

Women's Land Rights & Christian Leaders in Ethiopia

1. Executive Summary

This report synthesizes the results and lessons learned from a pilot initiative that sought to engage Christian clergy in Ethiopia as allies for advancing women's land rights (WLR). Despite Ethiopia's progressive legal frameworks, gender-equal land rights are often not realized in practice—particularly in rural areas where customary norms continue to dominate. These norms frequently restrict women's ability to access, inherit, and control land, even when national laws say otherwise, and even when women hold formal title to land.

Recognizing the deep religious fabric of Ethiopian society, the project tested a novel approach: aligning advocacy for WLR with theological arguments drawn from Christian scripture, and equipping clergy from both Orthodox and Evangelical traditions with the tools to act as change agents within their communities. Religious leaders—widely respected and deeply embedded in local life—were engaged in dialogue, supporting them to interpret and communicate biblical principles that support gender justice in land governance. The project built on the insight that religious values can provide a moral foundation for questioning and transforming discriminatory customs.

The project combined a rigorous preparatory phase—including literature review, key informant interviews, theological consultations, and community surveys—with the co-development of a reference guide and pilot trainings in select *Woredas*.¹ Trained clergy then participated in community dialogues to act as agents of change.

The results confirmed the viability and power of this approach. Clergy were receptive to theological arguments supporting WLR, and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their scriptural implications. Trained leaders applied their learning in practical settings, often exceeding output targets. The model proved not only effective, but also efficient and sustainable, due to the self-financed nature of church structures and the long-term presence of clergy in their communities.

However, the report also highlights limitations. The project duration was short, and the long-term effects of social norm change require further monitoring. Not every development topic lends itself to theological framing in the same way that WLR does, and in some contexts, religious or institutional dynamics may not be favorable to similar interventions.

This synthesis concludes with targeted recommendations for policymakers, development actors, and religious institutions. It calls for scaling up faith-based approaches, institutionalizing theological training on WLR, and fostering multi-stakeholder platforms that bridge legal frameworks with lived community realities. By leveraging the moral authority of religious leaders, this project has demonstrated a culturally rooted, locally led path toward greater gender equity in land rights.

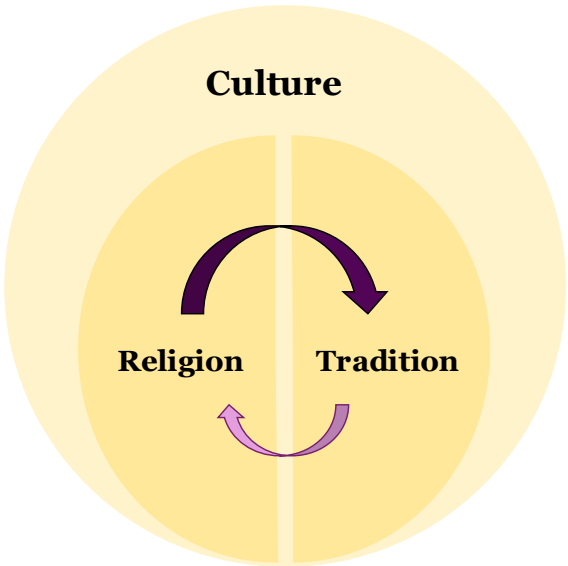
¹ Second-lowest Ethiopian administrative unit, analogue to a district. A *Woreda* comprises several *Kebeles*.

2. The Approach

The project emerged from a clear and persistent challenge: despite Ethiopia’s progressive legal frameworks guaranteeing gender-equal land rights, these rights often fail to materialize at the local level, where customary law continues to dominate land-related decision-making. In many rural areas, land inheritance, access, and control are governed by unwritten rules deeply rooted in community traditions, often to the detriment of women’s ability to claim and protect rights to land that are guaranteed in Ethiopian law.

Yet, while customary norms are powerful, they are not immutable. They coexist—and sometimes conflict—with religious values. Unlike customary practices, which are human-made and historically contingent, Abrahamic religions such as Christianity assert the authority of a revealed, divine truth. This gives religious norms a unique capacity to challenge cultural practices that are unjust, including those that discriminate against women. The project builds on this insight: by aligning advocacy for women’s land rights (WLR) with Christian teachings, it seeks to root gender justice not in foreign or secular logic, but in the moral authority of scripture as interpreted in a national and local context. In this respect, the project mirrors and complements recent initiatives by IGAD in Ethiopia’s Muslim-majority Somali region, where Islamic teachings were mobilized to promote and protect WLR.

