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## Women and family farming

Moving forwards from the  
International Year of Family Farming

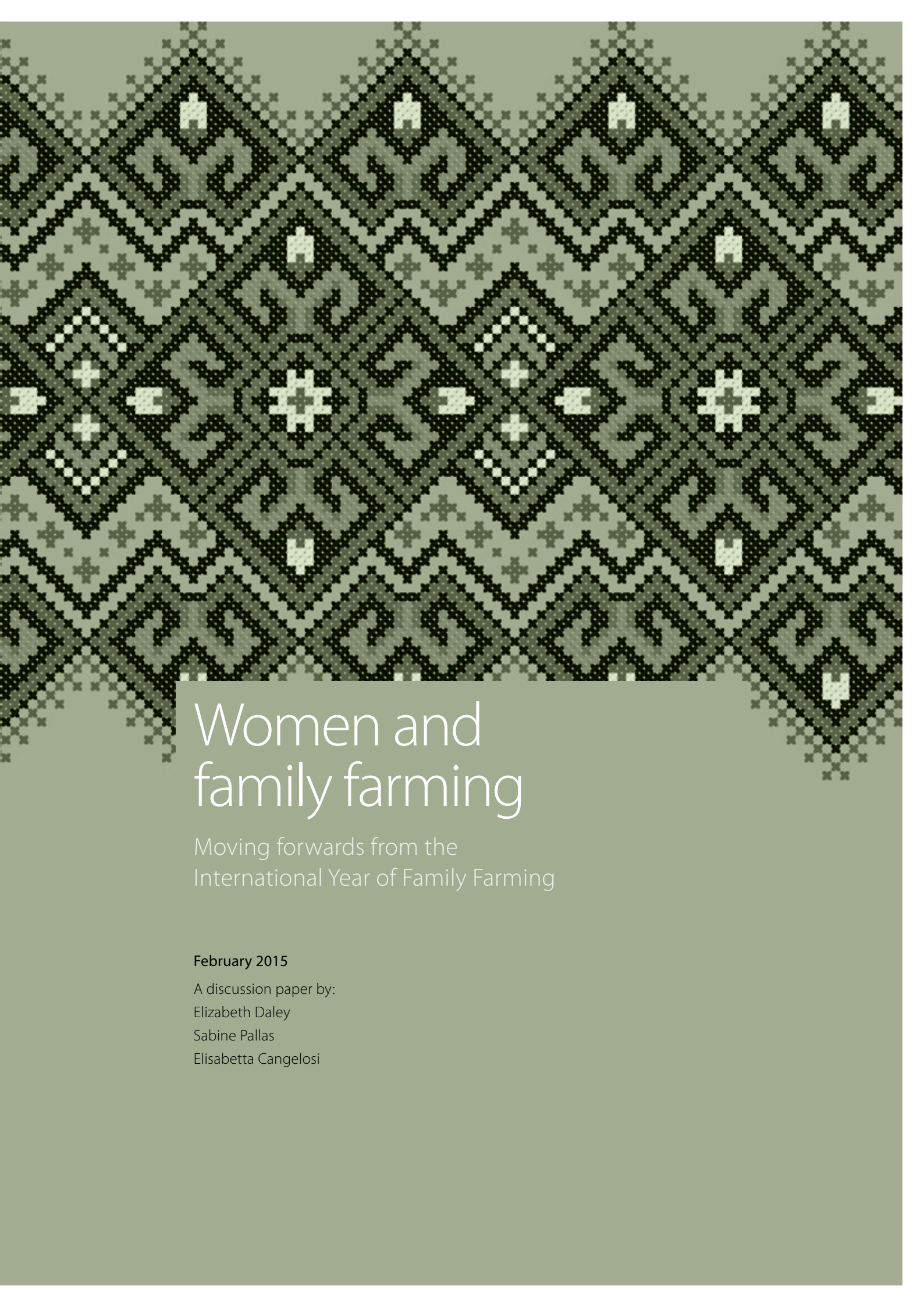


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This paper is part of the wider research project:  
**Family Farming and People-Centred Land Governance: Exploring Linkages, Sharing Experiences and Identifying Policy Gaps,**  
coordinated by Silvia Forno, Luca Miggiano and Michael Taylor.





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International Year of Family Farming

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*Madagascar*

# Introduction

2014 was the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) and gender issues were given some attention throughout the year. However, in the broader context of strong concerns about land grabbing and food security, the debate tended to focus on small-scale farmers as a whole vs. corporate capital and large farms.<sup>1</sup> The present discussion paper was therefore conceived by the International Land Coalition (ILC) to bring more attention to gender dynamics and women's rights in family farming. Crucial in this context are the assumptions related to the idea and definition of family and family roles, dynamics and structures. Family arrangements can vary and change according to family specificities and features at different times, and this matters very much from a gender perspective.

This paper takes stock of how gender dynamics and women's rights were considered in the framework of studies and activities related to the IYFF. It also explores the lessons from three empirical studies commissioned by ILC for the IYFF, from China, India and Nicaragua, and considers what can be learned for addressing gender issues in family farming going forwards. It is based on an earlier discussion paper that was published online on 4 December 2014 to provoke thoughts and reflections on how to address gender dynamics and women's rights in policy-making, projects, programmes and interventions around family farming during an ILC online discussion, hosted by the Land Portal, from 10-24 December 2014. It includes a summary of the contributions made during the online discussion and some overall conclusions and recommendations on the way forward.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: Vidal, J., 'Corporate stranglehold of farmland a risk to world food security, study says', The Guardian, 28 May 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/may/28/farmland-food-security-small-farmers> (last accessed 24 November 2014); GRAIN, Hungry for Land – Small farmers feed the world with less than a quarter of all farmland, GRAIN, May 2014 <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4929-hungry-for-land-small-farmers-feed-the-world-with-less-than-a-quarter-of-all-farmland> (last accessed 24 November 2014); McKeon, N., The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition: a coup for corporate capital?, Transnational Institute, May 2014 [http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/the\\_new\\_alliance.pdf](http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/the_new_alliance.pdf) (last accessed 24 November 2014); Oram, J., The Great Land Heist: How the world is paving the way for corporate land grabs, ActionAid International, May 2014 [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/the\\_great\\_land\\_heist.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/the_great_land_heist.pdf) (last accessed 24 November 2014).

