

# Restricted land,

## “Poverty is because of land”

**Inadequate land tenure, inequitable institutional support and lack of access to information are particular problems for the poor.**

Poor people are powerless as a result of:

- lack of participation in decision making;
- poor access to information and technology;
- unfair, inefficient administrative and judicial procedures (that are intimidating, expensive and inaccessible);
- lack of respect for social and cultural practices and knowledge (1).

Poor people depend on natural resources and land, but they often have ill-defined (or non-existent) land tenure and restricted rights to resources. Many poor people in rural areas live on land that is traditionally theirs but is not recognized as such by the state; many of the urban poor have settled in illegal slums (2).

Powerful companies are increasingly free to locate wherever they want and states frequently lay claim (through colonial law) to traditional resources; together they have forced weak rural and urban communities off the better land onto infertile land, polluted flood plains and other marginal areas. Indigenous communities, who depend heavily on access to forests and water, are particularly threatened. Once they are displaced, they cannot avoid further degrading the new land on which they find themselves (3).

The absence of rights to land, resources, information and institutional support particularly affects poor women. The

customary laws of patriarchal land ownership and inheritance often require women to leave land or deny them access to resources when they are widowed or divorced (4). The lack of property rights, coupled with illiteracy, inadequate access to information and weak institutions, makes women and other marginal groups vulnerable to corruption and loan deferments.

The evidence shows that securing local community rights to land tenure and resources will encourage the sustainable use of resources. To secure those rights, they must be integrated into national and international law, environmental information needs to be freely disseminated, and local communities must be able to take part in decisions about land and resource through greater decentralization and the strengthening of local government.

Ma. Sn.

1. *World Development Report 2000/2001*, The World Bank, Washington DC, 2001.
2. *The Jo'burg-Memo: Fairness in A Fragile World*, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin, 2002.
3. DFID et al., *Linking Poverty Reduction and Environmental Management: Policy Challenges and Opportunities*, Consultation Draft, 2002.
4. *Modules on gender, population & rural development with a focus on land tenure & farming system*, FAO, Rome, 1995.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

#### Marginal land

In developing countries twice as many rural poor live on marginal land than on “favoured” land (1).

In Columbia many poor farmers have to carve out a living on steep slopes prone to soil erosion and deforestation; commercial farmers use the fertile valley bottom (2).

In the Western Indian Ocean states poor farmers struggle to make a living from less productive land, while the best land is allocated for commercial crops (3).

#### Common resources

Worldwide 350 million people depend on forests for their livelihoods – more people than live in the United States and Canada combined (4).

Rural households in Africa get 35 percent of their energy needs from fuel wood, most of it collected from forests and common land (4).

#### Marginalized groups

Women carry out two-thirds of the world's work hours, they receive one-tenth of its income and own less than a hundredth of its property (5).

South Africans of African origin own slightly more than one hectare of land per person; those of European origin own 1,570 hectares per person (6).

Women who could better gauge potential damage of the 1992 drought in Zimbabwe were required to seek permission (via letter) from their husbands to sell cattle.

The men who had migrated to urban areas, but who retained property rights, were not willing to sell the cattle. As the drought progressed, pressure on grazing areas increased and large losses of cattle resulted (7).

#### Access to technology and information

One in six people in the world have never used a telephone. There are more telephone lines in Manhattan than on the entire African continent (5).

1. CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), *Report of the Study on CGIAR Research Priorities for Marginal Lands*, Technical Advisory Committee Working Document, TAC Secretariat, FAO, Rome, 1997.
2. Heath, J. and H. Binswanger, “Natural Resource Degradation Effects of Poverty and Population Growth are Largely Policy Induced: The Case of Columbia”, in *Environment and Development Economics*, Vol. 1, Part 1, 1986. Cited in Bojö et al., *Environment*, 2001
3. *Global Environment Outlook 3*, UNEP, Nairobi, 2002.
4. *The Jo'burg-Memo: Fairness in A Fragile World*, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin, 2002.
5. *People, Planet, Prosperity: Africa's Approach to the Agenda of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2000*, South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and the Johannesburg World Summit Company, 2002.
6. *Human Development Report: Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Integration*, SARIPS [stands for...], Harare, SAPES Trust, 2000. Cited in *Global Environment Outlook 3*, UNEP, 2002 [p. 72].
7. Vivian, J., NGOs and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: No Magic Bullets”, in *Development and Environment: Sustaining People and Nature*, Dharam Chai, ed., Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1994. Cited in World Bank, *Poverty and Environment*, 2000.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

*Poverty is because of land, the person who doesn't have any must obligatorily leave to do day labour.*  
Anonymous, Ecuador (2)