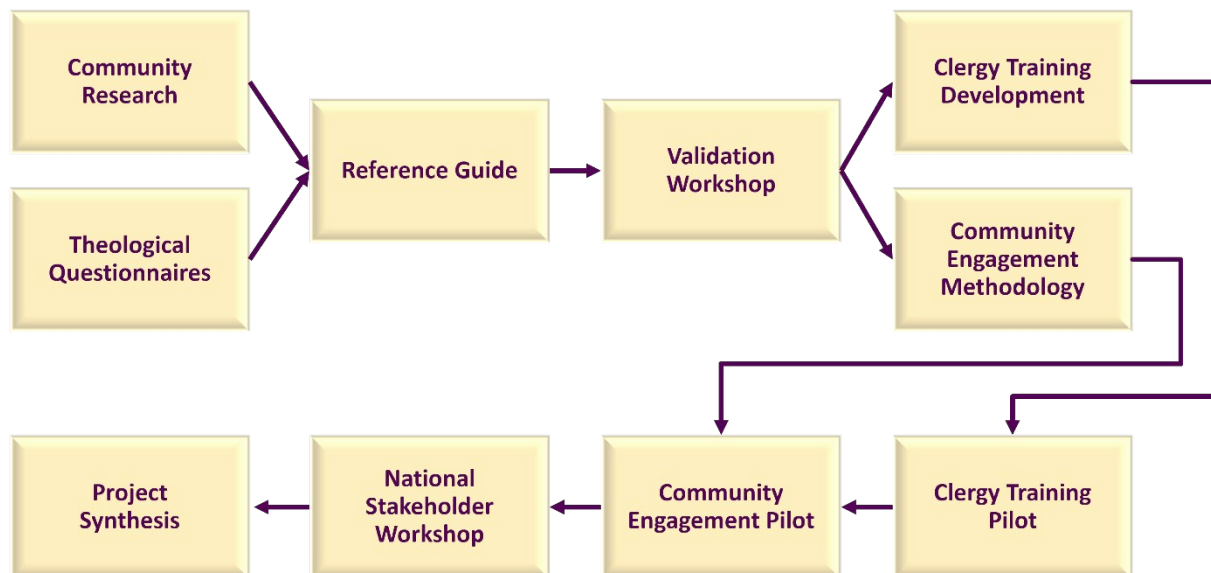
Central to this Christian-focused approach is the engagement of clergy—priests, pastors, and other religious leaders. In a society as deeply religious as Ethiopia, clergy are among the most trusted and influential figures in any community. Virtually every person, man or woman, has some relationship with a religious leader. Because clergy are seen as custodians of divine truth—those who interpret and communicate God’s will—they possess a moral authority that extends far beyond the pulpit. This makes them uniquely positioned to question harmful traditions and promote new norms grounded in faith. Their influence is amplified by their long-term presence: unlike project staff or government officials who may rotate frequently, clergy often serve the same congregation for decades. This longevity is vital for shifting deeply entrenched social norms, which rarely change overnight. The overarching aim of the project was therefore twofold: first, to explore whether biblical teachings could genuinely support women’s rights to land; and second, to pilot whether clergy could be effective and efficient allies in translating these theological insights into community-level change.



Outreach	Credibility	Sustainability
Every person in Ethiopia is somehow connected to a religious institution. Christian Ethiopians live in close relationships with churches and clergy, both sharing their experiences and receiving guidance.	Religious institutions are trusted to a degree that significantly outweighs trust in government or any other civil institution. This makes them gatekeepers for sensitive issues	Clergy stay in their community often for decades. If you win them as allies, they can create long-term impact. Church structures are self-funded and do not disappear when the project ends.

3. The Methodology

The project began with a preparatory study of social and cultural realities, conducted through a literature review, key informant interviews, and community surveys. In parallel, theological consultations were initiated using extensive questionnaires that were translated into local languages. Insights from this research informed the development of a reference guide that mapped relevant Bible passages and theological arguments related to WLR. Based on this guide, the partner churches (see box below) developed tailored clergy trainings, which were piloted in the project woredas. At the same time, a highly participatory community engagement methodology was designed to enable trained clergy to apply what they had learned in their communities. The methodology included a participatory land mapping as well as dramatized lectures to start conversations about prevalent injustices. To foster dialogue and account for social conventions that regulate public speaking, participants were divided at the beginning into sex- and age-specific groups, generating vibrant discussions. The project culminated in workshops and learning exchanges to consolidate lessons, promote replication, and encourage policy integration.