# Women farmers: growing recognition, but persistent challenges

Since the publication of the 2010-11 State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) Report, 'Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development',<sup>2</sup> recognition of the important role of women farmers globally has grown. So too has awareness of their specific needs. Despite increasingly comprehensive policy recommendations to help them engage more productively in agriculture, however, the challenges facing women farmers persist.

In 2011, in its 'Blueprint for Action' to respond to women farmers' needs, ActionAid International claimed that:

*women are not recognized as farmers by their own families, or communities, and definitely not by governments or donors. Patriarchy, stereotypes about men and women's rights and roles, traditional values and cultures, as well as the current global economic model all come together to generate and reinforce why women are not recognized as equal human beings in society, never mind as farmers. This is compounded by actual policies, legislation and practices on the ground. The net results of all this are that the needs of women farmers are ignored when it comes to policy, legislation, extension services, research, or other government support. Women are desperately short of secure and adequate land, basic tools and inputs, credit, extension services and technical advice, relevant research, and appropriate infrastructure and technology. In short, women farmers have not received the support they need in order to thrive.<sup>3</sup>*

Building on the nuanced analysis of gender issues in farming in the 2011 SOFA Report, the 2014 SOFA Report, 'Innovation in Family Farming', stresses the importance of gender and intergenerational considerations, noting that "policies will be more effective if they are tailored to the specific circumstances of different types of farming households within their institutional

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2 The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 – Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development, 2010, FAO <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf> (last accessed 25 November 2014).

3 What Women Farmers Need – A blueprint for action, February 2011, ActionAid International [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/the\\_blue\\_print\\_for\\_women\\_farmers.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/the_blue_print_for_women_farmers.pdf) (last accessed 24 November 2014).



and agro-ecological settings".<sup>4</sup> For example, "the needs of different types of family farms as well as different household members in farming families need to be addressed" in ensuring rural advisory services are relevant; special attention also needs to be given to boosting the capacity for innovation of women and girls "based on their needs and roles in agriculture and rural livelihood strategies".<sup>5</sup>

However, not all studies and activities during the 2014 IYFF were as nuanced. For example, the emphasis in the World Bank's Africa Region Gender Innovation Lab/ONE Campaign study of the reasons behind the gender gap in agriculture is on measuring the gender gap empirically and boosting the productivity of women farmers by addressing "broader norms, market failures or institutional constraints" that limit the returns to the resources and inputs that women already have, as well as ensuring access to resources and inputs that they lack.<sup>6</sup> While this makes a valuable contribution, the study has a clear technical focus and does not address underlying gender dynamics and power relations – even though these are intricately bound up with the very norms, market failures and institutional constraints that its policy recommendations are designed to address. Further, by its own admission, the study did not look at either tenure security and access to land or the social networks that affect women farmers, including cultural aspects of farming that are similarly bound up with gender dynamics and power relations.<sup>7</sup> For example, one reason why women farmers appear to be less productive than men farmers may lie in relatively simple considerations such as their choice of crops to farm – if these are less market-oriented and more geared to family food consumption then their productivity will be harder to gauge. What then becomes interesting is to understand the extent to which there is really any 'choice', and gender dynamics and power relations are key factors in this.<sup>8</sup>

In June 2014, delegates at a conference in Montpellier, France, 'International Encounters on Family Farming and Research', concluded that better analysis and monitoring is still needed of power relations within families and of the status of women in terms of labour and decisions and their consequences on the individual. Delegates noted that social and cultural differences remain in many cases, even when gender-focused laws have sought to improve matters, and that greater educational efforts need to be made within society to generate better awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of familial organizations.<sup>9</sup>

4 The State of Food and Agriculture 2014 In Brief – Innovation in Family Farming, 2014, FAO, p.1 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4036e.pdf> (last accessed 25 November 2014).

5 Ibid, pp.10-11.

6 Levelling the Field – Improving Opportunities for Women Farmers in Africa, March 2014, World Bank Group and ONE Campaign, p.7 [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/03/14/000333037\\_20140314131214/Rendered/PDF/860390WP0WB0ON0osure0date0March0180.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/03/14/000333037_20140314131214/Rendered/PDF/860390WP0WB0ON0osure0date0March0180.pdf) (last accessed 25 November 2014).

7 Ibid, pp.36-37.

8 Wa Githingi, M., Konstantinidis, C. & A. Barenberg, 2014, 'Small and Productive – Kenyan Women and Crop Choice', *Feminist Economics*, 20:1, pp.101-129 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13545701.2013.878467#.VHS4B75AhHg> (last accessed 25 November 2014).

9 Osaba, J., Brief report of the Closing Session, International Encounters Family Farming and Research Conference, Montpellier, 1-3 June 2014 <http://www.agropolis.org/pdf/news/2014-synthesis-working-groups-AIAF.pdf> (last accessed 24 November 2014); Contributing to a global research agenda (Offprint taken from the Proceeding December 2014), October 2014, Agropolis International, CGIAR, GFAR, WRF <http://www.agropolis.fr/pdf/actu/2014-contributing-global-research-agenda-agricultures-familiales-recherche.pdf> (last accessed 24 November 2014).

Towards the end of the IYFF, on 15 October 2014, Member States of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO's) Committee on World Food Security (CFS) endorsed the '*Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems*' (the CFS-RAI Principles), to provide guidance on national regulations, global corporate social responsibility initiatives and individual contracts around investment in agriculture.<sup>10</sup> These Principles are intended to complement the '*Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*', endorsed by the CFS in May 2012.<sup>11</sup> Both documents pay considerable attention to gender issues, and their implementation should theoretically ensure that gender dynamics and women's rights are increasingly addressed in policy-making and interventions around family farming in the years to come.

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10 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml291e.pdf> (last accessed 24 November 2014).

11 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2801e/i2801e.pdf> (last accessed 24 November 2014).

# The IYFF and ILC's engagement to promote family farming

The declaration of 2014 as the IYFF clearly served to raise the prominence globally of issues around sustainable rural development and food sovereignty – the individual and collective rights of family farmers and the right of peoples to produce a substantial part of their own food.

