

Strengthening Women's rights to land

Namibia

Project name	Support to Land Reform
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	All regions in Namibia
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (MLR)
Duration	2003 - 2014

Background

70% of Namibia's population depend on access to communal land for subsistence farming for their livelihood. Securing a piece of land is a fundamental need for rural women to secure their existence. Granting women equal access to land and control over resources is and will remain key in their economic empowerment.

In Namibia, 44% of rural households are headed by females. Most female landowners are widows who inherited the land from their husbands, followed by women who obtained land through divorce or inheritance from families. Since the commencement of the Communal Land Reform Act in 2003, single women can register their land without the consent of family members.

Our approach

Through a very consultative process that included gender activists, Namibia adopted the National Land Policy in 1998 which promotes equal rights, opportunities and security across a range of tenure and management systems for all citizens. The Communal Land Reform Act (Act No. 5 of 2002) was guided by the National Land Policy and aims to provide

greater tenure security in communal areas. Not only is gender equality emphasised in policy development, but the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (MLR) is also encouraged to employ women in land governance institutions. Communal land is administered by Traditional Authorities (TA) and Communal Land Boards (CLB). At least four of the CLB members have to be women. On average, women are represented with a total of 44.8 % in the regional CLBs (CLB Report 2012/ 13). Furthermore, women are well represented within the senior management of the MLR. In October 2013, 41 (54 %) men and 35 (46 %) women worked specifically on the Communal Land Rights Registration programme.

Training

The Farmers' Support Project (FSP) has been supported by the GIZ since 2010. The project enhances the competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of farmers and supports them to improve their farming practices. FSP keeps a gender disaggregated attendance record which illustrates female participation ratios in their activities. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 explain how many farmers have been reached through mentorship and training related activities from 2010 - 2012 in the Northern Communal Areas (NCA). It is evident that the number of female farmers reached through the FSP is steadily increasing.

"Land and property rights are not an end in themselves, but a means for a better livelihood for women and their families. If women are not economically capable of sustaining their livelihoods, they will not be able to maintain their land and property" (National Conference on Women's Land and Property Rights and Livelihoods, Windhoek, 2005).



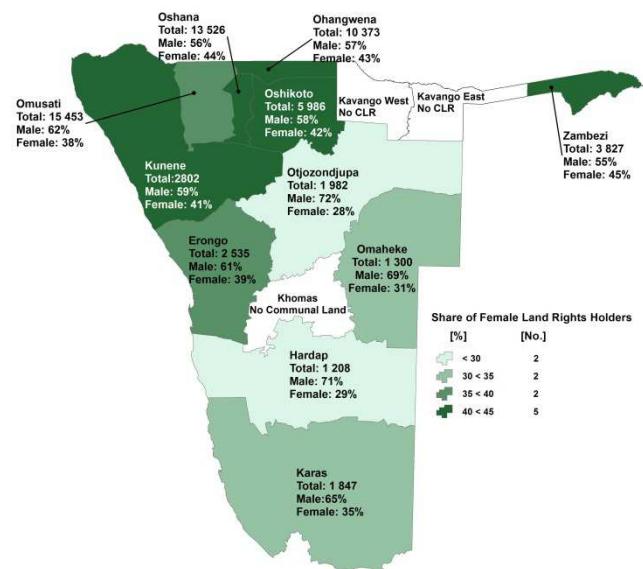
L. to r.: Employees of MLR verify boundaries and owners of land parcels; a woman is showing her certificate of registration

Awareness Raising through Physical Theatre Performance

The Ombetja Yehinga Organisation (OYO) is a Namibian Trust using the Arts to create social awareness. Through a unique non-verbal communication strategy, the dance troupe tours in various communities to address social issues. Women in rural areas of Namibia are often still unaware of the legal provisions on women's right to land, thus they do not register their land right.

OYO was contracted to produce a 15-minute long piece, 'If only', promoting the registration of communal land rights. Through dancing, the piece illustrated how women and children can benefit by registering their communal land parcel.

Since communal land rights registration is highly political, the piece created a catalyst for further discussions, promoted behavior change and encouraged people to register their land. The piece specifically provoked discussions on the role of women within the customary land tenure system.



Map of Communal Land Rights Registration (Source: MLR, 2013)

Achievements

1. High number of women in land governance institutions,
2. 41.5% of women are registered with secure land use rights in accordance with the Communal Land Reform Act (July 2013),
3. Increasing number of female farmers reached through mentorship and training related activities in communal areas.

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