

# Research on Women's Communal Land Rights in Northern Tanzania



**In pastoral communities of northern Tanzania, customary tenure is the dominant form of land governance, yet it does not provide equal rights and opportunities for women.**

Women face suppressive practices and limited access to land and productive resources within these systems. Many community members and institutions are unaware of the extent to which customary tenure systems perpetuate gender inequalities at the community level.

In partnership with Landesa and funding from Lever for Change, Pastoral Women's Council Tanzania conducted research to:

Increase understanding around the **challenges** and **limitations** faced by Tanzanian pastoralist women in accessing, owning, and controlling communal land

Explore potential **benefits** and **outcomes** that arise from securing and strengthening women's land rights and participation in decision-making processes within communal systems

Ultimately, research findings uncovered solutions to:



*address gender disparities, promote social justice, and empower women.*



Through individual and focus group discussions, the project interviewed **138 women, local government officials, and traditional leaders** in Embaash and Enkikaret Villages in Longido District, Tanzania.

## Findings

- The study revealed **deeply ingrained inequalities** in customary land tenure systems, which prioritize patriarchal traditions, limiting women's rights to own, use, or inherit land.
- **Women's representation in land governance remains minimal** due to systemic barriers and societal norms. Several challenges hinder women's participation, including low confidence, societal pressures, limited education, and resistance from male counterparts. Women who do hold leadership positions often face marginalization in decision-making processes.
- There is a **lack of awareness** among community members and institutions about how customary tenure systems contribute to gender inequalities.
- The study affirmed the profound impact of secure land rights on **women's economic independence and social standing**. Land ownership enables women to support their families, engage in agricultural and business activities, and reduce their reliance on male relatives. It also offers a **sense of stability and security for future generations**, particularly in cultures where inheritance practices often disadvantage women. Land ownership enhances **women's autonomy**, allowing them to make independent decisions and protecting them against gender-based violence and discrimination. Finally, women's ownership of land **benefits entire communities**, as women tend to use land in ways that promote sustainability and communal welfare.
- Increased awareness, education, and successful examples of women leaders are gradually **challenging traditional norms** and fostering societal change.



## Recommendations

- Increase targeted **outreach and educational programs** to inform women about their rights and encourage their participation in governance.
- Promote **democratic selection processes** (in lieu of appointments) for women leaders.
- Strengthen **economic empowerment initiatives** like microfinance programs.
- Address traditional norms and gender biases with **community sensitization** programs.
- **Improve collaboration** among local leaders, government bodies, and civil society.
- Strengthen **enforcement of laws** that protect women's land rights.

**Through dismantling systemic barriers, challenging patriarchal norms, and creating inclusive frameworks that recognize women as equal contributors to society, Tanzania's pastoral communities can make significant progress towards achieving gender equality and sustainable development.**