To support this process, a variety of data were collected to assess the estimated results of the intervention. In addition to standard quantitative, gender-disaggregated data, qualitative questionnaires were distributed among participants of both the clergy training and the community engagement activities. The project approach was presented at a World Bank conference on land rights, a national stakeholder workshop, and a webinar on religion and land rights held in collaboration with IGAD. Feedback collected during these events was incorporated into the project evaluation.

EOTC-DICAC (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission)

EOTC-DICAC is the development wing of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian traditions in the world. Established in 1972, EOTC-DICAC implements humanitarian and development programs across Ethiopia, including education, health, water access, and food security. The commission plays a key role in mobilizing the Church's moral authority and extensive community networks to support social justice, peacebuilding, and the wellbeing of vulnerable populations.

EECMY-DASSC (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission)

EECMY-DASSC is the development arm of the largest Lutheran denomination in Ethiopia. It focuses on sustainable development, human rights, disaster response, and community-based social services. Rooted in a faith-based commitment to justice and compassion, the Commission works closely with communities across the country—especially in rural and underserved areas—to promote inclusive development and empower marginalized groups.

UEWCA (Union of Ethiopian Women's and Children's Associations)

UEWCA is a national umbrella organization representing grassroots women's and children's groups across Ethiopia. It advocates for the rights and empowerment of women and children through policy engagement, training, public awareness, and mobilization campaigns. The Union plays a vital role in advancing gender equality, especially in areas such as land rights, leadership, and climate resilience, by amplifying local voices and connecting them to national platforms. UEWCA is also a core member of the Ethiopian Coalition of the Stand for Her Land global advocacy initiative for women's land rights.

4. Key Findings

4.1 Role of Clergy in Land Dispute Resolution

Current Involvement in the Application of Customary Law

In the cultural contexts where this project was implemented, clergy occupy a threefold role in the resolution of disputes related to women's land rights (WLR). First, they possess deep knowledge of local cultural norms and how these norms are applied in land-related matters. As some of the most respected figures in their communities, clergy are frequently approached to mediate land disputes in accordance with prevailing customary practices. Their involvement is typically seen as authoritative and often leads to the successful resolution of conflicts. Indeed, most participants in the clergy training reported that they were involved in land-related dispute resolution at least once every six months. Second, while clergy are generally familiar with the Bible and regularly preach on core themes such as Jesus Christ and eternal life, few have received systematic theological training. As observed during the project, biblical principles are rarely applied by clergy to promote gender justice in relation to WLR. Rather, prevailing cultural norms tend to take precedence over religious teachings and determine their opinions.

Third, as prominent local actors, clergy are regularly called upon by local government authorities to participate in land governance, including the mediation of land disputes. According to Ethiopia's federal rural land proclamations, dispute resolution is expected to begin at the community level, often involving local elders—among whom clergy frequently serve. Moreover, even decisions issued by formal courts are typically implemented with the cooperation of kebele administrators, elders, and clergy. For women, particularly those in rural areas who face considerable barriers in accessing the formal justice system, clergy often serve as an essential entry point to justice.

Opportunities and Limitations for Clergy as Advocates for WLR

Clergy who act as allies for WLR may face resistance from both traditional actors and certain state institutions. Their advocacy—particularly when grounded in religious principles—adds a further layer to Ethiopia's legally pluralistic landscape, where customary law, state law, and religious norms each exert influence over land governance. While there is potential for friction, project experience suggests that clergy engagement can, in fact, ease tensions. Government officials expressed appreciation that clergy had begun to challenge customary norms, noting that this made it easier for them to do so as well—especially in their own communities where they might otherwise risk social backlash for opposing prevailing traditions.

Need for Theological and Legal Capacity Building

Clergy participating in the training acknowledged that they were not well equipped to speak about WLR from a faith-based perspective and lacked familiarity with the relevant legal frameworks. Experience from this and similar initiatives in Ethiopia indicates that even short training interventions can yield significant impact—especially when participants are provided with user-friendly materials to support their sermons and community engagement. To maximize effectiveness, follow-up engagements are advisable to address lingering questions and reinforce key messages. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, such follow-up was not possible under the current project. More sustained engagement, including mentoring and outcome monitoring, would be essential for achieving long-term impact and consolidating clergy as enduring allies for WLR.