*The goal of the 2014 IYFF is to reposition family farming at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas by identifying gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development.<sup>12</sup>*

At the start of the IYFF, representatives of farmer organizations from five continents made five key demands on governments to guide the agenda for the year, one of which, Demand 4, specifically focused on gender issues: "Institute the equality of rights between men and women family farmers". They declared that:

*Women are the backbone of agriculture production, the supply chain, marketing and all other aspects...women are crucial to the success of the family farm. Wage discrimination between men and women is tremendous and should disappear... women and their families will continue to struggle...unless women have the right to sole or joint ownership [of land] and families collectively give men and women equal rights, responsibility, shared profit and risk management tools... cultural factors impede the enforcement of...laws aimed to correct existing inequalities...women farmers are in desperate need to organise themselves.<sup>13</sup>*

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12 FAO's Family Farming website, <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/home/what-is-family-farming/en/> (last accessed 24 November 2014)

13 Demands of Family Farming Organisations during the International Year of Family Farming IYFF-2014 [http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net/archivos/documentos/abu\\_dhabi\\_demands52fb95eef265f.pdf](http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net/archivos/documentos/abu_dhabi_demands52fb95eef265f.pdf) (last accessed 24 November 2014).



In this context, ILC supported research activities during the IYFF on the intersection between land rights and family farming, and the role played by family farmers and small-scale food producers in people-centred land governance. The studies were premised on FAO's definition of family farming, which states that it:

*includes all family-based agricultural activities, and it is linked to several areas of rural development. Family farming is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour, including both women's and men's.*<sup>14</sup>

As a working definition, then, family farmers are all those who farm plots of land managed by families or use forests, pastures and fisheries managed by families and communities, largely rural but also including those in peri-urban areas and families who have members living in both rural and urban areas. The similarity in position, in terms of defining who is a family farmer or not, lies in the level of their dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods and therefore their interest in the quality of governance of those resources.

Importantly, family farmers are not a new social group – rather, the terminology has changed over the past 50 or so years from peasant farmers, to smallholders, to small-scale farmers to family farmers. Neither has everyone embraced the new terminology, and that is largely because of issues and concerns like those raised within this discussion paper:

- » Who is the family?
- » What assumptions are made about the structure of families and their internal dynamics and composition?
- » What assumptions are made about who does different types of productive and reproductive (unpaid care) work within families?
- » What assumptions are made about the role of women in the management of the family farm and their control over its resources, natural and otherwise?
- » Who inherits the family farm?
- » How can we ensure women do not get left out when family farming is promoted, both as an idea and through practical interventions in agriculture and rural development?

The ILC studies were commissioned specifically to look at the links between family farming and land governance. This matters because small-scale food producers are a large proportion of all poor people, with the majority of them on low incomes, and they are inextricably linked to world food security. Small-scale food producers play a key role in producing staples, horticultural products and traditional foods, and thus ensuring food security – their own, as they rely on it, as well as through national and regional markets.

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14 See FAO's Family Farming website, <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/home/what-is-family-farming/en/> (last accessed 24 November 2014), and ILC's Call for Proposals, Family Farming and People-Centred Land Governance – Exploring Linkages, Sharing Experiences and Identifying Policy Gaps [http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/FamilyFarmingPeople-CentredLandGovernanceCall\\_1.pdf](http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/FamilyFarmingPeople-CentredLandGovernanceCall_1.pdf) (last accessed 24 November 2014).

Secure tenure rights are central to helping these small-scale food producers to produce and fulfill their potential to increase productivity, while also being responsible for environmental stewardship through safeguarding biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources. Yet whatever approach is taken to securing their tenure rights to land and other natural resources, there are opportunities and challenges that are specifically relevant to women. It was therefore also intended that the ILC studies would contribute evidence to answer specific questions about gender issues:

- » What are the land-related challenges faced by women in family farming?
- » What are the practical solutions to ensure that women's equal participation in land governance translates into women's equal participation and autonomy in small-scale food systems?
- » What are the organizational opportunities for women small-scale food producers outside family farming?

While gender analysis was a requirement for all six pieces of original empirical research commissioned at country and regional level, three of these in particular, from China, India and Nicaragua, incorporate attention to gender issues in a positive way, highlighting some key questions to be addressed on women's role in family farming, as well as some lessons for the future.

However, as with anything to do with gender, policy recommendations from studies such as those commissioned by ILC during the IYFF can still lean towards tokenism – a sentence or two, a couple of paragraphs perhaps, on specific measures that can support women (as individuals, usually). There can even be a temptation to claim that gender is not addressed specifically because it has somehow been 'mainstreamed'. Both of these are problematic because at root the fundamental issues are about power and social relations, and these are not easy issues to address. Yet there are many tools and methodologies that can be used to address gender (such as IFAD's Gender Action Learning System (GALS) – see below) and their use must be widely promoted in order for this to become the standard.

### Family, farmers and land rights

ILC's Colombia study describes how *"the family manages their employment autonomously, strengthening the family union"*.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the Nicaragua study directly critiques the standard neoclassical model of the family as a unified unit of consumption and production where all resources and income are distributed to the mutual benefit of all – a sort of perfect co-operative, where a benevolent (usually male) head of household assigns resources for the benefit, and in the interest, of all.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Acevedo-Osorio, A., Morales, L., Arroyave, D. & J. Aristizábal, 2014, Contribuciones de la agricultura familiar en Colombia desde el enfoque de la multifuncionalidad. Tres estudios de caso de agricultura familiar campesina e indígena, ILC [http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family%20farming\\_policy%20brief\\_colombia\\_sp.pdf](http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family%20farming_policy%20brief_colombia_sp.pdf) (last accessed 3 December 2014).

16 Flores, S., Solís, C. & L. Cordero, 2014, Los desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres rurales para tener tierra–La experiencia de Nitlapan y Trocaire-Addac en Matagalpa, Nicaragua, ILC [http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family%20farming\\_web\\_4%20nicaragua%20nitlapan\\_sp.pdf](http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family%20farming_web_4%20nicaragua%20nitlapan_sp.pdf) (last accessed 3 December 2014).

