

CASE STUDY

Tillabéri, Niger



Community Listeners' Club finds solution to secure access to land for women

Innovative approaches can help secure women's access to land in areas where land is traditionally controlled by men. FAO-Dimitra uses radio and community listener's clubs to facilitate communication about women's access to land in traditional communities. In the village of Banizoumbou in Niger dialogue around land through radio and listeners' groups influenced social dynamics and helped women secure a 99-year lease on agricultural land.

PRINCIPAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Dimitra Community Listeners' Clubs (CLCs)
America's Development Foundation (ADF)
FAO-Dimitra
ONG-VIE Kande ni Bayra
International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)

LOCATION

Banizoumbou Village,
Commune de Dantoandou, Tillabéri, Niger

TIMELINE

2010 - present

TARGET AUDIENCE

Civil society, policy makers, communities

KEYWORDS

Tenure security, land innovation, livelihood, radio, inclusive decision-making

INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION

UNITED
FOR LAND
RIGHTS



GOOD PRACTICES

towards making land governance more people-centred

This case study is part of the ILC's Database of Good Practices, an initiative that documents and systematises ILC members and partners' experience in promoting people-centred land governance, as defined in the Antigua Declaration of the ILC Assembly of Members. Further information at www.landcoalition.org/what-we-do

This case study supports people-centred land governance as it contributes to:

- Commitment 1** Respect, protect and strengthen the land rights of women and men living in poverty
- Commitment 4** Ensure gender justice in relation to land
- Commitment 7** Ensure that processes of decision-making over land are inclusive

Case description

Background issues

In Niger men control land access in rural areas. As a result, there are great disparities between women and men's access to land. Although women are responsible for food production, women's access to land is limited by patriarchal land governance systems and the inconsistency between the various sources of law. While customary law prohibits women from owning land and Islamic Law (used to settle most inheritance disputes) makes provision for women to inherit half of what a man inherits, the Niger Civil Code secures women's access to land (FAO-Dimitra Project 2008). Women, however, do not demand property rights to be enforced because they fear their families will retaliate.

There are disparities between men and women in terms of access to information and communication on health, education and control of land and other productive resources. These disparities are blamed on women's domestic roles, early marriage, the high cost of education and their limited access to land and other productive resources (Lalh 2010).

In order to tackle this problem, FAO-Dimitra introduced the concept of 'Community Listeners' Clubs' (CLCs). A community listeners' club is "a group of men and women who wish to listen to radio programmes actively and systematically with a view to discussing the content and above all putting into practice the lessons learned" (FAO-Dimitra Project 2011). CLCs promote discussion and stimulate active participation in the life of the community by jointly analysing the community's problems and taking concrete actions to ensure sustainable development.

FAO's CLCs' project covers the broadcast area of nine community radio stations in the Tillabéri and Dosso regions. Banizoumbou - Tillabéri - has high quality land and is located near an artesian well.

Solution

Thanks to a platform that - through CLCs - relies on inclusive decision-making, the land rights of women and men living in poverty were strengthened. Women could secure long-term land rights. A 99 year lease was signed in 2011, giving women control over 2.75 hectares of land. Gender justice in relation to land was ensured by redistributing land in a way that increased women's access to valuable livelihood assets. This initiative changed the way in which men and women view and relate to land.

Activities

Creation of Clubs

In 2010, FAO and the ONG-VIE Kande ni Bayra set up CLCs in Banizoumbou. The initiative was soon a great success, attracting the participation of many of the village's inhabitants (108 men and 33 women). The clubs' members met on a regular basis (three times a week) and identified and discussed topics such as food security, sanitation, access to water and land, nutrition, market gardening, early marriage, etc. Discussions were often followed by joint action.

Separate CLC groups were created for men, women and youth to avoid women's marginalisation. Each club was given a solar-powered wind-up radio and a mobile phone. Members would listen to the radio, exchange experiences, and decide on the actions to take. Groups also came together to share information.

After a few months of activity, the listeners' clubs around Dantiandou decided to look at the key issue of women's access to land. A debate was organised through Famay Community Radio to give the floor to the women of the listeners' clubs and other radio listeners to exchange views and suggest solutions for this problem. Lending land to individuals or groups through a formalized long-term contract was found to be the easiest solution to secure land for women.

Community mobilisation

More than 200 women were drawn from the community and trained as CLC facilitators. The main task of a facilitator is to organise, monitor and support CLCs to ensure they adhere to Dimitra-CLCs' principles. Facilitators must also guarantee that village meetings are well prepared; make sure participants have a strong sense of ownership; supervise the implementation of decisions; communicate with CLCs' partners and build on lessons learned. Finally, they have to oversee the relationship of CLCs with radio stations and with each other.

