ENHANCING WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS:

Insights from Experience Related to Land-Based Investments

TOOLKIT

ALIGN

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COLUMBIA CLIMATE SCHOOL
COLUMBIA CENTER ON SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT

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Photo: *Panchyat women gathering in Digner India (Carol Mitchell via* Flickr, CC BY-ND 2.0*)*

INTRODUCTION

The information in this toolkit originally came out of insights garnered through the Technical Support Facility of the Advancing Land-Based Investment Governance (**ALIGN**) initiative. As part of that work, we pulled together key experiences and recommendations in the (mainly) English-language literature, from ALIGN team members, and expert reviewers on the barriers that women face to meaningful inclusion in community engagements in the land-based investment context, as well as strategies to overcome those barriers.[I] We noted that this information had never before been compiled in one place in an easily understandable, practical, and pragmatic manner. This toolkit aims to do just that.

This toolkit includes the following three tools:

Tool 1. Identifying and Addressing Barriers Women Face to Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements

Tool 2. Women-Inclusive Community Engagement Planning Checklist

Tool 3. Sources of Law and Good Practice for Women's Inclusion in Community Engagements

Each of these tools is also available as a separate PDF that you can download at the Enhancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements: Insights from Experience Related to Land-Based Investments landing page.[1] The checklist is also available to download as a Microsoft Word document so that you can easily adapt it to your local context and use it as appropriate. In addition to English, the documents are available in informal French, Bahasa Indonesian, and Portuguese translations.

We have not specifically limited the scope of the toolkit to any particular subgroup of women. However, the toolkit is more oriented toward women living in rural areas, where land-based investments typically occur. We acknowledge that referring generally to women obscures the different political and legal statuses of female subgroups (based on factors such as Indigeneity) and their worldviews and have sought in places to highlight nuances. These nuances, however, will be best unpacked in context-specific adaptations of this toolkit. While this toolkit is designed to address barriers that women face, many of the barriers and the strategies to overcome these barriers are relevant to efforts working with a range of marginalised groups, including pastoralists, youth, migrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, among others.

A NOTE ON WORD CHOICE

In this toolkit, we use the term:

Community to mean a group of individuals, families, and households who collectively live within or have strong historical ties to a specific territory with definable boundaries and are governed by a shared set of Indigenous, customary, or state governance structures. We acknowledge the distinct legal status of both Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant Peoples as distinct groups and have sought to recognise that nuance where possible, while using community as shorthand where appropriate.

I   The resources listed in the Bibliography as well as the professional experiences of the authors and review team have been relied upon in the creation of this toolkit. In order to reduce endnote "noise" in the published version, the authors have removed nonspecific, generally supportive endnote references and encourage anyone wishing to know details to reach out.

Engagement to refer to the range of interactions (including formal group meetings, informal conversations with individuals, and exchanging information through other means such as electronic messages or audio) that a community should have with outsiders throughout the land-based investment life cycle—for context, see an agricultural investment life cycle in Figure 1. This includes all instances of community engagement by an outside person in the "process of building ongoing relationships with communities," including but not limited to "community capacity-building, sensitization, and education; social impact assessments and social performance; community negotiation, consultation, and agreement making; and obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)"[2] and the design and implementation of grievance mechanisms. While this toolkit focuses on community-outsider interactions in the context of land-based investments, it may be more widely applicable to other circumstances and to a wide range of sectors where an outside person seeks to engage with a local community.

Intersectionalities as a way of describing the interconnected nature of social categories like race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group—specifically, how these categories create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Investors to encompass the full range of local, national, or international elites; companies; business decision-makers; and project financers who stand behind any land-based investment, business, initiative, or project that has an impact on communities. Governments are often themselves direct investors, shareholders, or investment proprietors. The term investors also applies to local businesspeople, including those who may be operating illegally or without permits and permissions. A more nuanced understanding of the many types of investors involved in land-based investments was not needed for this toolkit, but we highlight the existence of such analysis, which is especially relevant to changing behaviour.[3]

Meaningful participation to mean women:[4]

1. Are **PRESENT** at community engagements, including understanding the content of engagements and being at meetings in large numbers, and

2. Have **VOICE** to speak up (in ways that feel comfortable to them), be listened to, and have their ideas, opinions, and interests taken into consideration, and

3. Have the **POWER** to influence community decision-making and play a role in community-outsider engagements, such as consultations and negotiations.

