

Participatory action research on women and land in Senegal: improving women's access to reliable information

One of the outcomes of the Workshop on Women's Access to Land, organised by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Dimitra in Mbour in 2008, is the establishment of an ambitious action research programme designed to improve and safeguard women's access to land in Senegal. It is being coordinated by the Groupe de Recherche Action sur le Foncier au Sénégal (GRAFOSEN - Senegal Land Action Research Group) and funded by the IDRC. The next stage is to share and validate the findings of the research with partner organisations and local populations, and to launch advocacy campaigns.



In Senegal, as elsewhere, land tenure is a delicate issue, intricately bound up with the social order and individual sensibilities. In rural households, women play a full role in food production, feeding the family and caring for and educating the children. In some cases, they have to shoulder these family responsibilities alone. However, despite their involvement in the economic fabric, women are hardest hit by the poverty associated with the difficulties in accessing and controlling resources such as land, which are linked particularly to patrilineal forms of social organisation.

Improving women's access to and control over land requires large-scale intervention and a commitment to placing people centre-stage, so that they can voice their wishes and fears and share their proposed solutions.

With this in mind, the project "Improving and safeguarding women's access to land in Senegal" has opted for a multidisciplinary action research approach, encompassing sociology, law, economics, agronomy and communication, among other fields. The researchers and users of the research findings engage in a joint 'learning by doing' process based on a detailed survey, data gathering and analysis, feedback and planning.

The action research is being implemented in three areas: Niayes, eastern Senegal and the Senegal River valley.

The research is a collaborative effort between grassroots organisations, NGOs, universities and ministries. Among those, the NGO Enda Protection Naturelle (Pronat), Dimitra partner in the region, which is responsible for coordination, the Groupe d'études et de recherches genre et sociétés (GESTES - Gender and Society Study and Research Group) at the University of Saint-Louis, the University of Dakar, NGOs such as the Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI - African Network for

Integrated Development), the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO.

Objectives and activities

The action research has three specific objectives:

- To present an exhaustive diagnostic on the issue of women's access to land by identifying the barriers to enforcement of the relevant legislation and regulations and their interactions with customary and religious laws.
- To bring about the conditions needed to disseminate and sustain the research findings on this topic by means of a partnership between the various stakeholders aimed at strengthening advocacy and legitimising the actions to be taken.
- To identify and put in place conditions that enable women to access reliable information on the issue of land tenure and express their points of view.

Numerous activities are being implemented to achieve these objectives. The long and crucial stage of compiling an 'inventory' of the situation by means of baseline surveys is now complete. This process enables the researchers to better understand the issue and identify the factors working for and against change.

The information meetings and methodological workshops organised in 2009 confirmed the importance of developing synergies and

involving multiple actors, with a variety of profiles, to make the initiative a success.

In 2010, GRAFOSEN will share the results of the survey with the groups concerned, with a view to validating and building on the findings. Communication activities will be launched, including partnerships with local media outlets aimed at improving women's access to information about (and involvement in) land issues in rural areas. Advocacy work will also be undertaken, primarily to mobilise decision-makers and other players in response to the action research findings.

A gender-based land access database will be developed and made available; effective advocacy tools will be produced and an awareness platform for land policy enforcement set up.

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GRAFOSEN Meeting in Koussanar.