Inclusive village meetings to raise awareness about the CLCs were used to mobilise the community and identify the different interests in the village. During these meetings FAO underscored the importance of villagers finding solutions to their own problems. Two introductory workshops were held to establish a baseline for monitoring progress on the basis of gender, participatory communication and networking, and to give FAO an insight into local dynamics. This was useful to adjust the global programme to the local context, as well as to identify individuals that FAO could work with. Workshops enhanced participants' awareness of Dimitra's principles of action-oriented participation, ownership and gender equity. In addition, they stimulated teamwork, synergy and people's familiarity with the fundamentals of radio listeners' clubs.

External support mobilisation

FAO benefitted from the support of an influential local chief, who knew the dynamics of the community and was the entry point into the village. The initiative also leveraged the existing village literacy centre for school drop-outs.

Besides lobbying the village chief, women engaged in discussions with a prominent religious leader, who mobilised 98 landowners to discuss their proposal. The men's club listened to the relevant radio debate and expressed views on the strategies they considered acceptable for giving women access to land.

The ONG-VIE Kande ni Bayra - a local NGO with a well-established network - assisted women in negotiating with the government for water. The Ministry of Hydraulics pledged to support the planned irrigation project. The women's request was accepted and they could secure themselves water.

Ten months after signing the contract, the women's group successfully negotiated funding from ADF to build a fence, reservoirs, a shop, a literacy centre and pipelines for irrigation; to choose the best crops for the area (with the support of ICRISAT); and to implement market gardening and marketing activities. The group also created their own farmers' organisation and joined a farmers' union to negotiate value chain access.

Engagement of women

CLCs ensured the participation of women by adopting a gender sensitive approach throughout the process. Facilitators and journalists were trained. Women were appointed as facilitators; actively encouraged to participate; put at ease through the establishment of women-only groups. The activities of the CLCs raised awareness on gender inequality in households and in the community and served as encouragement to take action on it. Collective dialogue on gender issues and CLC dialogue platforms provided a more inclusive platform than the traditional top-down mechanisms, and produced heated discussions between men and women. CLCs invested in awareness raising for both men and women on the importance of women's involvement in decision-making and emphasised the need for improving women's access to land, CLCs, community radios, training and leadership.

Importance of the case for people-centred land governance

This case is an example of constructive collaboration on gender justice in relation to land between the community, civil society organisations, the government and development partners. The sustainability of this collaboration is given by different factors: the initiative was driven by the community and particularly the women in the community; it could mobilise support from various development partners; it culminated in the achievement of a long-term lease over land and other productive resources. The land rights of women living in poverty were strengthened thanks to the CLCs providing an innovative platform through which women could secure their rights. Women moved from having dependent land rights - negotiated from men - that allowed them to use land for subsistence production only, to a situation in which they could make long-term intergenerational investments.

Changes

Baseline

Before the CLCs' initiative, men controlled land and women had insecure use rights. The community's livelihoods were vulnerable because of the lack of income sources. Women performing agricultural work could not make long term investments in land as they did not have any tenure security. The community was unable to mobilise the support of partners. Due to the absence of a local platform, issues could not be discussed.

Achievements

CLCs gave women a platform through which they could organise themselves and improve their livelihoods. They could secure land, attract development partners, improve agricultural production and generate income for their households. CLCs contributed to the following:

Mobilising the community

The CLCs provided the community with platforms around which they could congregate. Thereafter they were able to discuss issues that affected them. This empowered the community and women groups to discuss community issues and issues affecting women, such as those connected with their access to productive resources.

Sharing information

The CLCs allowed people to share information, which participants could use to analyse their situation, hear from people in other communities, identify and take advantage of opportunities within and beyond their village.

Securing land

Secure tenure enabled women to make long term investments for domestic and commercial agricultural production. These included investments regarding water and other infrastructure.

Attracting development partners

After signing the lease, investors were involved. ICRISAT and the Association ADLI provided financial, mechanical and technical support. Thanks to it, women could harness water and increase their agricultural production.

Improving agricultural production

The women's group decided to use three hectares of their land for vegetable production. In December 2013 they had already harvested three times. Women reported that 50 households were benefitting from this plot. Fruit trees had been planted. Two thirds of the production had been sold and one third used by group members according to their needs and desires. In 18 months profits reached 2.6 million of FCFA (about 5400 USD).

Accessing markets

Through their farmers' organisation and participation in a farmers' union, women could negotiate access to markets around the village.

Increasing women's self-confidence

CLCs' women members showed an increase in self-confidence and responsibility for their rights in the village. Their knowledge about health, nutrition and the technical aspects of agriculture was also enhanced.

"In Niger, which is one of the world's poorest countries, some of the rural women had never listened to the radio before. If anyone had radios, usually it was men. When women began to hear their own voices on the radio... you can imagine their reaction. They heard themselves on the radio, talking about issues that mattered to them. It was a very empowering experience".

