

GENDER

A PIECE OF LAND TO CALL HER OWN

Land is important for women not just because it enables them to grow food. It is also a form of wealth, somewhere to live, a source of independence and bargaining power, and a means to obtain credit and government services.

Nearly half the world's farmers are women. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in 2010 women accounted for 43 percent of the agricultural labour force worldwide, with wide regional variations. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean women make up 21 percent of the population economically active in agriculture, but 43 percent in Asia (outside of Japan) and 49 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. In a total of 30 countries, the majority of farmers are women. In Mozambique, the figure is 67.3 percent; in Lesotho, 65.2 percent. Libya ranks highest, with women representing 69.9 percent of the agricultural labour force.

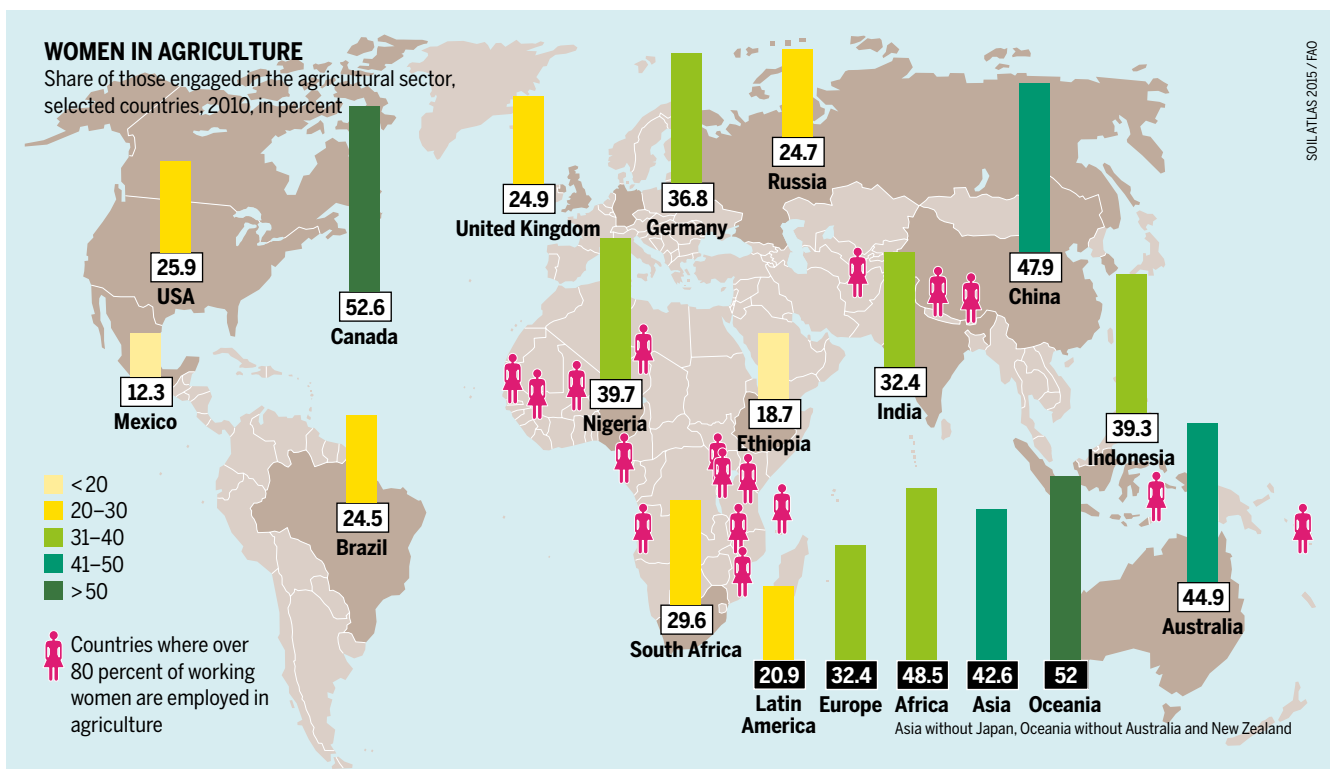
For women in many countries, farming is by far the most important source of livelihood. In Burundi, Rwanda, Niger and Nepal, more than 95 percent of all economically active women work in agriculture. In Germany, by contrast, the figure is 1.3 percent; in the United Kingdom, it is less than 1 percent.

Thus, women are important for agriculture and agriculture is important for women – at least in less industrialized countries. However, women are often discriminated against when it comes to land, an important asset, not only for agri-

culture. The legal situation can be very complex. Social scientists distinguish between the rights of access, ownership and control. Gender-specific data collection regarding these intertwined forms of land rights is only available for a handful of countries. In all three points, women may face disadvantages. For example:

- A woman may have the right to access a piece of land; she may be able to plant crops or keep livestock there. But she may not be allowed to decide what crops to grow. These decisions may be made by her husband, her male relatives, the clan or the government. In addition, other people may have the right to harvest fruit or collect firewood there.
- If a woman owns a piece of land, it means that she can use the land, prevent others from using it, and rent it out or sell it. In countries where data are available, women are often far less likely to own land than men; the share of female landowners ranges from 51 percent in Cape Verde, to just 5 percent in Kenya and 1 percent in Saudi Arabia. In Paraguay, women own 27 percent of the total farmland.
- Even if a woman owns the land, she may lack control over it. Women in many countries cannot inherit land, and they may not be able to buy or sell it without their husbands' permission. It is often assumed that women will be cared for by their fathers, husbands and male relatives. But re-

Wherever farming is a man's job, women are excluded: they are expected to take care of the children and the home

