represent approximately 200 rural women.

Through their advocacy efforts, focused on identified issues such as the effects of climate change and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, they successfully secured parcels of land amounting to 26 hectares from the municipality to work on collaboratively. However, their rights to this land are not secure.

FARM is composed of 250 rural women's groups in eight regions of the island whose mission is to promote gender equality and climate justice through raising awareness and providing training to rural women about their rights, strengthening their organizational and technical capacities, and ensuring their full participation in decision-making processes economically, ecologically, socially, and culturally.

Impacts of Climate Change and Disasters on Women's Welfare and Rights

The impacts of climate change on rural women in Fiaferana have been far-reaching and have profoundly affected their lives in several ways.

Loss of Land

The increasing frequency of hail storms and floods caused by cyclones (which also caused the destruction of the irrigation systems) has left vast tracts of rice fields unproductive. This has had a devastating impact on FARM members, prompting them to negotiate with the local authorities to get access to land. The 26 hectares that they obtained enabled the women to increase their income and economic stability. However, the parcels of land were provided as a donation without any accompanying documentation. Currently, the women are engaged in the process of seeking formal land titles. However, this process has proven to be financially burdensome for them.



Photo by Huairou Commission

Food Shortage

Climate change-induced shifts in weather patterns have resulted in reduced agricultural productivity. This reduction in crop yields and livestock has contributed to food shortages, leading to increased food insecurity among rural women and their families. Nutritional deficiencies and hunger have become pressing issues.

Migration

Climate-induced migration has become a common phenomenon among rural women and their families in Fiaferana. As droughts or floods render their land temporarily or permanently unproductive, many are forced to migrate to urban areas in search of alternative livelihoods. This migration disrupts their connection to the land and their ability to invest in it.

Land Conflicts

The competition for land in Fiaferana has led to conflicts, particularly as rich families from the capital buy up available lands, causing land prices

to increase beyond the capacity of poor families to afford. Thus, poor families in Fiaferana have been migrating to the city to search for work. This has led to rising unemployment in the city and increased pressure on the informal settlements, thus causing more land insecurity.

Loss of Cultural Identity

Displacement and changes in land use due to climate change have eroded the cultural ties that many rural women have to their ancestral lands. The poor families that are migrating to the city are losing their connection to their rural home. Without support for these families, their detachment from their ancestral land can be emotionally distressing and impacts the social fabric of these communities who end up living in informal settlements.

Landlessness and Unemployment

The effects of migration have been twofold: poor families from Fiaferana have not only lost their land at home, but have found themselves jobless in the city. This double blow exacerbates poverty and increases their vulnerability, as they struggle to find alternative sources of income.

Lack of Mitigation Measures

In many regions, there is a notable absence of comprehensive planning and mitigation measures to address the specific impacts of climate change on land. This lack of foresight and preparedness further compounds the challenges faced by rural women and their communities.

Lack of Investment and Access to Extension Services

Rural women often face significant barriers in accessing resources, such as land, credit, and modern agricultural technologies. This lack of access hampers their capacity to invest in climate-resilient practices, which are essential for mitigating the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods.

In light of these challenges, addressing the gender-specific impacts of climate change in the regions is crucial. Implementing climate-resilient

agricultural practices, providing access to education and training, and ensuring the inclusion of rural women in decision-making processes related to climate adaptation are all essential steps in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change on their lives and livelihoods.

Responses by Communities

In the face of climate change impacts, local communities have embarked on innovative strategies that not only address climate resilience but also empower women and protect their land rights.

First and foremost, they have embraced sustainable land use practices. Farmers are increasingly diversifying their crops and adopting drought-resistant varieties to mitigate the effects of changing rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts. These adaptive farming techniques not only help ensure food security but also reduce soil degradation. Another significant response is the adoption of agroecological practices, particularly in small-scale agriculture. Communities are maximizing the use of all



Photo by Huairou Commission

available inputs and small plots to increase crop yields while preserving the land. This approach not only boosts agricultural productivity but also allows women to actively participate in farming activities, strengthening their claim to land rights.

Organic agriculture has become a prevailing practice for the women groups in Analamanga. Here, women are actively involved in self-producing organic fertilizers and cultivating local seeds. An inspiring example comes from a woman, Berthine Razafindravao, member of a community-based organization (CBO) with 25 members in Fiaferana Municipality. She efficiently utilizes a small 20-square meter parcel for year-round organic green pea production. From this production alone, Berthine earns 100,000 Malagasy Francs or 4.14 US Dollars per month (which represents half of the minimum wage). Her regular income from this plot, which has become increasingly productive due to organic fertilizer use, highlights the potential for women's economic empowerment through organic agriculture.

Short-cycle livestock rearing, such as poultry, rabbit, and worm farming, has also gained traction. In Fiaferana, a group of 150 rural women started raising 20 chickens. They now sell 100 chickens per week per member, providing income and food security for participating families. Women are actively engaged in these ventures, contributing to household finances and reinforcing their role in land management.