Elaine Najros, Dimitra
Project Coordinator

Evidence

CLCs provided a space where three times a week people could meet, discuss and solve conflicts. The community mobilised to address strategic issues, such as access to water. There were positive changes in the behaviour, practices and perceptions of men and women about land access, water, information, education and local governance structures (FAO 2011). Women were invited to participate in village meetings (FAO-Dimitra 2008).

Lessons learned

Lessons for civil society

There is a need for innovative thinking about communities faced with multiple problems. It is important to use an approach that does not directly threaten the status quo - in Banizoumbou's case the patriarchal land holding system. The creation of alternative institutions in the community provides opportunities through which the sensitive issue of land can be tackled without clashing directly with traditional structures.

It is counterproductive to exclusively focus on tangible immediate benefits. In this case collective action was used to address gender gaps and mobilise a critical mass of people to gradually renegotiate land tenure.

A localised approach is effective. In Banizoumbou it provided the basis for mobilising other partners.

A bottom-up approach - based in this case on rural populations' involvement and on their ownership of the CLCs - generates realistic courses of action.

Lessons for policy makers

In order to successfully replicate this initiative, a policy environment that facilitates the establishment of community listeners' clubs is a precondition. Policy makers must collaborate in the development of partnerships between communities and other actors. It is also important that decentralised land governance is in place. In Banizoumbou this made obtaining a lease and access to water easier.

Work in isolated rural areas is not necessarily preceded by intensive infrastructural development. Through social media and information technology it is possible to initiate bottom up development processes. Communities can tackle their problems and prioritise them according to their needs. This approach yields more relevant projects.

Technology (the radio in Banizoumbou's case) to avail information to communities can be used to facilitate learning, development and community problem solving.

Challenges

This kind of initiative does not provide, unlike many development projects, inputs or financial support to participants. It stimulates capacity development, which - however - is not always easily and immediately accepted as project result. Efficient sensitization sessions are crucial at the beginning of the project to make sure the initiative's approach is well understood and there are not any false expectations: ownership of the process plays a key role.

Another challenge is building a partnership between CLCs and community radio stations, without providing economic support to the radios. These often lack resources to visit communities and produce good programmes. In Banizoumbou this difficulty was overcome by providing some equipment to radios as well as training in communication.

It took at least eight months for land negotiations to reach a conclusion because land parcels belonged to different families. An agreement to support the initiative had to be found within each one.

Follow-up

The potential for scaling up this solution is very high in areas where communities are isolated, disorganised and women face marginalisation in land access and have limited access to information and communication technology. The critical factors for duplication are the commitment and support of FAO-Dimitra; the flexible methodology that emphasises a gender sensitive approach; the existence of a methodology applicable to the local context that can be used to transfer knowledge to other communities.

Supporting material

References and further reading

Lalh, 2010. Giving voice to rural women and men through Dimitra, <http://www.urgentevoke.com/profiles/blogs/learn-6-12>

Dimitra, 2002. Relaunch Workshop, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/ap535e/ap535e.pdf>

FAO-Dimitra Project, 2011. Community's Listeners Club. Stepping Stones for Action in Rural Areas. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/am604e/am604e.pdf>

FAO-Dimitra Project, 2008. Land access in rural Africa: Strategies to fight gender inequality. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ak159e.pdf>

FAO-Dimitra Workshop: Information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality as regards land access and its consequences for rural populations in Africa. 22-26 September 2008. Brussels, Belgium. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ak159e.pdf>

Dimitra Newsletter, <http://www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-publications/>

Dimitra Publications, <http://www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-publications/publications/it/>

Photos, videos

FAO-Dimitra video, Banizoumbou, Niger
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYS_wDvB4_4

FAO-Dimitra video, Gassedou, Niger
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7FF4ZmkrcE

Contacts

FAO-Dimitra

Social Protection Division
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome
Italy
Tel: +39-06-570.56574

Web: <http://www.fao.org/dimitra/home/en/>



All our publications are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). The contents of this work may be freely reproduced, translated and distributed provided that attribution is given to the International Land Coalition and the article's authors and organisation. Unless otherwise noted, this work may not be utilised for commercial purposes. For more information, comments, as well as copies of any publication using it as source please contact info@landcoalition.org or go to <http://creativecommons.org/>

Suggested citation: Bottaro, M. and Paradza, G. (2015) *Community Listeners' Club finds solution to secure access to land for women*. Case study of the ILC Database of Good Practices. Rome: ILC.

ILC is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to put people at the centre of land governance. The shared goal of ILC's 207 members is to realise land governance for and with people at country level, responding to the needs and protecting the rights of women, men and communities who live on and from the land.

Authors: Mauro Bottaro (FAO), and Gaynor Paradza (ILC Secretariat).

Last updated: August 2015. Printed on recycled/FSC paper.

INTERNATIONAL LAND COALITION SECRETARIAT

at IFAD, Via Paolo di Dono 44 , 00142 - Rome, Italy tel. +39 06 5459 2445 fax +39 06 5459 3445
info@landcoalition.org | www.landcoalition.org