

RIGHTS FOR ACTION

Putting People at the Centre of Action on Climate Change



CASE STUDY 3:

THE RIGHT TO ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Access to information on land rights builds women's and community resilience to climate impacts in Niger

Alima Mamadou, technical assistant for the Women and Land Initiative at CARE Niger (centre left), and Aichatou Salaou, vice-president of HIMMA (centre right) from Niger alongside Aissatou Ndao from Senegal (far left) and Cecilia Kibe from Kenya (far right) attended the Hunger – Nutrition – Climate Justice conference in Ireland in 2013 to represent grassroots women's perspectives and talk about the impacts of the lack of rights, particularly in the areas of farming and land ownership. Dublin, 2013. (Credit: Sophie Molins)

This case study is compiled as part of the resource "Rights for Action", first published by the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice in August 2015. The full resource is available on www.mrfcj.org.



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Niger is a landlocked and predominantly desert country that stretches across the African Sahel. The country is one of the most climate vulnerable in the world, with recurrent drought exacerbating desertification and threatening food security. Women in Niger are primarily responsible for food and nutrition security yet existing gender inequalities mean that women can be prevented from accessing land, particularly if they are widowed, making it almost impossible to feed their families. This in turn results in high malnutrition rates and increased infant mortality.

CARE Niger has been working with local communities since 2010 to secure land rights for women to increase their involvement in agriculture and reduce their vulnerability to climate impacts and food insecurity. This work has taken a rights based approach which ensures the access to information on land rights for women in vulnerable situations, the participation of women in community discussions and decision making on access to and control over land.

One such woman, Rahamou, from the Maradi region of Niger, has benefitted from this rights based approach. Rahamou lives in Sarkin Yamma with her husband and eight children. When her father died 19 years ago she did not know that she had rights to a share of his land. This is an all too typical experience for women in the region. Because of their traditional exclusion from some or all farming activities, many women are unable to produce with high nutritive and economic value. When Rahamou learned about her rights she claimed her share of the land from her brothers. Now she is using her portion of the land to cultivate millet, sorghum and beans to feed her family and supplement the income she earns from plaiting hair and knitting¹.

CARE is now working with 3,000 women in 30 municipalities, most of whom do not have access to land and live with the daily reality of food insecurity. The initiative is raising awareness of the benefits of women's land ownership and addressing cultural taboos to secure the support of local leaders for women's rights. The rights based approach adopted by CARE is supported by Niger's legal system, particularly The Rural Code (1993) which defines a legal framework for land management and planning and protects 'rural actors by recognizing their rights'. The Code established local conventions or land use agreements in communities. Through their engagement in these conventions, women can participate in negotiations on the use of communal lands that are important sources of wild foods and medicinal plants. This access to resources from communal land is important during the dry season and in times of drought when they provide an important boost to food and nutrition security.

The rights based approach has enabled women to gain access to land and increase their resilience. Some women's groups have leased land for their own use while other groups have been given land to plant by the local community. Women are also buying land and exercising their rights to inherit land as per the Land Act. Previously women were unaware of their rights or impeded from exercising their right to inherit land due to customary practices. Importantly, the word is spreading as women share the benefits of having their own land and growing their own food to feed their family. Once women have established their land rights, access to training, credit, improved seeds and irrigation can further increase resilience to climate impacts.

Designing adaptation responses that protect the rights of smallholder subsistence farmers, particularly women - like Rahamou - can bring about benefits that increase food security, enable economic empowerment and ultimately community support for climate action.



Find out more about women and climate change
<http://www.mrfcj.org/leaders-forum-on-women-leading-the-way.php>

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FACT: If women worldwide had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30% and raise total agricultural output by 2.5–4%.²

Women's Right to Equal Access to Land - Lessons learned

- a) Communities are more resilient when their rights are realised. Improved access to information and facilitated dialogue empowers people to claim and exercise their rights so that they can combat the food insecurity and under nutrition caused by climate change.
- b) Engaging local leaders and blending formal and customary law can help to realise rights. Participation by local leaders is very important in changing cultural attitudes and practices with regards to gender equality and human rights.

¹ MRFCJ (2013), *Women's land rights in Maradi, Niger* available at: <http://bit.ly/1hHEQvO>

² FAO (2011) *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11: Women in agriculture*. Available at: <http://bit.ly/LL9mfR>