4.2 Theological Entry Points

The Bible Itself is a Challenge to Customary Law

The Bible itself must be seen as a challenge to customary law. Large parts of the Old Testament, especially many of its legal provisions, can only be understood as reforms or reinterpretations of earlier customary norms—a fact that sometimes is even made explicit (e.g. Ruth 4:7).² Prophets and biblical authors often pushed these traditions toward a vision of greater justice, especially for vulnerable groups. These ideals are further elevated in the teachings of Jesus, who challenged rigid applications of religious law when they conflicted with compassion and justice. For instance, in Matthew 19, Jesus teaches that the law allowing men to divorce was a concession to human hardheartedness, and not God's original intention. This reflects what many theologians see as a broader biblical pattern of evolving norms in the direction of greater equity and grace.

² Ruth 4:7 discusses “the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging”, telling us how property was traditionally transferred — not by written contract, but by a public ritual involving a sandal. The Torah did not create this ritual but recognized and regulated it within its legal provisions. Similarly, the practice of paying a brideprice (Ex 22:16-17), Levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) or slavery (Exodus 21:1-11) are presupposed by the Old Testament, and usually be modified by adding ethical modifications, and protective measures (especially for women, the poor, and vulnerable).

Equal Creation and Joint Bestowment with Land

A foundational theological idea is that both men and women are created equally in the image of God, as stated in Genesis 1:27. Importantly, the command to "subdue the earth"—often cited as the biblical basis for human stewardship of land—was given in the plural, to both the man and the woman. This affirms not only spiritual equality, but also shared responsibility and authority in relation to land.

Justice for the Most Marginalized

Justice is one of the Bible's most central values, especially as it relates to protecting the vulnerable. Deuteronomy 10:18 speaks of God's defense of the widow and the orphan. Isaiah 1:17 calls on believers to "seek justice" and "plead the case of the widow." Micah 6:8 famously summarizes true religious duty as doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Jesus continues this tradition by challenging social norms that hurt the vulnerable, including women. In Matthew 15:3, he critiques religious leaders for prioritizing tradition over God's command to honor one's parents. In John 8:1–11, he defends a woman accused of adultery and exposes the hypocrisy of her accusers. These examples frame Christianity not as static law, but as a relentless, consistent, and powerful moral force that prioritizes dignity, fairness, and compassion—values directly aligned with promoting women's rights.

Equality in Marriage

Marriage holds special significance in Christianity, both spiritually and practically, and is a key context for many land-related disputes. Genesis 2:24 describes marriage as a union in which man and woman become "one flesh," indicating shared life and mutual responsibility. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church—an image of sacrificial and self-giving love. This theological framing supports the idea of joint decision-making and co-ownership in marriage. It also challenges practices where property is controlled solely by the husband or reverts to his male relatives after his death, marginalizing the widow and children. While marriage and the nuclear family enjoy special significance in the New Testament, extended kin relations clearly do not. Ultimately, the biblical emphasis on unity, love, and justice within marriage supports the principle of equal rights to marital property.³

Women in Leadership

Finally, the Bible offers powerful examples of women in leadership and decision-making roles. One of the most notable is Deborah, a judge and prophetess who led Israel during a time of crisis (Judges 4–5). Her story demonstrates that women can rightfully exercise wisdom, spiritual authority, and political leadership. This directly challenges cultural assumptions that exclude women from land governance bodies, such as councils of elders, and affirms their legitimacy as participants in public decision-making. The theological message is clear: leadership is not bound by gender, but by calling, character, and capability.

³ It must be noted that the Biblical understanding of marital relations - at least in the view of a large majority of Christian theologians - is suggesting a complementarity of the sexes, based on equality in worth and dignity, but difference with regards to their roles in marriage, society and Church.

A key text for WLR in the Bible: The daughters of Zelophehad

In *Numbers 27:1–11*, five sisters—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—challenge the customary rule that only sons inherit land. They ask to receive their father’s portion so his name is not lost, and God affirms their claim, establishing a new legal precedent: daughters may inherit if there are no sons. However, in *Numbers 36*, tribal leaders raise concerns about land passing to other tribes if the sisters marry outside their clan. God responds by requiring endogamy—daughters who inherit must marry within their tribe. This ancient story remains strikingly relevant today, as many cultures still balance women’s land ownership with the desire to preserve communal land through similar restrictions.