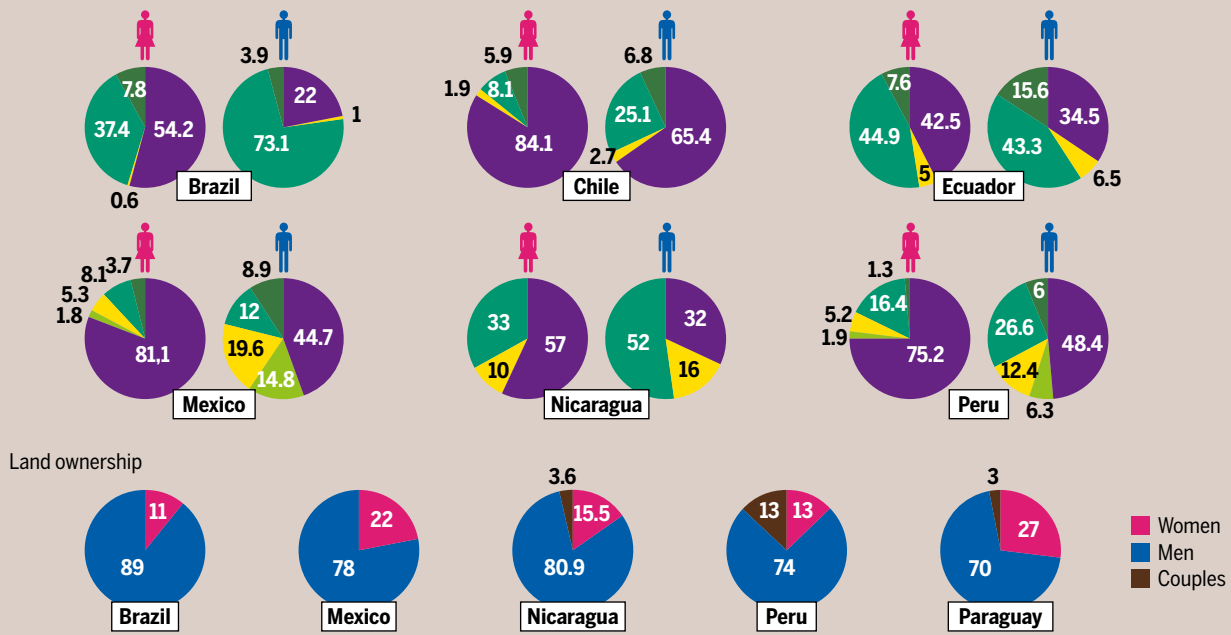


LAND ACQUIRED BY WOMEN, MEN AND COUPLES

The gender asset gap in Latin America

Land acquisition by type, selected countries, in percent

Through inheritance Through community From the government From the market Other



SOIL ATLAS 2015 / DEERE & LEÓN

ality may well be different. If a woman gets divorced, or if her husband dies, she may lose the house she lives in and the land where she grows food. Only one-third of widows in 16 sub-Saharan African countries inherit the majority of their spouses' estate; more than half get nothing. Likewise, when a woman gets married, she may leave her parents' house to join her husband; it is her brothers who then usually inherit the parents' land.

Property laws for women have been improved in some countries. In Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia, those who evict widows from their lands can now be prosecuted. In Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela, widows must be included in wills. In Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, India and Rwanda, both daughters and sons are legally entitled to a share of their parents' land. These rules are an improvement, but they are not necessarily enforced. Sons may still be favoured through a will or by being awarded more and better quality land. And traditional rules and customs often trump the formal legal system.

How do women become landowners? Inheritance – despite traditional and legal barriers – remains the most common means. Women are much less likely than men to buy land, or to have it allocated by the community or state. Neoliberal, market-centred policies have put large-scale land reforms out of fashion; many countries now instead focus on providing formal land titles, at times specifically to women. Titles may also be granted to a couple jointly; programmes that do this have quadrupled the share of registered women landowners in Ethiopia and Colombia. But well-intentioned

Women who own land often have more freedom to make decisions than if they rent their plots

schemes may backfire. In Kenya, Mozambique and the Solomon Islands, new laws ignored traditional user rights and transferred land ownership to men. Women who previously had access to the land lost that access as a result.

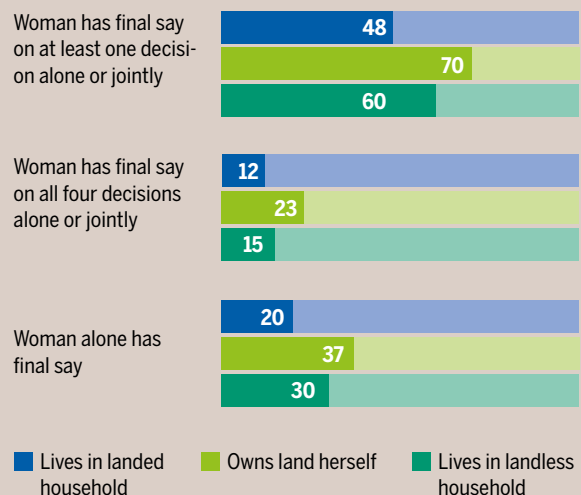
Solutions will depend on the situation. Overall, governments should remove gender discrimination in both formal and traditional law, inform women and men about their rights, train staff and improve land administration systems, and ensure that women's voices are heard. ●

LAND OWNERSHIP MEANS MORE AUTONOMY

Survey in Nepal, 2001, responses in percent

Married women decide alone or with their husbands about:

- their own health care
- large household purchases
- daily purchases
- visits to family, friends and relatives



SOIL ATLAS 2015 / ALLENDORF