In practice, families are clearly not such units, but are instead places of complex social relations defined by gender, age, parenthood, etc., and where bargaining over resources takes place continually. As Sen has argued, the family is thus an ambiguous unit of co-operation and conflict.<sup>17</sup> How each individual in the family bargains – their bargaining power – depends on the social legitimacy and status that they have – both in their own eyes and those of others. For Deere and Leon (quoted in the Nicaragua study), as earlier for Agarwal, the bargaining power of family members is determined by what would happen were they to survive outside of the household, for example after a divorce – this ‘*worst case scenario*’ or ‘*fall-back option*’ influences very much how household members bargain.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, families are clearly not homogenous and a lot of the debate over family farming has not paid enough attention to the diversity of family settings. This diversity runs from a widow living with her disabled adult daughter and raising seven grandchildren, five of them orphans, to a monogamously married man and woman raising three children of their own; from an older, unmarried man who lives alone, but whose sister, nephews and nieces help him with farming and extra food as needed, to the family or families of a polygamously married man.

The structure of families – the total number, age and gender of members, the number of generations they contain and the number of able-bodied adults and children old enough to contribute to farming and domestic tasks, as well as the relative weight of different livelihood activities done by members, their income sources and opportunities beyond farming facilitated by different members’ levels of education, literacy etc. etc., all matter critically to understanding both who/what is a family and who/what is a family farmer.

Another crucial consideration is what amount of land the farming family has rights to use – whether owned, borrowed or rented – and how secure those rights are. Land is crucial as it is the basis for generating income, can function as collateral, and can also be passed on to future generations, so it has a strong role to play in providing long-term security to the family. Linked to this are questions about the range of natural and common property resources that family farmers have access to – water sources, forests, fisheries and foreshores, and more. Often, access to such resources is highly gendered.

The detail of who is part of a farming family and what land and resources they have available to them, is absolutely critical to understanding that particular family’s land and labour relations, the role and importance of agriculture in their livelihood strategies, and the support from government, civil society and private sector organizations that they would likely benefit from most.

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17 Sen, A., 1990, ‘Gender and Cooperative Conflicts’, in Tinker, I. (ed.), *Persistent Inequalities*, England: Oxford University Press.

18 Agarwal, B., 1994, *A Field of One’s Own—Gender and land rights in South Asia*, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press; and see also Deere, C. & M. León, 2001, *Empowering Women: Land and Property Rights in Latin America*, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press.



# Is history repeating itself?

There is an extensive literature on gender dynamics within farming families, starting with early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial anthropological studies that described gender divisions of labour in different social groups, and moving onto research that uncovered gendered impacts of resettlement, agricultural modernization and land registration projects and programmes taking place from the 1950s to the 1980s. Studies document intra-household conflict and the differential benefits from development projects to male and female household members, such as the negative impacts on women from mass rice farming schemes in the Gambia and from land titling and registration in Kenya.<sup>19</sup> From the 1980s and 1990s, studies uncovered the gender dynamics in peasant resistance in Malaysia and explored intra-household co-operation and conflict and bargaining powers.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of the 20th century, existing research clearly showed that land, natural resource and agricultural policies, projects, programmes and interventions affect men and women differently, and affect different men and different women differently according to their age, class, marital status, family situation, etc. Yet, by 2014 little seems to have changed, as the focus on largely non-differentiated family farmers during the IYFF left gender dynamics and co-operation and conflict within farming families off the centre of the stage.

As Bernstein has written, “*whether class differentiation is strongly marked or not, ‘community’ and its reproduction is always likely to involve tensions of gender and intergenerational relations*.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is striking how ‘sticky’ gendered roles within a family are, even in contexts where the role of women is changing quite dramatically. In ILC’s Colombia study, for example, the fundamental role of female household heads in ensuring subsistence food production for their families during a conflict situation is highlighted, even though the basic patriarchal structure of social relations where men dominate in the public sphere and in any production beyond subsistence seems to remain intact – the standard divide of women to the domestic/reproductive sphere and men to the public/productive sphere.

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19 Carney, J., 1988, ‘Struggles Over Land and Crops in an Irrigated Rice Scheme: The Gambia’, in J. Davison (ed.), *Agriculture, Women and Land – The African Experience*, Boulder, USA: Westview Press Inc.; Davison, J., 1987, “Without Land We Are Nothing”: The Effect of Land Tenure Policies and Practices upon Rural Women in Kenya’, *Rural Africana*, Vol. 27, Winter 1987, 19-33; Dey, J., 1981, ‘Gambian Women: Unequal Partners in Rice Development Projects?’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 17:3, 109-122.

20 Hart, G., 1995, ‘Gender and Household Dynamics: Recent Theories and Their Implications’, in Quibria, M. (ed.), *Critical Issues in Asian Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Agarwal, B., 1994, *A Field of One’s Own—Gender and land rights in South Asia*, op. cit.; Sen, A., 1990, ‘Gender and Cooperative Conflicts’, op. cit.

21 Bernstein, H., 2014, ‘Food sovereignty via the ‘peasant way’: a sceptical view’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41:6, pp.1031-1063 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2013.852082> (last accessed 25 November 2014).

This underscores why it is so important to recognise that a family farm today is a site of contestation and difference in the same way that farming households – or indeed any households or families – have always been.

The question, then, is – what lessons must be learned from historical experience and from the existing body of knowledge and literature on the complexities of rural households and farming families?

# Lesson 1

## gender analysis is not optional

Gender has to be addressed. It cannot be left as the ‘elephant in the room’. Gender relations are critical within families of all sorts and must be acknowledged and analyzed. Three of the ILC studies do just this.

### Evidence from Nicaragua

ILC’s Nicaragua study explicitly focuses on women’s land rights and the role of women in family farming. Its concern is to look at the challenges rural women face in accessing land and how to secure their land tenure from a gender perspective, by reviewing the experiences of different organizations using different approaches to help rural families gain access to land.<sup>22</sup> The study specifically examines differences between projects focusing on women without access to land and those focusing on family groups. With respect to the latter, interactions within the family including intra-household conflicts and lack of support from husbands’ are underlined, and power relations and imbalances are acknowledged as crucial to outcomes. The study finds that women’s effective control of assets and property is a first step to their economic empowerment, but it is not sufficient as this is also related to how women see themselves as potential farmers – and how others see them. This is because unequal power relations cannot be addressed just through giving women property rights alone – there also has to be recognition of the inequalities and a desire to change them.

