

“Gender inequality - A constraint to economic growth, biodiversity protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development:

- Drylands make up 33 to 41% of the earth’s surface according to different indicators and are home to around 2 billion people, among the poorest and most vulnerable communities of the planet.
- Gender inequality in the drylands, remains a constraint to economic growth, biodiversity protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development as insufficient attention is placed at the local level and the role of women and their contribution to sustainable land management (SLM) practices. The vulnerability dimensions of women in drylands are considerable.
- In many social groups and communities, women have the primary role in a household and are key to the food production processes. They are the main natural resource managers, providers of food security, and repositories of knowledge and expertise on indigenous plants, medicines, food and water. However, in many parts of the world, customary laws do not recognize the ownership of land by women. The same is true for cultural divisions of labour between men and women, which hamper economic growth. Also, gender inequality in financial markets, based on erroneous myths such as women are risky borrowers, still prevails with devastating consequences to future generations.
- These circumstances and many others increase the feminization of poverty in the drylands resulting in women being unable to properly sustain their families. Failure to guarantee equal participation of women in the socio-economic development of the drylands is a price that is becoming increasingly too high to pay. Not only does it reduce the opportunities for cooperation but it also reduces productivity and economic benefits for the local communities that are put at risk to present and future generations.
- Thus, in order to effectively combat *desertification / land degradation and drought (DLDD)* and achieve economic growth, biodiversity protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development, a full and equal participation of both men and women is required.
- The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INCD) on desertification, which launched the UNCCD in 1990, established gender considerations through the participation of men and women in the realization of the ultimate objectives of the convention. The INCD also recognized that participation cannot materialize just by adopting a decision but requires special targeted action that promotes women’s opportunities. To this extent, the UNCCD recognizes that empowering and investing in women is the key to combating the effects of DLDD and paving the way for rural sustainable land management economic development and poverty alleviation
- The Ten-year Strategic Plan and Framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008-2018), includes the elements needed to ensure effective participation of women and men at the local, national and regional levels for local populations, within a framework of policy planning, decision-making and implementation as part of the priorities of DLDD contained in their national action programmes (NAPs).

- Thus the UNCCD 10-year Strategy is in line with the Beijing Platform for action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, chapter 24 of Agenda 21 on the importance of gender mainstreaming as regards combating DLDD issues, on poverty eradication and food security policies and measures.
- Gender-responsive interventions that successfully impact overall productivity, income and natural resource management ought to target development assistance specifically at women, in sectors where women are disadvantaged by social norms. This would catalyze a change process for ending gender discrimination, securing women's access to key resources and enhance economic growth, biodiversity protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development.
- To this extent, it becomes vital to adjust the erroneous perception - typically ingrained in many cultures that gains by women signify loss to men. Such perceptions only exacerbate resistance to change within cultural practices or national customary laws.
- Investments in gender issues should support women farmers access to productive assets.
- Women play a significant role in pastoral communities and are key agents in livelihood development..
- Agriculture may be the area where the special role of women in development is most clear. Clearest basis for synergy among the UN agencies.
- Most small farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are women, but a lot of agricultural interventions do not take that into account. Some field programs aim to increase the productivity of crops without understanding that higher production can mean that women have to work longer and harder in the field, leaving them less time to care for their households; that can undermine the welfare of the household in general. And it has established that when a woman gets cash for her work, she is more likely than her husband to spend it on things like food and school fees.
- Nearly 70% of the 1.2 billion poor are women who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. A majority of these women hardly own or have access to productive assets. In pastoral communities, where assets are communally owned, female-headed households face greater challenges in accessing communal resources.
- Women rarely own land and are often confined to the production of subsistence foods. In Uganda, for example, although 97% of women have access to land, 8% have leaseholds and only 7% actually own land and have access to credit (UN-Habitat, 2002).
- Lack of access to land deepens women's exclusion from participation in land conservation and development projects, agricultural extension work and policy-making processes. Consequently, the land they depend on for sustenance is easily and continually degraded. As the most disadvantaged in asset access and ownership, drylands women encounter great difficulty in adjusting during crises and extreme conditions.
- Establishing partnerships and forums, enhancing capacities, promoting better access to educational opportunities and health care and legalizing women's land rights and ownership are part of the solution. Incorporating gender issues into the entire project life-

cycle stages of initiatives supported by financial mechanisms and organizations that promote sustainable land management in drylands would reinforce these measures. To this end, relevant studies providing insight into dryland women's access to and ownership of assets and gender roles, including women's contributions to carbon offsetting, water management, shelter delivery, food security, sustainable use of biodiversity and payment for environmental services, are indispensable.

- Different types of agricultural biodiversity are used by different people at different times and in different places, and so contribute to livelihood strategies in a complex fashion. Understanding how this use differs according to wealth, gender, age and ecological situation is essential for understanding its contribution to the livelihoods of different members of a community.