

# ACHIEVING DRYLAND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IMPERATIVES

## 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), in order to explore resilience issues with respect to 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

Dryland peoples face significant challenges from environmental, demographic and socio-economic trends, and the added threat of climate change. These challenges are exacerbated by the generic and multi-faceted marginalization of drylands areas resulting from persistent myths and misconceptions and a history of highly inappropriate policies, under-investment, poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation.

Women play an important role in drylands development, managing land, crops, forest and water resources, which affect the livelihood options of families. However, women face particular kinds of discrimination and experience worse outcomes on core development indicators than national averages.

Widespread discrimination, inequality and stereotypes are preventing women's participation in decision making and the realization of their human rights. Gender equality rooted in human rights is an essential development goal and at the same time is vital to achieving sustainable and inclusive drylands.

Resilience is a key concept, adopted by research communities and by many international agencies and donors, that encourages thinking on how drylands and the people who live there can, in the short term, be more able to recover from shocks, and in the long term be transformed for the better.



The study **'Achieving dryland women's empowerment: environmental resilience and social transformation imperatives'**, commissioned by the UNDP Global Policy Centre on Resilient Ecosystems and Desertification (GPC-Nairobi) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), found there are major opportunities to strengthen the resilience of dryland environments and for women to actively contribute to and benefit from sustainable drylands development.

## Key measures

A wide range of measures is required to achieve dryland resilience and to transform gender relations, and thereby empower women. These measures fall into three categories: ensuring the **recognition** of dryland women's rights, facilitating equal **representation** for drylands women and securing the **redistribution** of resources for more equitable development.

**Ensuring the full recognition of women's rights means achieving widespread acceptance that women are equal members of dryland communities.**

- As citizens, women should have equal rights to participate in decision making from the community to national levels. Women should receive high-quality government basic services, and have equitable access to appropriate resources, networks and markets.
- The value of women's indigenous and local knowledge should be fully acknowledged by policy makers.
- Action is required where customary norms are less positive for women, especially specific practices which undermine women's health, wellbeing and dignity, but also where women are not recognized as value chain actors, or equally able to influence household decision making, or access education and health services.
- Enabling women to realize their human rights requires raising the awareness of both women and men on the importance of tackling gender inequalities. The value of adaptive pastoral livelihood systems, particularly the element of mobility, should also be recognized.
- All policies and programmes should be aware of the fact that women frequently have more limited influence in decision making, higher work burdens, and less secure rights to resources, and should seek to change this for the benefit of women themselves, their households and their communities.

**Women's representation in all kinds of decision making within customary and statutory systems must be improved.**

- Change has to be facilitated within household decision making so that women's rights to participation are recognized by their male relatives and so that any government services or development interventions such as climate adaptation programmes play out in more equitable ways. As well as ensuring that women have greater influence in household decision making, they need to be involved in the design of more effective services and their delivery. In addition to

extending the coverage of service delivery, it is necessary to build upon the strengths of dryland people's adaptive livelihood systems, which fit with the structural variability of dryland climates by working with pastoralists' mobility, and draw upon new approaches to social learning to develop locally tailored solutions.

- Social protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, market development and livelihood development schemes should utilize the generic lessons of resilience thinking, as well as the potential insights it provides about how social change may occur or be encouraged – such as the importance of social learning and multi-stakeholder processes to develop locally tailored solutions, action across multiple scales, and recognizing where variability is the norm. Managing resources and organizations adaptively is important in responding to uncertainty.
- Capacity strengthening is needed to increase the presence of women in delivering key services to dryland women, such as community animal health work, and in programming and policy design so that they are more gender equitable.
- Development interventions, such as social protection or climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes, should build women's participation, ensure high-quality understanding of gender relations and how different forms of discrimination interact, and build upon promising household approaches in gender action planning.
- Where resilience assessments are conducted, steps are needed to ensure high-quality representation by diverse groups of women and marginal groups, and to ensure recognition of women's strategic interests.







**Measures are needed to ensure a redistribution of resources.**

- Social protection measures are an important means of moving beyond short-term disaster relief and, where they are climate sensitive, there is evidence that they can support longer-term resilience in ways that benefit women.
- Improvements for women are needed in a range of areas, including basic social services such as health, education, animal health, appropriate research and advisory services and social protection; access to resilient crop and livestock markets, livestock development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable land management. 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 for resilient drylands and women's empowerment.