The Nicaragua study also finds that decisions about land titling – jointly or to individuals – influence the way in which a couple work together. Individual titles for women bring a stronger responsibility for the land to one person only, but with the risk that husbands might not support women to farm and pay off debts; there can also be an emotional impact on women from not having this support from their husbands. Alternatively, while joint titles allow for joint visions of the family, and shared responsibility for it, the study does not find enough evidence to suggest that decision-making powers within households became more equal as a result, and women could still end up submitting to men’s decisions ‘for the good of the family’. Related to this, the study highlights the general emotional dependency of women upon men that goes with financial/material dependency, and also draws attention to the threats that men perceive to their masculine identity when women acquire land. This can lead to domestic violence and to pressure on the women to sell their land and buy instead where the husband identifies a plot – so as not to upset the existing balance of gender inequalities and social roles.

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22 Los desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres rurales para tener tierra–La experiencia de Nitlapan y Trocaire-Addac en Matagalpa, Nicaragua, op. cit.



### Evidence from India

ILC's India study provides comprehensive details about gendered divisions of labour within Kurichya joint farming families in Kerala State, and discusses the gendered structure of power relations and decision-making within these unique extended matrilineal families.<sup>23</sup> Kurichya is a system of tribal land governance where land is owned by the extended family and not by individuals, and in which there are very strict traditional gender roles and divisions of labour and responsibility. Men make all the decisions and hold all key decision-making roles, while women are only represented through and by men and have no real rights of their own. While the system ensures that no family members go hungry, there is no gender equality at all and men control the family land. At the same time, the study finds that external socio-economic changes and pressures of individualization have been impacting on the Kurichya system, with smaller family units within the extended family now becoming more economically separate and engaging more in their own individual income-earning and use of land. The study finds that these smaller family units are more patrilineal and patriarchal than the extended Kurichya family, and that women still shoulder the main labour burdens of Kurichya joint family farming even as the system moves in this more individual and patrilineal direction.

The India study is most interesting because it is highly problematic from a rights-based perspective yet it clearly demonstrates the value of this particular kind of extended family farming for environmental stewardship and food security. The study shows how ideas about custom and community land rights that directly threaten gender equality and repress women are still very current, and are even being advocated within the family farming debate – because of its very privileging of food security concerns over issues of human rights and women's rights to land. This then raises the very relevant question – if the main rationale for supporting family farming during the IYFF has been largely about food security and the environment, does this mean women's land rights might have to be foregone?

### Evidence from China

ILC's China study provides a potential answer to this question in a different way.<sup>24</sup> The China study separates out rural households according to a typology of the different livelihood patterns that emerged during fieldwork, and examines each livelihood pattern with reference to who does what in the household, noting the different things men and women contribute to the farming family in each different livelihood type. Gender relations within the household are not analyzed to the same extent as they are in the Nicaragua and India studies, but the study addresses itself to how families make choices about different livelihood strategies according to their individual membership structure and specific situations and attributes. It contains important insights about the value

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23 T. Suma, 2014, Customary vs state laws of land governance: Adivasi joint family farmers seek policy support – The case of Kurichya joint families in Wayanad, southern India, ILC [http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family-farming\\_web\\_5-india-mssrf\\_en.pdf](http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family-farming_web_5-india-mssrf_en.pdf) (last accessed 3 December 2014).

24 Zuo, T. & Z. Wang, 2014, Negotiating Sustainable Livelihoods in Rural North-West China – the impact of policy and governance on smallholders' options for land use, ILC [http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family%20farming\\_web\\_2%20china\\_en.pdf](http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/family%20farming_web_2%20china_en.pdf) (last accessed 3 December 2014).

of mixing livelihood activities and drawing on the strengths of different members for the greater good of the household as a whole. For example, a family might mix farming with employment, or focus on livestock farming, or mix a skilled job with renting out their land. From the sample village studied, land use rights were core to livelihoods for 56% of households, essential to livelihoods for 15% of households, an indispensable supplement to livelihoods for 5% of households, and only a back-up to livelihoods for 24% of households. Women in this village have a key role in farming of all sorts, and in all businesses in the village, while those who leave the village for skilled employment tend to be men. The study also finds that women have generally high levels of awareness of their rights, and actively engage in household decision-making about the use of their land rights. In four of the seven livelihood types identified in the study, women “*play an equal or even more important role than men in family budgeting and farm work*”.<sup>25</sup>

The China study thus very much supports the 2014 SOFA Report’s view that:

*Below a certain level, a farm may be too small to constitute the main means of support for a family. In this case, agriculture may make an important contribution to a family’s livelihood and food security, but other sources of income through off-farm employment, transfers or remittances are necessary to ensure the family lives a decent life.*<sup>26</sup>

By examining this in practice through a gender lens, the China study also shows that family farming, as a tool in poverty reduction and as part of a diversified livelihood strategy, does not at all have to be inconsistent with gender equality and women’s rights.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The State of Food and Agriculture 2014 In Brief – Innovation in Family Farming, op. cit., p.2.



*Nicaragua*



# Lesson 2

## gender analysis needs to guide policy

Once gender dynamics and gender relations are analyzed and addressed, the information arising must be used to guide policy.

### Evidence from Nicaragua

ILC's Nicaragua study makes recommendations for organizations involved in supporting family farming to go beyond a focus on the family and the individual to adopt one that looks at the entire community and the social and gender relations within it – thus to focus on women's rights without worrying about making visible some of the gendered conflicts (including domestic violence at the extreme) that exist within households and the community. Lessons include the need to adopt a flexible strategy and avoid working with pre-established approaches; the need to develop indicators to measure change in terms of gender relations in order to measure project impact, and to develop those indicators in collaboration with women; and the need to recognise that the family is a unit of co-operation as well as of conflict. Moreover, the Nicaragua study finds it important for organizations working to support family farmers and women's rights to land to use a gender lens to understand why some men do not support their wives while others work alongside their wives without fearing the loss of their masculinity. It is not enough to work with women and women's groups, but instead the organizations working with family farmers must look at how they themselves are implicitly gendered in the approaches they take, and how they can change this so as to have greater impact through their work.

### Evidence from China

ILC's China study recommends that women's land rights should be further strengthened by policy measures and legislation to avoid violations by other stakeholders, and that further studies of family farming should be carried out from the perspective of women, focusing on the opportunities and challenges they face in family farming and the formal and informal institutions that influence their role in organising agricultural production, budgeting and starting up their own businesses. The China study suggests that more policy attention is needed to women's rights in land governance and to economic decisions that affect the family.

