

Editorial

Land, Women, Youths, and Land Tools or Methods: Emerging Lessons for Governance and Policy

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Women and youths encounter problems with access to land, as well as securing tenure in land resources. Several researchers and organizations have dedicated their efforts to conceptualizing land tools for women’s and youths’ access to land. A land tool or land method is any practical means of solving land-related challenges. To ensure that land tools and methods produce pro-poor and inclusive impacts, they need to be developed to also incorporate youths’ and women’s experiences (including their needs and participation). This implies acknowledging that land tools or methods may impact differently on women, men, and youths. The focus of this Special Issue (SI) “Land, Women, Youths, and Land Tools or Methods” is crucial for understanding the social aspects of land administration and land management. *Land* (a natural resource), *women and youths* (focusing on people), and *land tools or methods* (problem-solving techniques) share a mutually beneficial relationship (see Figure 1).

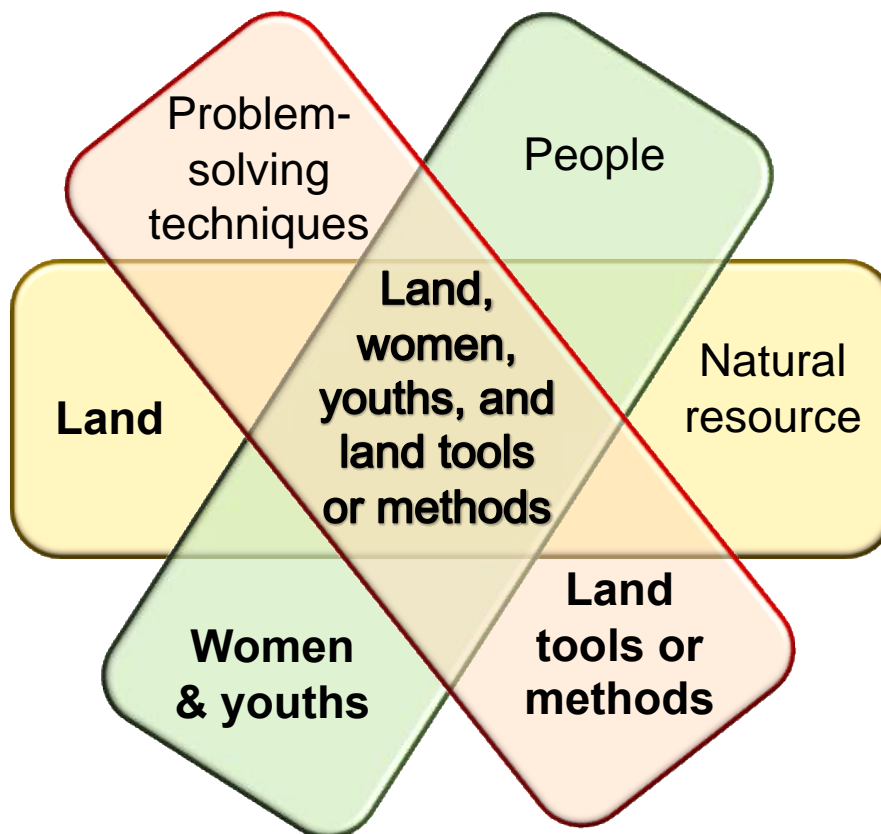


Figure 1. The relationship between land, women, youths, and land tools or methods (author’s illustration).

Land, as a natural resource, is essential for ensuring that *women and youths* are part of the community (the critical demographic). This is because access to land provides physical availability of land parcels for women and youths to use or enjoy the rights embedded therein. Furthermore, it provides opportunities for them to improve their livelihoods and their households. Women and youths are more socioeconomically empowered when they have the right to inherit property, transfer their land rights to others, and exercise those rights in relation to water, housing, food, the forest, and environmental and mineral resources, to mention just a few. Without disregarding the problems that men encounter, there is a focus on women and youths because they are the demographic usually left behind in efforts aimed at securing land rights for all. However, efforts to secure land/property rights for women and youths would not be possible unless specifically tailored problem-solving techniques are adopted for solving women- and youth-related land challenges. Furthermore, people (women and youths, in this case) also need to understand their rights in order to use and enjoy land resources, as well as have the capacity to use land sustainably. This is how *land, women and youths, and land tools or methods* share mutually beneficial relationships (again, refer to Figure 1).

With the exception of an Erratum article, the SI contains a total of 13 positively evaluated (peer-reviewed) articles. Therefore, the objective of this editorial is to highlight one key insight from each of these, thus compiling 13 lessons learned from the articles published in this SI. These 13 lessons learned are a selection only. A broader spectrum of insights and findings is available in the publications. A thematic review (and analysis) of the articles required a multidisciplinary perspective to grasp the variety of data types, as well as the collection and analytical methods used. A matrix-type thematic analysis is presented in a tabular format (Table 1).