What does this mean for WLR today? The original exclusion of daughters was not a divine command, but customary practice—now overturned by divine judgment. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the command of endogamy was given in a specific context: the people of Israel living in the Promised Land. It is a concession God makes to human hardheartedness (cf. Matthew 19), in this case their desire to keep their land in the community. It is not God’s original plan. Ultimately, the passage can be read as a part of the *divine pedagogy* through which God led the people of Israel closer and closer to the full truth that was ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ, which is why the Old Testament is supposed to be read in the light of the New Testament at all times.

4.3 Churches as Partners

The cooperation with both the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) was exceptionally strong throughout the project. Several enabling factors contributed to this success—factors that may not be equally present in other contexts and should therefore be noted.

- First, both churches operate through long-established “development wings,” a structure shaped by Ethiopian law requiring the separation of religious and development activities. These wings are specialized, professional institutions with decades of experience partnering with international organizations, allowing them to bridge the gap between faith-based networks and development practice.
- Second, their access to nationwide church structures provided a unique implementation advantage. Because these structures are largely self-sustaining, project activities could be delivered with very low overhead costs. This efficiency was clearly demonstrated when both church partners independently requested to raise their output targets, having trained significantly more clergy than originally planned.

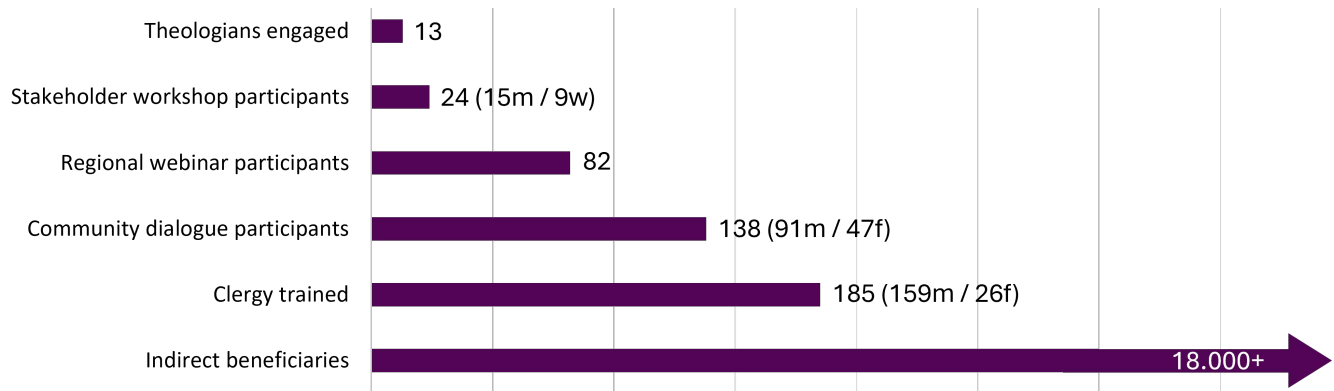
These lessons highlight the value—but also the specificity—of working with Ethiopia’s church institutions, where long-standing infrastructure, institutional capacity, and intrinsic motivation can align to produce high-impact, cost-effective results.

Throughout the project, the value of the initiative was never questioned. Both Church partners consistently affirmed the alignment between the WLR agenda and the core messages of Christianity.

In their view, WLR is grounded in principles of fairness and compassion—virtues that should take precedence over prevailing gender norms in local culture. They also emphasized that clergy are called to stand for truth and justice. However, in practice, clergy often adhere more closely to cultural traditions than to religious teachings. According to their own reflections, this is largely due to a lack of theological education and limited formal preparation for their roles. For this reason, they welcomed the creation of training materials and the opportunity to strengthen the theological knowledge of their clergy with the project’s support. Overall, they appeared genuinely interested in improving the quality of their clergy’s theological formation.


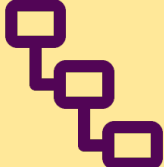



5. Project Outcomes

The project outcomes surpassed the expectations. Not only with regards to the numbers of clergy trained and people engaged in the communities, but also with regards to the support the project received from the side of the Churches’ hierarchies. Both Churches sent their highest ranked theologians to participate in the theological discussions, and the results were subsequently endorsed by both Churches’ spiritual leadership.