# Alternatives to family farming?

The question was raised earlier, in discussing ILC's India case, of whether family farming and gender equality are actually compatible. The China case suggested they might be, while the Nicaragua case raised numerous issues that still need to be explored. Writing during the IYFF, Agarwal draws our attention to the "serious contradictions" between "strengthening family farming and achieving gender equality"<sup>27</sup>:

*how will unequal gender relations embedded within families be tackled? Indeed an emphasis on family farming, which often depends on women's unpaid labour, could go in the opposite direction, unless intra-household inequalities are addressed... Alternative institutional arrangements based on proactive farmer cooperation in production, especially cooperation among women farmers, may be more conducive to gender equality, but that could go contrary to individual family farming.*<sup>28</sup>

Agarwal found in her research in India that "many family farms are effectively managed by women...[yet]...family farms do not provide autonomy to women workers or the means to realize their potential as farmers".<sup>29</sup> She explored various forms of co-operative and group/collective farming as an alternative to individual family farms and describes how they may be more empowering and transformative for women:

*In the women-only group farms there is a basis for women's empowerment outside the family structure, but women's claims on family land and labour for their collective efforts remain weak. Nevertheless...many groups...do receive support from the husbands of some of the women involved in finding land to lease, or in terms of technical advice and help in marketing their crops...women's group farming ventures are typically seen by spouses as bringing additional income or food in kind, rather than as conflicting with family farm production.*<sup>30</sup>

This highlights the notion that family farming as it is generally perceived might not be so compatible with gender equality, but that perhaps the two can be compatible if creative and innovative alternatives to standard models and approaches are pursued.

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27 Agarwal, B., 2014, 'Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: critical contradictions, difficult conciliations', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41:6, pp.1247-1268 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2013.876996#.VHTa61esXNc> (last accessed 25 November 2014).

28 Ibid, p.1249.

29 Ibid, p.1255.

30 Ibid, p.1263.

# Moving forwards?

As well as ILC's open online discussion on the Land Portal, 'Women and Family Farming – Moving Forwards from the IYFF', two other related online discussions took place during the IYFF, hosted by the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN): 'The future of Family Farming: empowerment and equal rights for women and youth'; and 'The Future of Family Farming: Providing Resources for Women and Young Farmers'.<sup>31</sup> Participants in the first of these discussions argued that:

*support for women farmers should be tackled in the context of the need for greater gender equality, the main issue being their empowerment to acquire capacities and rights to act as family farming leaders and entrepreneurs...the entire society needs to be involved, including, most importantly, those in power.*<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, participants in the second of the FSN discussions recommended that support for women farmers has to be backed up by more radical changes in gender relations and power, including especially through: tackling gender-based violence; gender-sensitization and training that includes both women and men and emphasizes the benefits to the family and society as a whole from measures and interventions that target women; and creation of women's farming groups and women-only spaces to support women's empowerment starting with basics such as literacy training etc.<sup>33</sup>

These various recommendations come on top of all the suggestions about ways to improve women's access to resources, improve laws and policies, etc. that are indicated in reports and studies such as the above-mentioned 2011 ActionAid 'Blueprint for Action', 2010-11 SOFA, 2014 SOFA, 2014 World Bank/ONE Campaign study, 2014 ILC studies and from the research carried out by Agarwal – all of which cannot be 'one size fits all' but have instead to be relevant to different country contexts and cultures. However, even supposing that all these recommendations, measures and suggestions are pursued, there is a question of how they are pursued and how they are kept on the global policy agenda and inserted into the continuing debate on family farming, to make sure that they lead to action and real change.

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31 For topic notes, details of contributions received and summaries of both discussions see <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/family-farming> and <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/FF2> (last accessed 25 November 2014)

32 The future of Family Farming: empowerment and equal rights for women and youth – Summary of discussion no. 104, from 9 June to 7 July 2014, FSN [http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/sites/default/files/files/104\\_family\\_farming/summary\\_104\\_EN\\_FamilyFarming.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/sites/default/files/files/104_family_farming/summary_104_EN_FamilyFarming.pdf) (last accessed 25 November 2014).

33 The Future of Family Farming: Providing Resources for Women and Young Farmers – Discussion No. 109 from 14 September to 5 October 2014, draft summary of the online discussion, forthcoming online, FSN <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/FF2> (last accessed 25 November 2014)

# ILC's Online Discussion, 10-24 December 2014

In ILC's online discussion there was broad agreement on the inadequate attention given to the historical context of women's access to land during the IYFF. General issues raised related to the existence and enforcement of women's rights, as well as to the role played by different actors, such as international agencies, NGOs, governments and other organisations, including the involvement (or non-involvement) of ordinary women and local grassroots movements. External aspects were also mentioned, as here by **Nidhi Tandon**: *"the capitalist system of production, and in particular, the plantation economy – continues to place enormous strains on the family unit and this in turn, increases the load of women's multiple responsibilities"*. Key issues around land ownership and titling, inheritance rights and land rights in cases of divorce were also raised. These were connected to more practical issues such as lack of formal identification to enable land registration, lack of knowledge, illiteracy and difficulties in accessing justice – which are all key issues that arise in any discussion about women's land rights.

At first sight, it may thus appear that the issues for women in family farming are exactly those same issues that affect women's land rights in general. However, some contributors went beyond general reflections about women's land rights to focus more specifically on the role of women in family farming. For example, constraints in access to cash incomes were identified as very relevant for women, and, as **Maria Hartl** emphasized, women's unpaid work on the family farm *"needs to be counted as a contribution to the gross national product."* Contributors also viewed land rights as interconnected with other issues for women and family farming, as demonstrated by examples offered from: Burkina Faso, about land titling and the importance of involving men in the process; Guatemala, about indigenous rural communities reclaiming and occupying land and farms; India, where Dalit women have to face strongly-embedded cultural barriers to accessing land; and Sierra Leone, where women affected by HIV are socially marginalized.<sup>34</sup> Other examples illustrated the challenges faced by women when dealing with family land. For example in Nigeria, as shared by **Mpigi G L**, women are still considered as belonging *"to the family they are married to and as such...[a woman's]...right to land is shared with her husband"*. This has the consequence that women's land is registered in their son's name.

