

GENDER AND DRYLANDS GOVERNANCE: EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR CHANGE

POLICY BRIEF



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This Policy Brief provides an overview of a study commissioned by the UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification (GPC-Nairobi) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) that explores governance issues and dryland women's empowerment. The research produced a series of reports on dryland women which includes Land Rights (Thematic Paper 1), Governance (Thematic Paper 2) and Resilience (Thematic Paper 3).

Context

Governance refers to decision making by a range of stakeholders, including individuals, both in formal positions of power and 'ordinary' citizens, households, communities and organizations. Each stakeholder brings different interests, leverage and power which establish who decision making is 'by' and 'for'. An active and empowered citizenry is essential to good governance, and vice versa, including the participation of those that are asset-poor and marginalized. Drylands governance is characterized by a diverse array of hybrid forms, including customary systems and manage resource sharing and mobility between groups, state institutions, and a range of civil society and development organizations. These each generate their own forms of 'micro-politics' at the local level.

Spatial marginality and misconceptions about dryland regions have historically led to the exclusion of dryland communities from state governance processes, which have in turn led to inappropriate policies resulting in sustained poverty. Other challenges for dryland governance include low levels of capacity, conflicting stakeholder interests and lack of accountability, and poor opportunities for dryland citizen engagement, in the broader context of wider socio-economic, environmental and demographic change.

The challenges of good governance in the drylands are gendered. In many circumstances, ideas and practices of state citizenship along with community membership in customary systems often reflect a male bias, where recognition of women's rights and their right to participation is ignored. Part of the difficulty lies with the



representation of women, where international rights rhetoric of advancing female participation does not match representation on the ground.

The study 'Gender and drylands governance: empowering women for change' found that significant opportunities exist for facilitating dryland women's empowerment in governance in international research, policy, dialogue and practical action. This includes tackling inadequate representation, recognition and redistribution in dryland governance, in the context of supporting broader processes of democratic governance and values. Effective channels that can be used to support gender justice are in growing investment in dryland governance, democratization and decentralization, supporting the development of new spaces for dryland citizen engagement and women's participation.

Key measures



A wide range of measures is required to achieve women's empowerment in dryland governance. These measures fall into three categories: ensuring the recognition of dryland women's rights to participate in governance processes, facilitating and increasing equal representation for drylands women, leading to improved distribution of women's access to land. This requires key measures in the following areas:

The full recognition of women's rights to participate in governance as citizens of the state and members of dryland communities.

- Full recognition is required of women as equal 'members' of dryland communities and citizens with rights to make and influence decisions and be active agents of change.
- New spaces and opportunities within political processes are needed to secure human rights and facilitate social transformation, recognizing the overall marginalization of communities in governance processes and their need for greater self-determination and the marginalization of women and other excluded social groups within those communities.
- To secure dryland women's rights requires challenging the socio-cultural norms and practices that devalue women's roles and contributions and that prevent their active participation in decision making, while at the same time challenging the spatial and political marginality of drylands in general.

Increasing women's representation in governance systems and decision making needs to be addressed as a priority, from local to international levels.

- Targeted measures are required to increase women's representation in dryland governance institutions and processes, including customary and state institutions and in development projects at the local level.
- Identification of spaces where women have limited bargaining power or influence in decision making, along with locations in which women directly influence, is required to target support and for learning respectively.



- Barriers to women's representation and participation in more formal positions need to be tackled on a short-, medium- and long-term basis, including poverty, illiteracy, lack of education and poor health.
- Capacity strengthening of female leaders and collaborating with women's movements and organizations are all effective pathways for improving women's representation in the drylands.

Recognition and representation can facilitate the redistribution of land rights for women, though additional measures are needed.

- Recognition of women's changing roles in the drylands, along with increased representation, will aid in the redistribution of resources towards women.
- Women's participation in decision making needs to be addressed through tackling barriers to accessing services (social, financial etc.) that support women, which affect both immediate and long-term participation. An improved distribution of resources will ultimately benefit male members of society, as well as women.



Recommendations

The study details a range of strategic actions to build an enabling environment land rights and women's empowerment in the drylands.

Policy actions

1. National governments to support a policy and implementation review to ensure women are represented in governance across all policies, such as those related to the economy and poverty reduction and environment, with attention to territorial and agro-ecological differences and intersecting inequalities.
2. National governments to mainstream gender equality policies within democratization and decentralization initiatives in the drylands.
3. National governments to ratify and implement international conventions and agreements for women's rights and empowerment, good governance and environment in national policy.
4. Local and national governments, with the support of donors and CSOs, to review institutional barriers to women's participation in governance, such as education or literacy requirements in order to run for elections, funding for election campaigns, or the need for identification for voting privileges. These barriers will need to be identified through a comprehensive review of women's participation at local to national levels with specific recommendations to be addressed and monitored.
5. National governments to adopt redistributive policies through progressive taxation and social protection to orientate greater resources to service provision for dryland women.

Institutional actions

6. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to promote women's rights, empowerment and participation in local, regional and national governance, including support to women's groups in civic awareness and voter registration.
7. National governments to establish an inter-ministerial working group on women and governance, including territorial representation, with adequate budget. This should involve academics and CSOs to increase evidence-based policy making towards improving the recognition of gender and dryland issues in policy.
8. National governments to institute quotas for women's participation in governance from local to national levels, supported through a capacity-strengthening programme for women and awareness-raising initiatives with men.
9. National statistics offices to direct effort to improve administration systems to collect gender-disaggregated data on women's participation in governance processes and in accessing services in the drylands in a systematic and comparative way.
10. Ministries of education, with the support of donors, CSOs and research institutes, to review gender issues in education (including adult education) and develop a targeted strategy in the drylands (e.g. scholarships, presentations to girl students, mentorship).
11. Academic institutions to seek support for research on gender and governance in the drylands to inform policy.



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12. Media outlets to support the advancement of female journalists and provide greater exposure to issues of women's rights in the drylands.

Capacity-strengthening actions

13. CSOs to support gender justice through capacity strengthening for communities in gender equality, participatory dialogue and civic engagement. This should be complemented by activities working with local leaders and supporting new female leaders.



14. CSOs, academic institutions and the media to increase awareness of gender, pastoralist and environmental sustainability issues in the drylands, and how policies are implemented in practice. This awareness raising should seek to counter the negative stereotypes of dryland areas to culturally revalue them and women's knowledge and equal rights in particular.

15. Donors to direct investment, as a priority, to strengthening the capacity of local governance structures, state and customary, for gender justice.

16. The international community, national governments, research institutions and CSOs to identify and share good practice (internationally and locally) on pathways for greater gender justice in governance in dryland areas.

Conclusion

Urgent action is needed to ensure that women are recognized as independent rights holders and members of dryland communities and to improve women's representation and participation in governance at all levels. Change is needed on a number of levels, including a stronger policy framework, and greater capacity and gender awareness in local institutions. Further, it is necessary to challenge widespread discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, which prevent dryland women from realizing their rights.



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