The project’s indirect beneficiaries include the thousands of community members who have been reached by trained clergy within just two months of implementation. According to rough estimates provided by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, these clergy members have reached a total of 18,428 people—of whom 9,206 were women—through various community-based channels.

How indirect beneficiaries were reached:

				
Church Events	Cascading to other clergy	Home visits	Community events	Sunday schools & women of faith
10,142 (5,412 f)	365	520 (287 f)	5,449 (2,849 f)	1,952 (658 f)

This broad-based reach suggests that the project is already influencing public discourse and norms around women's land rights well beyond the immediate participants of the clergy training sessions.

Feedback from the clergy training sessions, gathered through structured questionnaires, revealed a strong and positive impact on participating religious leaders. On key evaluation questions, the majority of clergy reported the highest level of agreement. Specifically, in response to whether the training changed their perception of women's land rights, nearly all indicated it had done so "to a large extent." Similarly, the question on the relationship between culture and religion also saw the highest number of responses in the same category, highlighting that the training effectively encouraged participants to re-evaluate traditional assumptions through a faith-based lens. Furthermore, clergy overwhelmingly felt better prepared to publicly teach and preach on women's land rights and the biblical vision of gender equality - a key goal of the project. They also expressed strong confidence that their interpretations and judgments would be followed by the community and that they possessed sufficient authority to advocate for and enforce shifts in these customary practices - whereby the Protestant were slightly less confident than the Orthodox.

Q: Which elements of the training did you find the most useful?

"To challenge culture and tradition through the Word of God. [...] I believe now that I have a responsibility to be a voice for women's rights and to educate them about their land rights."
(Protestant clergy, male, 40y)

This feedback not only validates the theological relevance of the training content but also underscores the potential of clergy to serve as influential agents of change in the pursuit of gender justice.

A clergyman committed to becoming a WLR ally after clergy training

Rev. Sisay, a participant in the EECMY Church Leaders Training in Mizan (May 2025), shared a deeply personal reflection that marked a turning point in his thinking. "I have four children—two sons and two daughters. The first and third are boys; the second and fourth are girls. Years ago, I prepared a plot of land, planted coffee on it, and registered it in the names of my sons. I intended the income to support their schooling and serve as a resource for their future. At the time, I did not do the same for my daughters. I was following what society taught me—that providing food, shelter, and clothing is enough for girls, while land and inheritance are for boys."

He continued, "But this training opened my eyes. I taught about Jesus and cast out evil spirits, yet I never questioned the injustice embedded in our customs. I realized I had been living according to cultural norms rather than religious truth when it came to women's land rights."

Now, Rev. Sisay is committed to change. "I believe I wronged my daughters. As a father, if I mistreat them, how can I expect their husbands to treat them well? I have promised to give land to my daughters, just as I did for my sons."

The community engagements also appeared to find fertile ground. Among the commitments defined by each group was the pledge by community elders to include senior and respected women in dispute resolution councils—an idea that had been expected to face much more opposition.

Case: A mother's journey to secure her land

Mrs. Zenebech once lived a fulfilling life with her husband and two children, Solomon and Senait. The family owned a large plot of farmland in Cherecha Kebele, which provided them with a steady harvest. As the children grew up, Senait moved to a nearby city to begin her own life.

After her husband's passing, Mrs. Zenebech's situation changed drastically. Solomon, well connected in the local administration, bypassed the formal inheritance process and transferred the land into his name alone, claiming his right as the sole male heir. As conflict with his mother escalated, he completely disregarded her rights and well-being. She soon struggled to afford basic needs. Seeing her mother suffer, Senait confronted Solomon and succeeded in bringing the case before the local community council, trained by EOTC-DICAC under this project. For the first time in this community, women representatives were also included in the council. After hearing both sides, the elders reached a consensus: the family would undergo a formal inheritance process, and Solomon would provide monthly support to his mother.

However, follow-up visits revealed that Solomon was not honoring the agreement, prompting the elders to escalate the matter to the Woreda Land Administration Task Force. Ultimately, ownership of the land was officially returned to Mrs. Zenebech, who was then able to rent it out and use the income for her own needs.