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34 Details of the Guatemala, India and Sierra Leone cases can be found in ActionAid, 2013, From Marginalisation to Empowerment, April 2013, ActionAid International <http://www.actionaid.org/publications/marginalisation-empowerment> (last accessed 21 January 2015).

An important, positive example was offered from Senegal by **Jeanne Koopman**. Within the PRODAM project, an alternative model based on the development of small group farming enterprises organized under local jurisdiction rather than family control was experimented with.<sup>35</sup> Rural councils started distributing land under their official control to around 150 young male and female farmers who established legal entities for holding land, managing investments and marketing. **Jeanne Koopman** argued that this model could contribute to improved food security without interfering with traditional farming systems and could also be more socially acceptable in a patriarchal society since men could *"appreciate that their wives or sons are able to make a larger contribution to the household economy without increasing their claims on household land"*.

### Knowledge generation and access to knowledge

Knowledge also emerged in the online discussion as a fundamental component of the debate on women and family farming – knowledge of the context, knowledge of available tools and opportunities, knowledge of mechanisms and machineries, but also knowledge generation (and sharing) and access to knowledge. From a practical perspective, the need for vocational training and creation of opportunities for women, especially in rural areas was highlighted, along with processes of sensitisation and capacity building.

Lack of access to knowledge was connected to lack of access to justice, because even though some progress has been made to the benefit of both individuals and families, there is still a huge need for women to have more agency and greater knowledge of their rights. On one hand, the lack of indicators, gender disaggregated data and specific tools affects the generation of knowledge, and, on the other hand, the lack of training and opportunities to acquire knowledge (lack of access) affects the efficacy and implementation of existing legislation that is favourable to women, because women are either unaware of supportive legislation or unfamiliar with the justice system. Regardless of whether it is cause or consequence of this situation, women have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes, in particular about land, and from policy-making and implementation as a whole.

### Actors involved and the role of women in policy-making

For NGOs, international agencies, women's national organisations and development planners in general, two of the most relevant guiding questions raised by contributors were: how to manage the complexities of land ownership when it comes to women and land rights (by **Mpigi G L**) and how to deliver public awareness – particularly in remote areas that are isolated or remote from each other (by **Nidhi Tandon**). Comments were also made about the active role that could be played by men, especially in relation to project implementation and the interaction of outsiders with chiefs of villages. In some cases, as described by **Razafindrakoto Yolande** for Burkina Faso, the active involvement of men can provide a very relevant contribution through their participation in gender cells and discussions with village chiefs.

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35 See [http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public\\_html/eksyst/doc/prj/region/pa/senegal/PRODAM/PRODAM.htm](http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/prj/region/pa/senegal/PRODAM/PRODAM.htm) (last accessed 21 January 2015).



However, contributors agreed that the most important issue in relation to different actors remains the active role to be played by women, both as individual actors and as part of grassroots movements which in some cases are not included in policy-making and project implementation around family farming. A crucial question identified for international agencies, NGOs and women's groups was therefore about how to develop women's political capital so that they can hold governments to account for their decisions.

Inclusion of women in the process means active participation both in the identification of needs and in the elaboration of solutions and new plans. However, as **Razafindrakoto Yolande** argued, *"sometime the gender issues are discussed just among donors and person influent [sic] in the society but not the women grassroots"*. Indeed, the complexity of different local contexts, where class and patriarchal power can affect the success (or otherwise) of farming projects, implies, as **Jeanne Koopman** said, *"that project designers are highly unlikely to be able to deal with these issues without serious input from the women involved"*.

### Role of the family

The online discussion also confirmed that the idea of family is challenging in itself. For example, although the traditional connection between family land and identity and status was noted by **Esther Angudha** in a contribution from Kenya, another contributor's reflections on traditional African farms challenges the very assumptions behind the idea of the family farm as a single farm enterprise. **Jeanne Koopman** described a traditional African farm, on the basis of her own research, as *"a composite structure, most often made up of one or more family fields that are managed by the household head and farmed by unpaid family labor, as well as several other agricultural or non-farm enterprises under a woman's or a man's individual control"*. Even though the connection between different factors affecting women's land rights is strong, **Jeanne Koopman** went on to argue that analysts too often see patriarchal control of inherited land as the major constraint on women's access to land to farm on their own account, when in fact it is *"essential to recognize that the size of male-controlled family land has been shrinking"*. This is due to several external factors, such as population growth and emigration (as also mentioned by **Maria Hartl**) leading to division of traditional lands by household heads.

As **Getaneh Gobezie** suggested, family collaboration across gender-specific enterprises as a way to increase overall household welfare and food security appears as a possible way to address some of the specific constraints within family farming. Yet, the unfair distribution of benefits within family farming households remains one of the most challenging aspects of family farming, not only with respect to incomes, but even more so because it produces other effects, such as low motivation, and affects the capacities of household/family members.

### Ways forward

By the end of the online discussion, several ways forward had begun to emerge. First, it was clear that even when policies that guarantee women's land rights exist they are often not implemented and women cannot claim their rights. Thus **Getaneh Gobezie** argued that community attitudes need to change in order to let women enjoy their rights, including through the involvement of men.

Second, at the planning level the role of women appeared to be fundamental, not only because women are in the best position to understand their own needs and deal with patriarchal, familial and larger cultural and class issues, but also because they can find and create alternative solutions such as their own group enterprises.

As stressed by **Maria Hartl**, *"farming is a family business, and it will not survive if it is not a family matter"*, and the connection between family farming and communities is extremely strong. This was the reasoning behind the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD's) joint elaboration of specific methodologies (such as the above-mentioned GALS) to support women in family farming, while also supporting the use of existing tools such as the CEDAW to promote women's rights.<sup>36</sup>

Last, the discussion made clear that further reflection would be helpful on the idea presented by **Getaneh Gobezie**, that achieving food security will not guarantee gender equality, even though policies that ensure access to land can be useful and supportive for women. With reference to Naila Kabeer's work, **Getaneh Gobezie** argued that: *"confining the analysis of gender inequality to these achievements alone serves to convey the impression that women's disempowerment is largely a matter of poverty"*. Whereas, gender equality is a much deeper and more comprehensive goal, requiring fundamental social and attitudinal change and not just the achievement of food security and economic equality and prosperity.

