

Abstract

Land in Sub-Saharan Africa has been subject to many transformative events that increased its value. The resulting land scarcity triggered practices such as land commodification and land grabbing. These practices had negative impact on rural communities and women more particularly. Initially, women land rights were limited due to customary rights, however globalization worsened their situation.

For many years, development practitioners, scholars and activist raised their voices to claim secured land rights to women. As a result, many governments implemented land reforms aiming at closing the gender gap and promote women development.

In Mali, new land policies addressed women situation and formulated provisions to reform women land rights.

The role of this thesis was to describe the prevailing conflicts between customary laws and women rights in Mali and to examine the governmental land reforms impact on women land rights.

Relevant papers, books and reports related to women land rights in Sub-Saharan Africa under customary and statutory laws were examined. Moreover, Mali land tenure laws and National Gender Policy were examined. A framework inspired by the Gender, Agriculture and Assets Project (GAAP) conceptual framework was used.

This study suggests that governments should rely on customary laws to promote effective and sustainable women land rights. Hence participatory projects that include rural communities and customary chiefs are believed to have more impact on women access to and control over land.

In addition to participatory approaches for land reforms, empowering women in other areas of their lives such as health, education, access to financial institution and access to equipment seems necessary to allow them to benefit from their land rights.

In Mali, many efforts have been made in order to promote women rights. Women land rights however are still poorly secured despite of the existence of law texts protecting them and promoting gender equity in access to land.

To be able to secure women land rights effectively, Mali needs to translate its laws into concrete actions. It is also believed that including women in every level of policy conception, implementation and evaluation is essential to promote their rights.

Key words: Women Land Rights, customary rights, sub-Saharan Africa, governmental land reforms.