Outsiders to refer to noncommunity members. In the land-based investment context, this is likely to include government officials, company representatives, staff of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and local civil society organisations (CSOs), and professionals and consultants hired by those actors.

Women to include those people who identify as female and girls who are younger than 18 years old who already bear household responsibilities that are tied to land use.

What are land-based investments, and what impacts might they have on Indigenous Peoples and local communities?[II]

Governments across the world continue to grant large areas of land to national and foreign investors for agro-industrial, logging, mining, alternative energy, and tourism ventures. Very often, Indigenous Peoples and local communities live on these lands and hold rights to these lands. The positive effects of such investments may include improved infrastructure (such as roads, water supply, electrical supply, cellular towers, schools, hospitals), jobs for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, annual rent paid to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, links to markets and services, and other benefits each affected group might negotiate for. However, the benefits that are promised may not materialise, and investments may further bring a range of negative impacts to affected Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including:
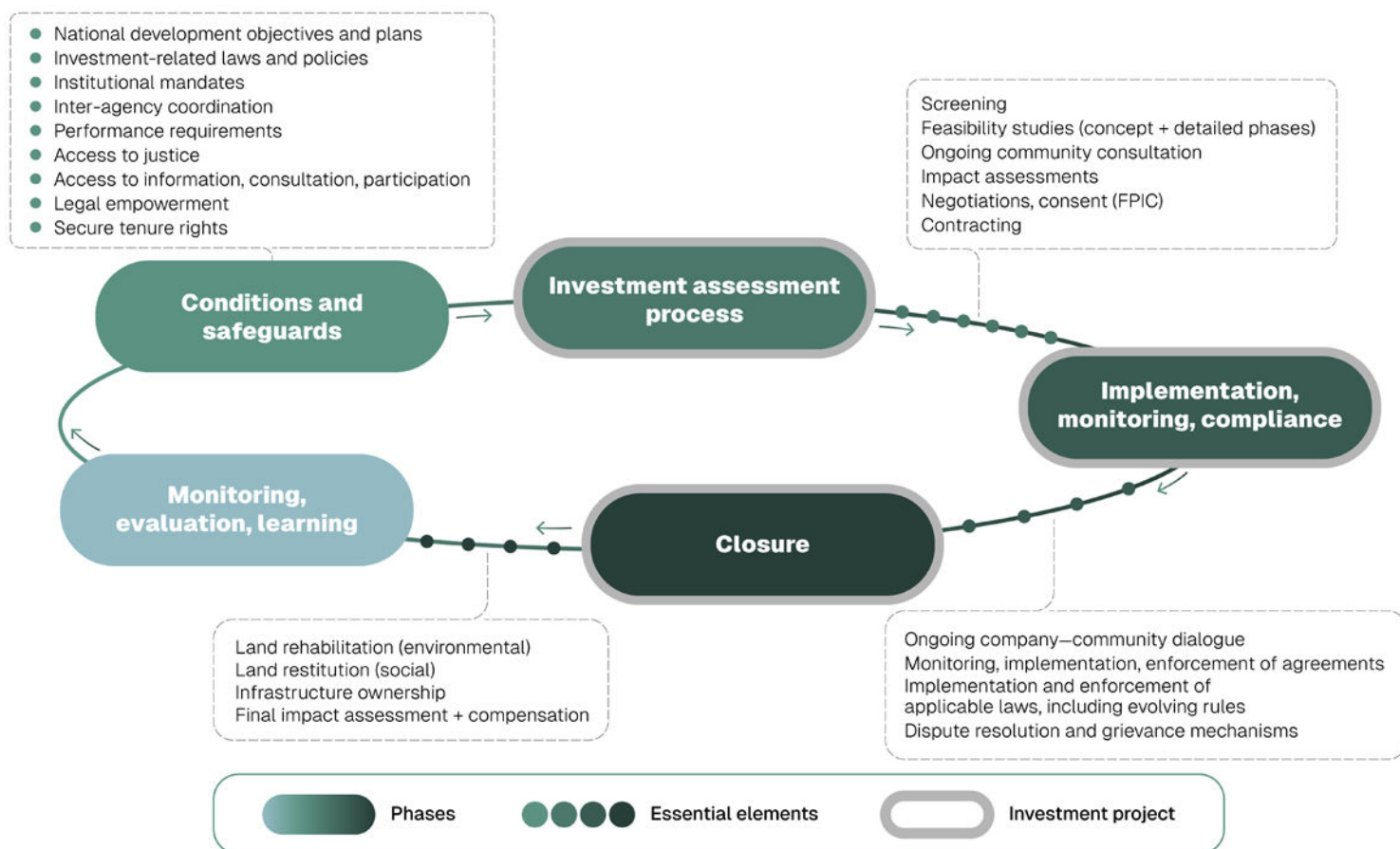
- Air, soil, and water may be polluted, and animals and plants may be endangered.
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities may lose access to forests, water bodies, grazing lands, fishing areas, and rights of way necessary to their livelihoods, survival, and well-being.
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities may be pressured or forced to move off their lands.
- Roads may bring pollution or heavy truck use may endanger children.
- Electricity and water may be brought to the investment but not shared with Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- Company workers may bring violence, alcohol, and drugs into communities and create health and safety risks.