Table 1. Articles in the Special Issue (SI) “*Land, Women, Youths, and Land Tools or Methods*”, listed in the order they are discussed in this editorial (‡: primary focus area of publication; †: secondary focus; •: unaddressed theme).

No.	Title of Published Articles	Key Subject Area Addressed in the SI Themes ¹				
		L	W	Y	LT	G
1	Willingness to participate in voluntary land consolidation in Gozamin District, Ethiopia [1].	‡	•	•	†	Ethiopia (Africa)
2	Household land allocations and the youth land access nexus: evidence from the Techiman Area of Ghana [2].	‡	•	‡	•	Ghana (Africa)
3	The changing structure and concentration of agricultural landholdings in Estonia and possible threat for rural areas [3].	‡	•	•	†	Estonia (Europe)
4	Rural women’s invisible work in census and state rural development plans: The Argentinean Patagonian case [4].	‡	‡	•	•	Argentina (South America)
5	Community development through the empowerment of indigenous women in Cuetzalan Del Progreso, Mexico [5].	‡	‡	•	†	Mexico (North America)
6	The nexus between peri-urban transformation and customary land rights disputes: effects on peri-urban development in Trede, Ghana [6].	‡	•	•	†	Ghana (Africa)
7	Using a gender-responsive land rights framework to assess youth land rights in rural Liberia [7].	‡	•	‡	‡	Liberia (Africa)
8	Benefits and constraints of the agricultural land acquisition for urbanization for household gender equality in affected rural communes: A case study in Huong Thuy Town, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam [8].	‡	†	•	•	Vietnam (Asia)
9	Absent voices: women and youths in communal land governance. Reflections on methods and processes from exploratory research in West and East Africa [9].	‡	‡	‡	‡	Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Tanzania, and Uganda (Africa)

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Title of Published Articles	Key Subject Area Addressed in the SI Themes ¹				
		L	W	Y	LT	G
10	Smallholder agricultural investment and productivity under contract farming and customary tenure system: a Malawian perspective [10].	‡	†	•	•	Malawi (Africa)
11	Mapping environmental conflict using spatial text mining: focusing on the regional issues of South Korean environmental NGOs [11].	‡	•	•	‡	South Korea (Asia)
12	Urbanization and increasing flood risk on the northern coast of Central Java – Indonesia: an assessment towards better land use policy and flood management [12].	‡	•	•	‡	Indonesia (Asia)
13	Gender inequality and symbolic violence in women’s access to family land in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania [13].	‡	‡	•	†	Tanzania (Africa)

¹ L = Land; W = Women; Y = Youths; LT = Land tools or methods; G = Geography.

Two key inferences can be drawn from the data presented in Table 1. First, all articles in the SI have land as a primary focus, followed by issues about women, land tools or methods, and youths, respectively. Second, while the geographical focus of the articles leaned predominantly towards Africa, the entire volume is representative of countries from all regions of the world. The SI, therefore, addresses land, women, youths, and land tools or methods from a global perspective. The 13 articles in the SI are authored by 37 land and natural resource scholars. They collectively produced 13 notable lessons [1–13]. Below is an outline of the lessons learned.

Lesson one: Landholder farmers are predominantly willing to participate in voluntary land consolidation. The study conducted by Gedefaw et al. [1] evaluated the willingness of farmers to participate in land consolidation in Ethiopia. They revealed that landholder farmers are more willing to participate in voluntary land consolidation than in compulsory land consolidation. The study identified motivations or determinants for their willingness: (1) land exchange in a consolidation process is preferable between neighboring parcels of adjacent farmers; (2) nearness of parcels to the farmstead; and (3) expected productivity improvement.

Lesson two: A social welfare scheme is necessary for aged farmers to provide youths easier access and security to the use of land. Concerning the growing lack of access to land by youths in most developing countries, Kidido and Lengoiboni’s [12] study on Ghana underscores the need for a social welfare scheme for aged farmers to encourage earlier transfer of land to the youth to enable easier access to land.

Lesson three: Policy action is urgently needed in Europe to mitigate the impact of land concentration caused by the increasing concentration of agricultural land into the hands of corporate bodies. Focusing away from Africa, Jürgenson and Rasva [3] studied the farmland situation in Europe where the area of agricultural land has remained almost the same, despite a decreasing trend in the number of farms on the continent. They found, with a particular focus on Estonia, that “Agricultural land has been increasingly concentrated into the hands of corporate bodies” [3] (p. 1). Hence, the need for a policy direction to mitigate the impact of land concentration.