(EOTC, Community Engagement, Minjar, May 2025)

Lessons Learned

- 1. Churches are open to work on WLR**
 - ➡ Given the right framing and respectful engagement, both Orthodox and Protestant churches are willing and capable partners in advancing WLR
- 2. Theological arguments can challenge harmful cultural norms**
 - ➡ Scripture provides robust, faith-based arguments to support WLR—this approach resonates more strongly in communities than secular rights language.
- 3. Clergy appreciate theological training**
 - ➡ Clergy welcomed the opportunity to deepen their understanding of biblical perspectives on land and justice, and requested further training.
- 4. Respect & Trust**
 - ➡ Clergy must be engaged as faith leaders—not just facilitators. When they are treated as men and women of God, they become invested and proactive.

5. **Theological Empowerment**

➡ For clergy to speak credibly in their communities, they need theological language that aligns with their mission and daily ministry.

6. **Clergy as agents of change**

➡ Trained clergy actively influenced community attitudes on land and gender—demonstrating their power to shift norms from within.

7. **Gender-transformative outcomes**

➡ The approach led to structural change: in one community, women were for the first time granted seats on the customary law council.

8. **Effective, efficient, and sustainable**

➡ Effective: Clergy can challenge cultural norms from a position of trust.

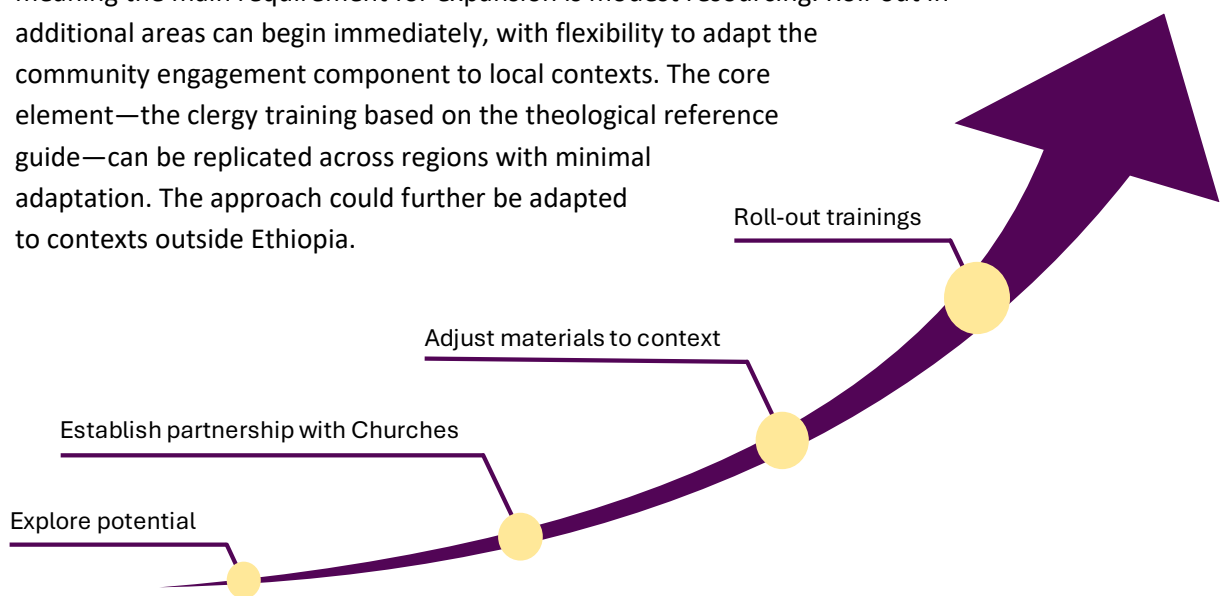
➡ Efficient: Church-led initiatives operate with low overhead due to existing structures.

➡ Sustainable: Clergy often remain in their communities for decades, fostering long-term change.

“The cultural influence that has existed since the time of our forefathers is being challenged now, as the Holy Bible teaches that women have equal rights with men, including the right to inherit land.” (*Protestant clergy, male, 37y*)

Potential for Scaling

The approach is highly scalable within Ethiopia. Clergy training materials tailored for both Orthodox and Protestant contexts are already developed and field-tested. The Protestant materials are suitable for clergy across denominations, not just EECMY. Both churches have trained facilitators in place, meaning the main requirement for expansion is modest resourcing. Roll-out in additional areas can begin immediately, with flexibility to adapt the community engagement component to local contexts. The core element—the clergy training based on the theological reference guide—can be replicated across regions with minimal adaptation. The approach could further be adapted to contexts outside Ethiopia.