Given the high risks, it is important that affected Indigenous Peoples and local communities are fully informed about a potential investment, meaningfully engaged about the possible investment project, and then given the opportunity to withhold or give their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) (this is required under international law for Indigenous Peoples);[5] some countries have laws and some companies have standards that extend this right to all affected communities, including Afro-descendant Peoples.[6] Most of all, it is critical that the terms of any resulting investment project reflect community-outsider agreements arrived at through an inclusive, comprehensive negotiation process. These agreements should be documented in a written contract that has been reviewed and signed by all parties.[7]

There are many steps involved in land-based investments. Indigenous Peoples and local communities must be involved and consulted throughout every phase. **Figure 1** depicts the key phases and essential elements from a responsible land-based investment perspective of an agricultural investment life cycle.[8] Other land-based investments will have different essential elements. For example, a mining investment assessment process will also involve exploration, exploitation, and closure stages and numerous associated essential elements.

II We acknowledge the legal status of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant Peoples as distinct groups and have sought to recognise that nuance when possible, while using *community* as shorthand where appropriate.

Figure 1: An agricultural investment life cycle

- National development objectives and plans
- Investment-related laws and policies
- Institutional mandates
- Inter-agency coordination
- Performance requirements
- Access to justice
- Access to information, consultation, participation
- Legal empowerment
- Secure tenure rights

Screening
Feasibility studies (concept + detailed phases)
Ongoing community consultation
Impact assessments
Negotiations, consent (FPIC)
Contracting

Conditions and safeguards

Investment assessment process

Implementation, monitoring, compliance

Monitoring, evaluation, learning

Closure

Land rehabilitation (environmental)
Land restitution (social)
Infrastructure ownership
Final impact assessment + compensation

Ongoing company–community dialogue
Monitoring, implementation, enforcement of agreements
Implementation and enforcement of applicable laws, including evolving rules
Dispute resolution and grievance mechanisms
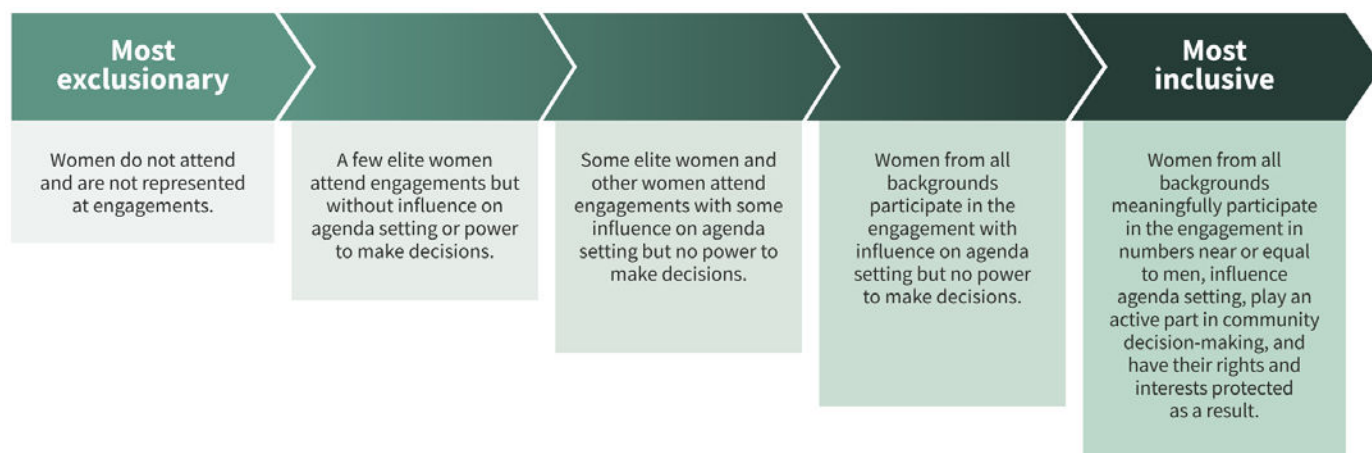
Phases   Essential elements   Investment project