**Policy actions**

1. National governments, with the support of donors, should undertake more fine-grained, regional or national studies on dryland resilience and women's empowerment to inform effective policy making and implementation.
2. National governments to adopt redistributive policies, including social protection measures, such as cash and asset transfers and livestock index-based insurance to improve dryland resilience, taking steps to ensure they are gender equitable.
3. National governments to adopt policies which enable improved health and education service provision in dryland areas, to deliver improved access for dryland women and more appropriate approaches and forms of delivery.
4. National governments to adopt policies which enable improved animal health service provision in dryland areas, to deliver improved access for dryland women and more appropriate approaches and forms of delivery; opportunities to combine animal and human health service delivery to mobile populations should be taken up in government policy.
5. National governments to adopt policies which deliver improvements in dryland women's access to climate change adaptation and mitigation opportunities, sustainable land management programming and development initiatives, including women's economic empowerment.
6. National governments to adopt policies to promote private sector sourcing from women producers, while also filling the gaps for harder to reach groups, and to undertake studies to assess the potential for sustainable procurement programmes, including those that favour women producers.

**Institutional actions**

7. Governments, with support from international donors, to support funding lines for gender-equitable climate change and rural development policy implementation and programming for dryland areas.
8. Governments, donors and researchers to fund and facilitate resilience assessments that are needed for particular dryland areas engaging with all key stakeholders and ensuring gender equity in the process of assessment and identification of priorities for action to strengthen dryland resilience.
9. Ministries and departments of education, animal and human health, agricultural and livestock extension, with donor support, to review gender issues in service delivery, developing strategies in a participatory fashion with users, and identifying approaches that tackle problematic gender norms and work with structural variability and mobility. Investment is needed to extend coverage in dryland regions.
10. Academic institutions should seek support for research on gender and resilience in the drylands, to inform policy and programming. This research should generate context-specific analyses on how gender relations and outcomes are changing with respect to dryland dynamics and resilience, and to help identify new opportunities and appropriate policies and strategies. Specific research gaps to fill include evaluating what works in different contexts for women's empowerment in social protection, human and animal health and education, livestock livelihoods and diversification strategies, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Action research should be a priority, as well as support for South-South learning, particularly peer-learning processes and identifying how gender and social norms can be changed and improved for the benefit of all.



11. National governments to facilitate high-level policy dialogues with academics, civil society organizations and journalists to increase the demand, uptake and use of evidence on resilience and gender in policy making. In particular, fora are recommended on dryland women's climate-resilient, economic empowerment to capture the opportunities that exist and to find ways to mitigate risks.



## Capacity-strengthening actions

12. National governments, donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) to support capacity-strengthening programmes to support resilient dryland development in ways that empower women and other marginal groups. Approaches which are participatory in nature and engage with stakeholders across different scales will be needed. Further, efforts should be made to support experimentation and social learning given the (growing) uncertainties in dryland areas. Programmes are needed that tackle the gamut of issues of importance to dryland women, including education, health, social protection, livestock (especially smaller stock) and non-livestock livelihoods.
13. CSOs to support gender justice involving whole communities, in particular men and local leaders, to challenge discriminatory social norms and harmful practices.
14. CSOs, academic institutions and the media to increase awareness of gender, pastoralist and environmental sustainability issues in the drylands. 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 and CSOs to support the strengthening of the capacity of local government with respect to resilience and gender equity.
16. The international community, national governments, research institutions and CSOs to identify and share good practice (internationally and locally) on pathways for women's empowerment in resilient dryland development.



## Conclusion

Ensuring and achieving greater environmental resilience is urgently needed – this will require measures to sustain the current state of dryland ecosystems or measures to enhance or restore them. However, in the social sphere, there is also a clear need for transition or transformation in most contexts to enable women to realize their human rights and to strengthen the resilience of drylands now and for the challenging times ahead. Change is needed with more appropriate and enabling policies, measures to change societal attitudes and behaviours, and better development programming and research; ultimately, dryland women will lead the process of their own empowerment.



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