Lesson four: A strategy for the economic and political recognition of women’s contribution to regional development through their land-based activities is a necessary intervention for gender-inclusive and equitable planning. Concerning the issue of women’s land rights in South America, Núñez et al. [4] investigated the historical census data from Argentina and found that women’s contributions to the family farming system in the Patagonian region remain unrecognized, and this has caused the invisibilization of women’s contributions to development. They found that the system of data usage leads to women being denied their rights to family land use. The consequence is that “Patagonia has become one of the most affected by extractivism” [4] (p. 1). They, therefore, recommended that a strategy for the

economic and political recognition of women's contributions to development (through land-based activities) is a necessary intervention for gender-inclusive and equitable planning.

Lesson five: An “inclusive legal and institutional framework” leads to the segregation of Indigenous communities when (or where) policy implementation is weak; however, community development approaches can help. The study by Durán-Díaz et al. [5] is a regionally relevant work that overlaps between cultural Latin America and geographical North America. They investigated “the status of Indigenous rural women, as well as the mechanisms and impacts of their empowerment” (p. 1). It presents a community development approach as a women-focused land tool or method—based on the Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicacauani organization in Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla—to ensure more effective implementation of programs meant to desegregate Indigenous communities.

Lesson six: A land-use plan meant to convert rural lands into urban plots can become a trigger of tenurial changes and customary land rights disputes. Owusu Ansah and Chigbu [6], in another study on Ghana (Africa), explored the link between peri-urban transformation and emerging customary land rights (CLR) disputes in peri-urban geographies. They found that a land-use plan implemented to develop a functional peri-urban land market contributed to CLR disputes. Going forward, they [6] proposed measures for peri-urban land management and CLR dispute prevention.

Lesson seven: For a Land Rights Act of a country to become responsive to the needs of the youth, a precondition is to embrace community-level interventions. Louis et al.'s [7] study provides insights into the land rights situation of youths in Liberia. They argued for the implementation of the country's Land Rights Act to embrace community-level interventions to improve youth land tenure security in the country. This study provides a land tool (or methods) perspective by using a gender-responsive land rights framework that examines youth land rights through a gender lens.

Lesson eight: Where (and when) agricultural land is acquired for urbanization, it can lead to an increase in the economic status of women in households whose land was acquired. The study by Pham Thi et al. [8] explored agricultural land acquisition for urbanization (ALAFU) in Vietnam. Their key finding indicates that ALAFU has increased the economic status of women in households whose agricultural land was acquired for urbanization. Taking structural gender inequalities into account in agricultural-to-urban land acquisition can be a veritable strategy for achieving gender-responsive sustainable development goals.

Lesson nine: Responsible governance of communal natural resources is only possible when the voices of the disempowered segment of communities, especially those of the women and youth, are heard and respected. This study by Lemke and Claeys [9] explored natural resource governance from a communal perspective, and with a specific focus on the empowerment of women and youths through the promotion of their right to be heard in communal land matters. A point of methodological interest is that they adapted participatory action research (PAR) to the COVID-19 situation. Hence, they present how PAR can be applied under uncertain situations.

Lesson ten: Matrilocal practices positively influence agricultural investment, but even in such a women-friendly customary system, women remain insecure in their landholding. In this study, Benjamin [10] investigates the impact of the customary residence system on agricultural investment, with a particular focus on tea shrub and agroforestry, and productivity among contracted smallholder tea out-growers in southern Malawi. The study concluded that despite the dominance of matrilineal–matrilocal systems in Southern Malawi, there is a need for policy to address gender gaps in the region because women are still insecure in their access and use of land.

Spatial text mining can provide evidence of variability in the degrees of environmental conflict sensitivity, geographically or regionally, leading to policy-relevant information for land or environmental management. Lee and Kim's study [11] found that air quality-related conflicts in South Korea are concentrated in the western municipalities, development-related conflicts are concentrated in the southern region of Jeju Island, and intensive safety-related conflicts occur in the metropolitan areas (especially the city of Ulsan). Their data, when presented in the form of an environmental map, is capable of being used as a tool for country-level land and environmental management decisions.

Land policies are necessary for guiding sustainable flood management in coastal cities and riverine areas. Handayani et al.'s study [12] explored the relationship between urbanization and flood events on the northern coast of Central Java using the river basin as the basis of unit analysis. Their findings show that the growth rate of the built-up area is significantly related to the occurrence of flood events. The study concluded that river basins have a dual spatial identity in the urban system (policy and land-use related). They recommended “problematizing urbanizing river basins” as “an opportunity for an eco-based approach to tackling the urban flood crises”.

Lesson thirteen: Gender inequality and symbolic violence in women's access to family land can be improved through the use of dialectical communication between women and men. Lusasi and Mwaseba [13] investigated land-related gender scenarios in selected villages in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania and found that cases of tree-planting surges in the region cause gender inequality and symbolic violence in women's access to family land. The study advanced a communication tool to reduce gender disparity in land issues. They recommended the use of dialectical communication between women and men to reveal and heal practices of symbolic violence in land accessibility, control, and ownership.

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