Source: Coleman, Jesse, and Anna Bulman, Investment Frameworks and Responsible Land-Based Investments: Illustrating Points of Contact (London, England: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), ALIGN, 2026)..

Land-based investments have been shown to disproportionally affect women

Well over a decade of research has shown that women tend to bear the greater burden of negative impacts of land-based investments.[9] For example, in rural areas, women are more likely than men to lose access to lands and natural resources necessary to their household survival: They may have to walk further to collect water, work harder to collect firewood, food, medicines, and other goods central to household subsistence. Women are also less likely than men to benefit from investments—data shows that women are less likely to receive project employment, service contracts, and skills training, among other positive impacts.[10] And as community dynamics change as a result of the investment, women may suffer from increased gender-based violence—both within their families and by workers associated with the investment.[11]

One reason that local women experience more negative impacts from investments than men is that they tend to be excluded from key community engagements.[12] To ensure women's rights and interests are protected during community-outsider engagements, transformational[13] system-wide social, cultural, legal, and institutional changes may be necessary. Often, governments, investors, and other outside actors work to ensure that women are present at community consultations or FPIC meetings (so as to superficially "check the box" of "gender inclusivity"), when in actuality the women present did not speak up, or were silenced when they did speak, or had their ideas and concerns ignored in the final community decision.[14] **Figure 2** highlights some of the nuances of the various key elements of women's participation:

Figure 2: Examples of community engagement outcomes on the women's rights continuum[15]

Most exclusionary				Most inclusive
Women do not attend and are not represented at engagements.	A few elite women attend engagements but without influence on agenda setting or power to make decisions.	Some elite women and other women attend engagements with some influence on agenda setting but no power to make decisions.	Women from all backgrounds participate in the engagement with influence on agenda setting but no power to make decisions.	Women from all backgrounds meaningfully participate in the engagement in numbers near or equal to men, influence agenda setting, play an active part in community decision-making, and have their rights and interests protected as a result.

Women's meaningful participation in community engagements is crucial for responsible and successful investments

Positively, community engagements can be used as an opportunity to support women to share their wisdom and wield increased power to the benefit of the entire community. Governments and investors alike have a vested interest in meaningfully including women in community engagements because doing so:

1. **Complies with legal obligations (of the state) and responsibilities (of the investor).** Women's meaningful participation is a legal requirement and a core element of international good practice. An ever-growing body of international, regional, and domestic laws and standards concerning land-based investments require states and investors to pay attention to how governments and investors secure and use land and local natural resources. Consumers also increasingly demand this. Many of those laws include specific sections requiring both protections for women's rights and women's participation in community-outsider interactions and negotiations. Tool 3 summarises some of those laws and standards.

2. **Is more likely to improve local development outcomes (such as poverty eradication and food security) by increasing community land tenure security and protecting diverse livelihood strategies.** Evidence shows that good outcomes for women are correlated with good outcomes for the community.[16] This is partly because women are often responsible for growing food needed to ensure household food security[17] and tend to allocate greater resources toward improving that food security.[18] Women are also primarily responsible for gathering water for household consumption and nontimber forest products, medicines, wild foods, and thatch and other building materials from community common lands like wetlands, forests, and grazing lands.[19] Yet government officials and traditional leaders often see these common lands as available and allocate them to investors.

