

Kick-off event Strengthening Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Land Governance

Report

On December 13th, over 70 policy makers and representatives of civil society organizations, knowledge institutes and the private sector gathered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a kick-off event and photo exhibition on Strengthening Women's Land Rights. Four women from Kenya, Uganda, India and Malawi shared successful examples of grassroots activities, which emphasised the importance of involving grassroots women and women's groups in decision-making procedures to strengthen women's right to use, control, access and take decisions about land. Hereafter, concrete examples on the role of Dutch actors were identified, such as involving women's groups and women's land rights in trade missions and investment projects, and linking expertise on women's land rights with embassies. The insights of this kick-off event will be further developed during follow-up meetings in the upcoming months and discussed with Minister Kaag.

The Director General of International Cooperation, Reina Buijs, shared opening remarks at the beginning of the kick-off event. She emphasized the linkages between Women's Land Rights and national and international commitments by the Ministry, not only with regards to the SDGs and the UN CFS's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs), but especially with regards to the new policy note on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

During the event, Daniëlle Hirsch, director of Both ENDS, invited four female land rights champions to share their experiences: Ellen Matupi (Rural Women Assembly, Malawi); Sostine Namanya (National Association of Professional Environmentalists, Uganda); Snehlatha Nath (Keystone, India); and Catherine Gatundu (Action Aid International Kenya). Daniëlle and these land rights champions explored the linkages between the grassroots experiences and the Dutch policy on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

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"Anchoring women's land rights in the daily practices of policy makers helps to effectively carry out the policy note and achieve at least half of the SDGs, due to important outcomes of strengthened women's land rights: empowerment of women and girls, better family living conditions, improved food security, children's health and education, higher earnings and individual savings, and reduction of domestic violence."

(Reina Buijs, Director General of International Cooperation)



Background

This event took place after Minister Kaag's request in July this year to representatives from Kadaster, Utrecht University, Both ENDS and Rabobank, to assist all departments at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in applying concrete tools to anchor gender equality and women's land rights in the implementation of the new policy note on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. This event was therefore the kick-off of a trajectory of activities on *Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Land Governance* in the months to come. For example, face-to-face meetings with different departments and land rights experts will take place in January 2019. The new insights of the policy makers and the concrete tools that will be identified during these meetings, will be discussed with Minister Kaag at the next High-Level LANDdialogue on the 5th of March 2019.

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Several aspects were highlighted, in linking grassroots experiences and Dutch policies:

- the importance of (support to) women's organisations;
- the engagement of traditional leaders and men in conversations about women's land rights;
- the mapping of land and relationships of women with land by women themselves.

With regards to the role of the Dutch government and Dutch embassies, the women emphasized the importance of providing reliable information, making sure that women are included in consultations, environmental and social impact assessments, and the monitoring of existing and new agreements. It is essential that the government makes sure that businesses comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the VGGTs, including the implementation of FPIC. Grievance mechanisms should be in place to address unfair or non-transparent investments.

By way of closing the event and officially starting the trajectory on Women's Land Rights, Secretary General of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Joke Brandt, opened a photo exhibition displaying the work of grassroots women leaders and other organizations from around the world in strengthening women's ability to exercise their rights to land and play an equal, active role in decision-making around land use and governance. She stressed that discussions about women are always about broader developments in society. This trajectory is therefore just the beginning: let's continue to make noise about it!

What's next...

Land and gender experts are meeting with the different Ministry departments in January 2019

Are you interested in participating in follow-up activities and events, please contact the secretariat of the LANDdialogue: g.betsema@uu.nl



Joke Brandt, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opened the photo exhibition together with the female land rights champions. All photos: Michelle McLinden Nuijen