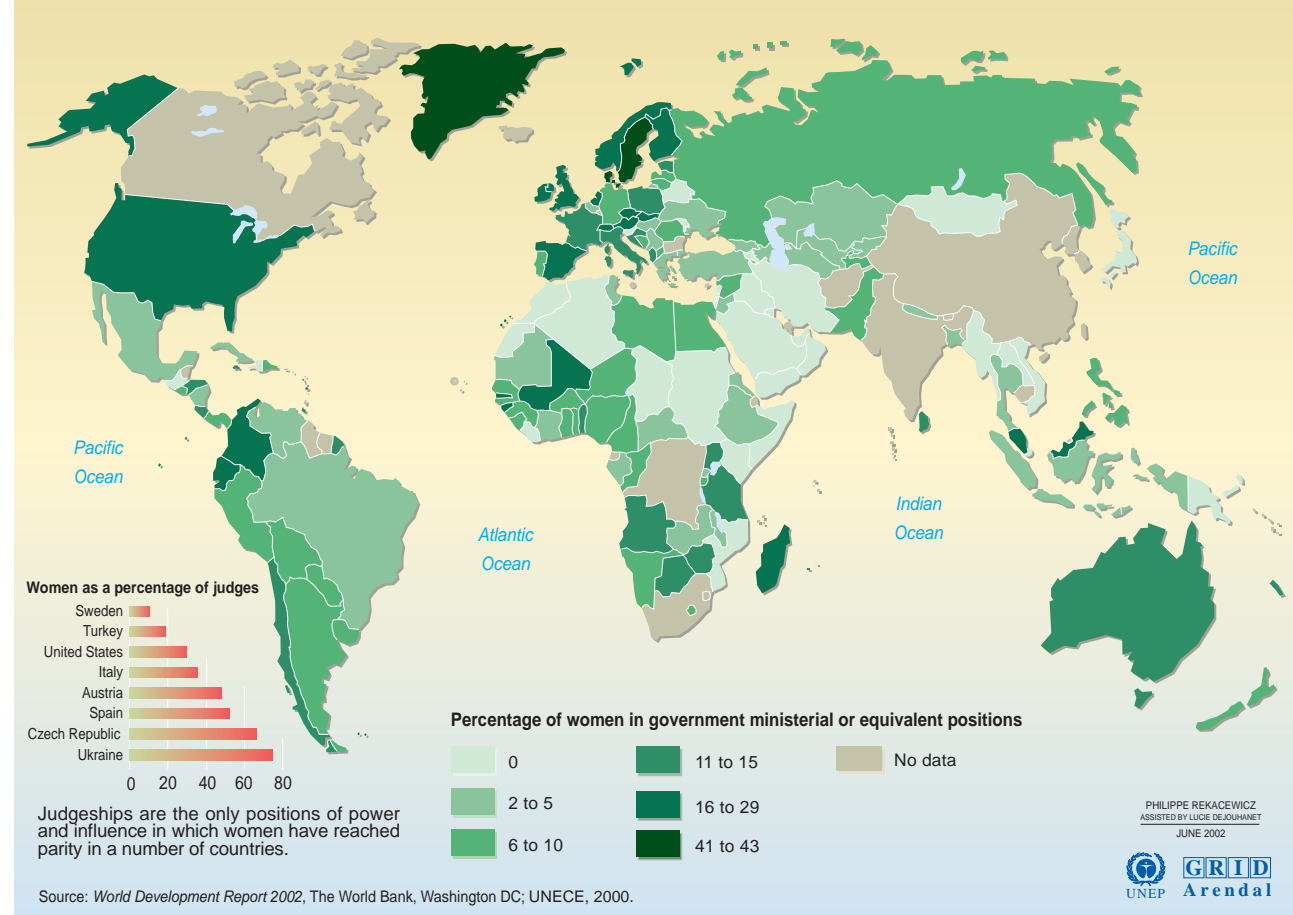
*There is no hope of someone to help us. I wanted a loan, but they are requiring the land title, but I can't provide it.*  
A man, Ecuador (2)

*...To make things worse, our farmland is continuously decreasing as a result of concessions given to poultry farms by private investors.*  
A group of poor men and women, Ethiopia (2)

1. Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher, and Sarah Koch-Schulte, *Can Anyone Hear Us?*, Voices of the Poor series, The World Bank, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000.
2. Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera Shah and Patti. Petesch, *Crying out for Change*, Voices of the Poor series, The World Bank, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000.

## Women's rights

### WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS IN 1998



#### Property ownership and poor credit

Getting credit or loans is difficult, if not impossible, for poor women who do not have proof of property ownership or sufficient stable income (collateral is required by most lending institutions).

#### Land rights and patriarchal control

Women are responsible for most household work (and in many parts of the world the majority of agricultural production), but women's rights to own land or control resources are constrained, often by traditional customs and religious laws. In societies with patriarchal land ownership women, when widowed or divorced, are often driven off land or denied future access to land and resources on which they rely (1).

1. *Modules on gender, population and rural development with a focus on land tenure & farming system*, FAO, Rome, 1995.

### Guardians and gurus of biodiversity

In many agricultural and gathering communities, women select and preserve seeds and gather a wide variety of plants. Vegetable, tree and flower species diversity help ensure that different species can grow under various climatic and soil conditions and in turn help communities through periods of variable rainfall and food shortages.

The manufacturing of genetically engineered seeds (that cannot be replanted etc.) threatens the role women play to maintain biodiversity. Companies that seek gene patents are exploiting women's genetic indigenous knowledge (1).

Ma. Sn.

1. *The Jo'burg-Memo: Fairness in a Fragile World*, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin, 2002.