   If women are not present throughout the community engagement process to describe the ways that common areas and common-pool resources are critical to household survival, then the community may lose access to those areas, impoverishing families. Likewise, because land is used in different ways according to livelihood (for example, agriculturalists, pastoralists, fisherfolk), excluding women and minority groups from community engagement processes may mean that certain land uses, areas, or management strategies will be lost to the investment. Conversely, when women are meaningfully included in engagements, their rich knowledge and ideas can shape outcomes that enhance the lives of and development outcomes for their communities.

3. **Is more likely to enhance the overall success and sustainability of an investment.** Women's participation may do this by:

   - Providing unique insights about the land to be granted for the investment project

- Offering forward-looking solutions and ideas that may be especially helpful during early project assessment and design, and
- Identifying potential future problems and negative impacts, then problem-solving for their proactive prevention.

Failure to meaningfully include local women in project planning can lead to investors' failure to fully assess and take steps to mitigate project risks; this can, in turn, lead to an increased likelihood of community-investor conflicts, which have been proven to negatively impact investment profits.[20] Further, failing to include women in community engagements can be costly and cause reputational harm as investors who do not abide by laws and standards can face local or even transboundary litigation.[21]

Who this toolkit is for, and how to use it

We wrote this toolkit for government officials, company representatives, staff of NGOs and local CSOs, and professionals and consultants hired by those actors who may not have extensive training or experience in how best to ensure women's meaningful participation in community engagements. We designed this resource with the aim of it being particularly helpful when arranging and facilitating community engagements, which will often (but not always) take the form of meetings.

Tool 1 summarises the main barriers women face to inclusion in community engagements and presents practical, concrete strategies to overcome those barriers. You can either peruse Tool 1 from start to finish or use it as a diagnostic tool by reading the table of contents to see the main barriers—identifying a barrier you are faced with in your fieldwork and turning directly to that section of the toolkit to find a list of suggested strategies to overcome that barrier. Tool 1 primarily draws on fieldwork undertaken in Africa and Asia.[III] Where possible, it includes specific country examples of how these strategies were successfully implemented. **Users can pick and choose among the strategies to find ideas they feel are worth trying—and that they have budget for—in their specific context.**

Tool 2 is a checklist that translates the strategies laid out in Tool 1 into an adaptable instrument that can directly and easily inform fieldwork. Tool 2 is also available in a separate Word document for this purpose. However, to ensure it can be useful to a range of contexts, this toolkit provides a very generalised picture of what meaningful women's participation in community engagements might look like: **Users should always critically analyse the specific context in which the fieldwork is taking place and adapt the suggested strategies to that local context.** This might involve deleting strategies, adding strategies, and changing wording.

Tool 3 sets out key principles and sources of law and good practice for women's inclusion in community engagements. We intend for this to be used as a go-to reference point for those seeking to understand or needing to show that meaningful inclusion of women in community engagements is a governmental legal obligation and an investor responsibility.

Finally, please note we designed this toolkit as a synthesis of global advocates' experiences ensuring women's meaningful participation in land-based investment-related decision-making. The toolkit is intended to complement the many in-depth resources that already exist on the broader topic. The Bibliography sets out some of the key practical guides.

Endnotes for the Introduction chapter can be found at the end of the consolidated toolkit.

III We note a bias toward English resources, which impacts the range of country examples examined. Some of the literature reviewed has drawn on experiences learned in other regions, such as Latin America and the Pacific, but the bulk of it—as well as ALIGN's technical support facility—focuses on experiences in anglophone Africa and southeast Asia.

Tool 1

IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING BARRIERS WOMEN FACE TO MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

HOW TO USE TOOL 1

This tool is part of the Enhancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements Toolkit.[IV] Information about word use and context can be found in the *Introduction* of the toolkit, but to recap, the sorts of land-based investment-related community engagements Tool 1 might be useful for include:

- Ongoing relationship building
- Capacity-building, sensitization, and education
- Consultations
- Impact assessments and social performance
- Negotiations
- Agreement making
- Requests for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, and
- Grievance mechanism design and implementation.