Furthermore, fish farming, primarily targeting women, is being carried out with notable success. Their regular harvest of 500 to 800 grams of fish per unit, sold at competitive prices, provides a consistent income stream.

Additionally, rural women groups have started reforestation and afforestation projects to combat deforestation caused by resource-intensive livelihoods such as charcoal production. They collectively work on the 26 hectares of land that they received from the local authorities, practising agroecological methods in growing fruit trees and crops. By replenishing forests and protecting natural habitats, they aim to restore

ecological balance and reduce the risks of landslides and soil erosion during heavy rainfall.

Key actors involved in supporting these initiatives include the European Union's DINIKA project, which contributes to these efforts by fostering climate resilience and sustainable land use practices in the Analamanga region.

These local responses not only help communities adapt to climate change but also contribute to women's economic empowerment and the protection of their land rights. By actively participating in sustainable agricultural practices and income-generating activities, women gain a stronger footing in decision-making processes related to land, thereby fostering gender equity and resilience in the face of environmental challenges.

Responses by Authorities

The central government generally does not provide support for locally initiated efforts to tackle the challenges arising from the impacts of climate change. The BNGRC (National Bureau for Risk and Disaster Management), which serves as the national agency for disaster risk prevention and response, primarily focuses on addressing natural and human-made disasters as they occur. There is a notable absence of follow-up, critical reflection, or proposed actions in the aftermath of disasters, even in regions known for their susceptibility to such events.

In contrast, there is a growing emphasis on community-led advocacy for sustainable land and resource management. Communities are working to raise awareness about the importance of preserving land, water resources, and forests. They engage in dialogues with local authorities to promote policies that address climate change adaptation and mitigation while safeguarding their land rights. A concrete positive outcome of community engagement with local authorities is the grant of 26 hectares of land to women's groups in Fiaferana. The women are now using the



Photo by Huairou Commission

land for reforestation by planting eucalyptus, acacia, and fruits trees. They also received land for market gardening using organic production.

Assessment

Key Issues

Rural women respond by adapting to changing conditions, but their options are limited. One of the pressing issues faced by rural women in the context of climate change is the insecurity of land tenure. This insecurity not only disrupts their lives but also exacerbates climate-induced migration. Women are forced to leave their homes due to the loss of productive land. In some regions, they compete for resources, leading to conflicts.

Additionally, there is a noticeable absence of adequate mitigation and adaptation measures in areas heavily impacted by climate change. This lack of preparedness further compounds the challenges faced by these communities.

Furthermore, gender disparities persist in land ownership, with women often having limited access to and control over land resources. Finally, there is a significant gap in government policies aimed at protecting tenure rights, leaving rural communities vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Reflections and Insights

Secure land tenure is fundamental in enhancing rural women's resilience to climate change. It serves as the foundation for investment in sustainable land management practices, enabling them to better adapt to changing environmental conditions. Additionally, integrating customary land tenure systems within formal land governance structures can significantly strengthen community resilience if social norms and practices are not gender-biased. This integration can lead to clearer land rights, reduced disputes, and more effective land management.

Moreover, adequate land planning is pivotal in mitigating the impacts of climate change. By identifying safe and suitable areas for settlement and agriculture, communities can reduce their exposure to climate-related risks and ensure more sustainable land use practices. In sum, addressing these key issues and applying these insights can help rural communities better navigate the challenges posed by climate change which exacerbated land tenure insecurity.

Recommendations

Drawing from the insights of the case study, a set of recommendations can be formulated to address the pressing challenges faced by rural communities in the context of climate change and land tenure insecurity.

- It is essential to strengthen land tenure security through the issuance of land certificates and titles, providing communities with a legal document to protect their land rights.

- Promoting sustainable land management practices is crucial in mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change. This includes measures to prevent soil degradation, optimize water resources, and adopt climate-resilient agricultural techniques.
- Implementing gender-sensitive land policies is vital to ensure that women's land rights are recognized and protected.
- Disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies should be developed, with the involvement of rural women, and incorporating land-use planning tailored to climate-impacted regions.
- Fostering collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities is imperative to comprehensively address the intertwined challenges of land tenure and climate change, ensuring a more resilient and equitable future for rural populations. ■

References:

How Gender Inequality and Climate Change are interconnected, UN Women, 2022

Land Rights and Economic Resilience of Rural Women in G5-Sahel Countries, West Africa, A. Bizoza, 2019

Promoting Women's Access to and Control Over Land in the central Highlands of Madagascar, ILC publication, 2010

Why Simple Solutions won't Secure Africa Women Land Rights, IIED Briefing, July 2021

Women and Land tenure Rights in Southern Africa: A Human Rights-Based Approach, G Mutangadura, 2004

Citation:

Ramaroson, Mino (2023). *IP women challenge the intersection of gender and land rights inequalities: A case study of rural women's resilience efforts in Analamanga Region, Madagascar*. Huairou Commission (HC). [Paper prepared by HC for the initiative "Strengthening land governance through promotion of land tools and approaches" supported by Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN Habitat)].