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36 See <http://www.crjournals.org/CRJEGS/pdf/2014/September/Gobezie.pdf> (last accessed 21 January 2015) and <http://www.sjrbss.com/vol-1-no-3> (last accessed 21 January 2015).

# Some overall conclusions and recommendations

It seems clear that the departure point in the debate on family farming during the IYFF has not been a human rights-based one, with gender equality and women's land rights at its fore. Instead, food security and environmental stewardship have been privileged as both rationale for, and goal of, the promotion of family farming. This makes it difficult to address key outstanding questions, such as:

- » How can women be included as participants in decision-making?
- » How can women's unpaid labour within family farming be addressed, including their care work?
- » How can the income distribution from family farming be made more equal?

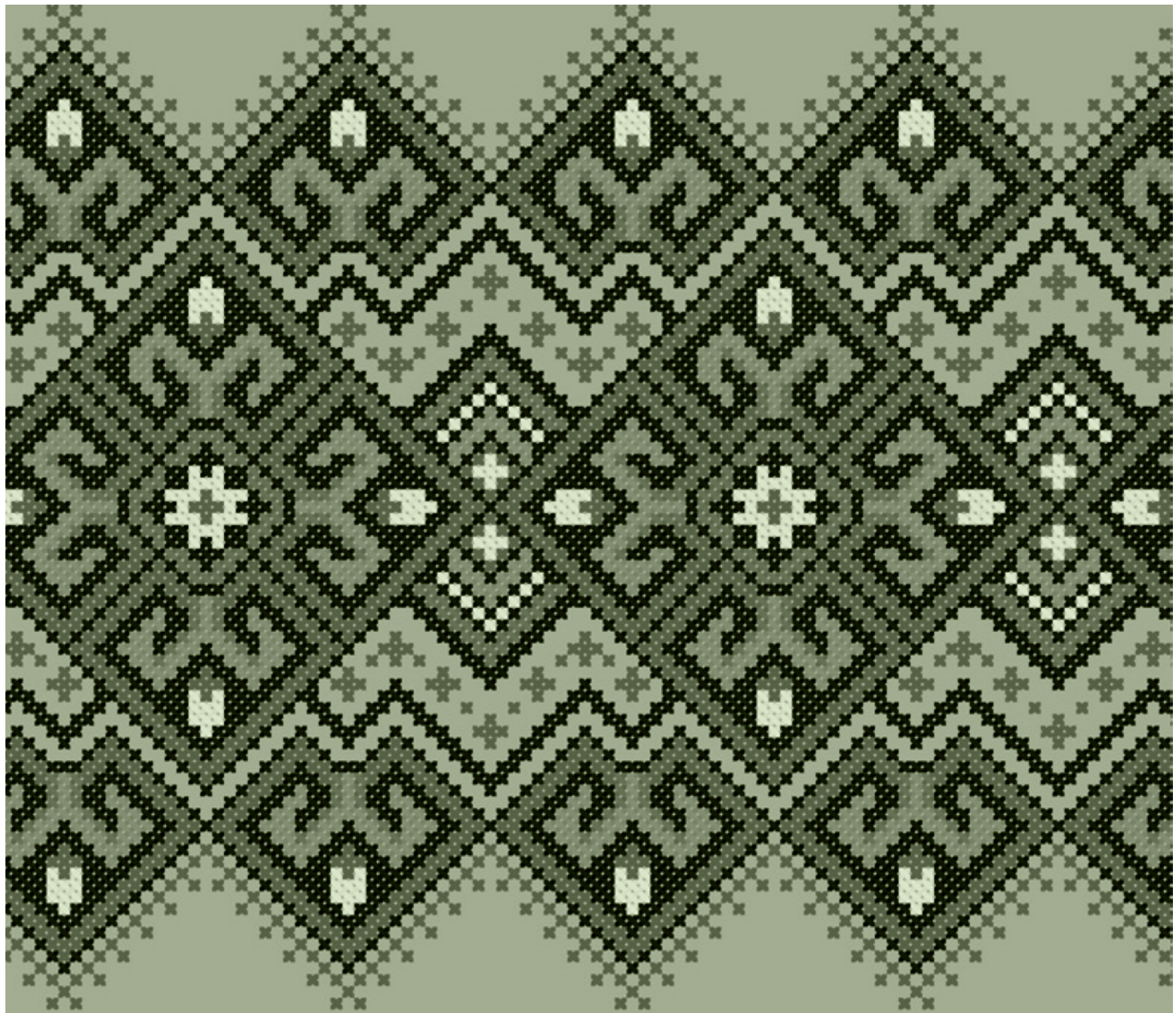
These questions are difficult to address because without gender equality and women's land rights being placed high up the global policy agenda around family farming and agricultural development, gender issues will tend to be overlooked in practice – especially when other concerns such as the environment and food security take precedence. A focus on family structures and dynamics, with gender, women's land rights and human rights must therefore be the departure point.

ILC's original discussion paper and online discussion were both specifically intended to generate debate on the critical questions of what can be learned from the IYFF and how gender dynamics and women's rights issues can be inserted into and kept on the family farming agenda going forwards. Yet the central conclusion here is that what can be learned from the IYFF is **exactly that gender dynamics and women's land rights issues must be a constitutive component of the family farming agenda going forwards**, in order for real change and improvements for women to occur within family farming.

This can be achieved through numerous practical and often seemingly small actions and strategies on the part of everyone working on these issues:

- » Continue to promote and push for women's rights and gender equality issues to be addressed in all work around family farming and agricultural development;
- » Conduct research on specific cases of family farming and share and disseminate knowledge generated from this as widely as possible;
- » Lobby funders of family farming support projects to address women's rights and gender equality in a meaningful way;

- » Actively involve women's grassroots organisations in the design and implementation of family farming projects to ensure women's perspective is taken into account;
- » Think of projects on family farming as primarily a tool for achieving gender equality, a much deeper and more comprehensive goal that goes beyond the straightforward achievement of food security and economic equality;
- » Network, liaise and share information with NGOs and international agencies about the importance of prioritizing human rights (and gender equality and women's land rights) in promotion of family farming; and
- » Work to ensure a human rights-based approach, which prioritizes women's rights and women's land rights, is enshrined in the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





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