Tool 1 is designed to:

- Raise awareness of the fact that women are commonly excluded from meaningful participation in community engagements because of direct or indirect barriers and that this exclusion can exist even when there are women physically present at meetings or other engagements.
- Serve as a diagnostic tool for people who are engaging with communities but finding that women are not meaningfully participating. You can sift through the barriers to see if any are present in your situation and then turn to the corresponding strategies to see if there are any you can adopt to improve the quality of your engagements.

It does this by:

- Explaining the barriers and the underlying causes of those barriers
- Setting out strategies for overcoming those causes and barriers, and
- Showing country examples where strategies have been successfully implemented.

IV   Toolkit landing page: https://ccsi.columbia.edu/content/women_participation_toolkit.

The barriers and their associated strategies are grouped into:

1. Underlying causes of the barriers, and
2. Specific barriers that exclude women.

Meaningful participation is when women are **PRESENT**, have **VOICE**, and have the **POWER** to influence community decision-making. These categories build upon each other. To have a voice, women must be present. To have power, women must be present and have a voice. We seek to show how the specific barriers can variously impact presence, voice, and power by placing the following icons as they most directly apply next to the specific barriers:

PRESENCE   VOICE   POWER

Please note that while each of the **strategies** is listed only once in Tool 1, many of the strategies are relevant to multiple barriers. To that end, the strategies have been compiled and set out in Tool 2 in a separate checklist, which can be pulled out of the toolkit, adapted to local context, and used when planning for and conducting engagements, including community meetings.

Many of the barriers and strategies set out in this section are interlinked. For the sake of usability, they have been grouped into subject headings so that users can jump to particular challenges they are facing and find strategies to address them. We encourage users to reflect deeply on cultural norms and practices, build a full picture of the power dynamics at play, look for interlinkages between barriers, and craft strategies that can apply to and impact a range of circumstances.

Navigation – List of causes and specific barriers

1. Underlying causes of the barriers women face to meaningful participation and strategies to address them

Cause: Sociocultural norms and practices and a lack of legal mandate for women's inclusion

In many contexts, sociocultural norms and practices hinder women's meaningful participation in community engagements.[22] Sociocultural practices involve values, norms, beliefs, traditions, preferences, roles, and behaviours, and they influence how individuals within communities live and the social structures and systems of community governance. Such practices may be enshrined in local customary law (see **Box 1**). All the specific barriers set out below arise directly or indirectly from what women are or are not allowed or expected to do by society at all levels—household, community, country, region, and beyond.

These sociocultural norms and practices may also be reflected directly or indirectly in the country's formal laws. For example, gender-neutral language in laws, policies, and other documents may fail to address the range of structural disadvantages women face in accessing land. Regulations and policies may also fail to address administrative processes within government that institutionalise barriers to women's ability to claim or defend their legal rights. Laws and regulations may also lack mandates requiring women's inclusion in engagements, resulting in a lack of legal mandate that women must be part of community land governance and community engagements.

Box 1: The tension that can exist between customary law and human rights law

When customary laws dictate that land ownership runs along patrilineal lines (and do not include local protections for women's land rights) custom may come into conflict with international, regional, and domestic human rights laws that protect women's rights (see Tool 3 for key sources of law and good practice).

One way to address this tension is to recognise that customary law is not static. It is often unwritten, and its very nature is that it is fluid and evolves over time. In the same way that statutory and common law have been subject to development in line with constitutional law and human rights standards in many country contexts, so too can customary law be developed to recognise substantive equality between men and women—which is already a requirement in many countries.[23] The project team may want to work with community leaders and members to address contradictions between customary laws and national and international laws: education, experience sharing, and debate—all opportunities afforded by land-based investment-related community engagement—are dynamic opportunities for communities to critically reflect upon their traditions and adapt them to evolve with the current context and time.