Challenges & Limitations

- **Limited Timeframe**

The project's duration was relatively short, while shifts in social norms—especially around land and gender—tend to unfold gradually over years or even generations. Although early signals of change were promising, the medium- and long-term impact of clergy engagement on women's land rights can only be assessed through sustained follow-up and monitoring.
- **Tension with Full Gender Equality**

While the theological foundation of equal dignity based on shared creation is strong, it often coexists with doctrines that assign different roles to men and women. This can create a tension between promoting women's rights and staying within the doctrinal boundaries accepted by church leadership and congregants.
- **Limits of Theological Relevance**

Not every development issue lends itself to faith-based engagement. Clergy are most effective when they can draw on meaningful theological concepts and scriptural grounding. If the topic feels unrelated to their spiritual mission, engagement risks becoming superficial or performative—mere religious “icing on the cake.”
- **Not Universally Applicable**

This approach depends heavily on context. In areas where religious institutions are fragmented, politicized, or lack grassroots legitimacy, or where the population is more religiously diverse or secular, similar initiatives may be less feasible or less effective. Careful contextual analysis is essential before replication.

6. Recommendations & Way Forward

The following points are based on the project evaluation and the discussions during the National Workshop.

For Policy Makers

- **Recognize Religious Actors as Allies:** Acknowledge the critical role of churches in transforming gender norms related to land rights and integrate them as key partners in WLR strategies and programs.
- **Strengthen Legal Enforcement with Faith-Based Advocacy:** Support initiatives that bridge gaps between formal law and community practices by leveraging theological narratives that align with state laws on gender equality and WLR.

For Development Partners and Civil Society

- **Scale Up Faith-Based Approaches for WLR:** Expand collaboration with religious actors, recognizing their effectiveness (authority & credibility), efficiency (self-funded structures) and sustainability (clergy's long-term community presence). Development actors can achieve greater impact with less investment by partnering with these established networks.
- **Address Organizational Reservations through Dialogue:** International organizations with secular mandates, such as GIZ, may initially hesitate to engage religious actors. These barriers can be effectively addressed by local secular CSO, for example through facilitated

dialogues, showcasing successful models and involving experienced mediators who can bridge institutional cultures.

- Leverage Local Staff and Foster Reflexivity on Religion: International organizations should actively draw on the cultural and religious expertise of their local staff. For this, local colleagues must feel confident that their faith—or religion in general—is taken seriously. International staff should reflect on their own (often secular) biases, acknowledge the positive role religion can play, and signal openness to faith-based collaboration.

For Religious Institutions

- Institutionalize Theological Engagement on WLR: The project demonstrated that clergy are receptive to faith-based arguments supporting gender-equitable land rights and welcome capacity building in this area. Formalize the integration of WLR topics into theological education and ongoing clergy training programs.
- Empower Clergy as Agents of Social Change: Equip priests and pastors with practical tools to apply theological arguments in community engagement, land dispute mediation, and advocacy. Given their long-term presence in communities and moral authority, clergy are uniquely positioned to challenge harmful cultural norms that restrict WLR.

For Joint Action

- Foster Multi-Stakeholder Platforms: Establish forums where religious institutions, government bodies, and development partners collaboratively address WLR challenges. Such platforms can harmonize efforts, ensure alignment with both legal frameworks and community realities, and build mutual trust.
- Document and Share Evidence of Impact: Continuously gather and disseminate evidence on the effectiveness of faith-based WLR interventions. Highlighting success stories and lessons learned will further legitimize this approach and encourage broader adoption.

7. Annexes / Further Readings

- Kalkum, B., Hundessa Edosa, G. (2025). *Reference Guide - “Heirs to the same grace”: Women’s Land Rights from the perspective of Ethiopian Christianity*. https://stand4herland.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Reference-Guide_WLR-from-the-perspective-of-Ethiopian-Christianity_FINAL.pdf
- Istratii, R., Kalkum, B., & Hailu, H. (2025). *Findings from a Theology-Informed Training for Ethiopian Orthodox Clergy: Policy and Practice Note*. Religion and Development (published online ahead of print 2025). <https://doi.org/10.30965/27507955-20230043>
- Tempira, O., Sait, S., & Khouri, R. (2018). *Women and land in the Muslim world: Pathways to increase access to land for the realization of development, peace and human rights*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). <https://arablandinitiative.gltm.net/library/publications/women-and-land-in-the-muslim-world>