Strategies

- **Appoint a gender consultant to the engagement team.** The consultant will be responsible for creating and executing a gender strategy and also making sure everyone on the team is engaging with that strategy. A first step may be to ask selected women what issues they may be facing. Choose someone who has had significant gender-inclusivity experience working at the community level in the region you will be working. If possible, select someone who truly understands the culture and language of the region, as well as the nuances of power and exclusion at the village level. The consultant should be given the authority to make relevant decisions and implement necessary actions. If there is not budget for a gender consultant, consider hiring a field team member with this experience and knowledge and make this one of her responsibilities.

- In collaboration with the community, **identify and establish a working relationship with two local people** (a man and a woman) responsible for supporting your team's communication with the community. Be thoughtful about who will play this role: select people who are honest and respected and trusted by the community—regardless of the status, background or the group those people belong to—as well as reflective and thoughtful about the community's culture, norms, and dynamics. It may be best to select individuals who represent the range of local socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to ensure that the whole community feels represented by them. To honour their time, consider paying them in money, skills training, and airtime (mobile phone credit).

- **Work with schools and youth programs to instil gender-equitable attitudes** in the next generation, ensuring long-term transformation.

- **Identify and establish a (where appropriate, renumerated) working relationship with relevant local civil society or women's rights organisations** working with women and marginalised groups that can:

- Provide insight, advice, and support

- Identify marginalised groups

- Facilitate meetings, and

- Identify and mobilise relevant women's groups and networks.

- **Seek the advice and counsel of the gender consultant, local guides, and women's rights organisations** regarding how to best understand and navigate relevant local cultural norms and traditional practices in a manner that does not inadvertently disrespect such norms and practices (and in so doing alienate community members) while still elevating women's voices. This may entail documenting such norms and practices to make them visible to all and provide a basis from which to start orienting concrete and participatory changes.

- **Build trust with communities, and do not rush them.** Take all the time needed to understand the context, culture, and the interests of a range of community members. It is particularly helpful to build trust with both male and female community leaders (including leaders who may not be elected but hold leadership in other ways).

- **Budget adequate resources to implement the strategies set out in this toolkit**.

Cause: Men may fear they will lose power if women gain power

Women's rights must be looked at as one aspect of a multifaceted, complex, interdependent world of power. Power—and institutionalised oppression—and the way that power impacts the relatively less powerless is at the heart of whether or not women participate in land and natural resources governance.[24]

Men often resist ideas of women's rights and authority because they think that when women gain rights, authority, or power, it means that men must surrender their own power.

In many societies, land is traditionally seen as a male domain, and decision-making authority is a patrilineal inheritance. Such cultures, practices, or norms often have legal frameworks within which men have traditionally been seen as the rightful landowners and decision-makers, while women's land rights are confined to use rather than ownership. As users, women have no decision-making rights and do not have a seat at the table—on community land-management bodies and during negotiations with investors and other outsiders.

In such contexts, women who challenge these norms may face stigma, ridicule, and exclusion. In some cases, men may resort to gender-based violence when women in their family assert power publicly, or when they fear that they are losing power as a result of women's rights being strengthened.

Strategies

- Together with the local guides and gender consultant, **discuss and draw up a list of what might be stopping women from attending and participating in community engagements.** This may include uncovering and understanding community prejudices in relation to women, as well as how local power dynamics may be affected by the proposed policy, investment, or other land-based intervention.
- **Address men's fear that strengthening women's rights will reduce their power. Mobilise men to become champions of gender equity** by developing their understanding:
  - That empowering women and girls also empowers men (working with the youth—young men—might provide better and faster results as they are more exposed and may be more open to cultural changes).
  - That the balance of power is not men versus women but how a community can be in the strongest overall position to engage and negotiate with outsiders. Men and women will benefit if women are also given a seat at the table: Women's knowledge and expertise will augment men's, allowing the community as a whole to leverage that combined wisdom and power for better outcomes.
  - Of the connection between women's land tenure security, increased household income, and better outcomes for children and community members (see more in *Barrier: Women are not listened to by men, who undervalue their land- and natural resource-related expertise*).
  - Of the benefits of addressing both men's and women's needs in project planning and risk reduction.

  This can be done through different avenues, such as:
  - Meetings with customary leaders.
  - Specific agenda items in general community meetings.
  - Formal men-only meetings, including young men.
  - Informal discussions with men at the places they spend time.

  Different approaches can be useful, such as:
  - Showing this through mapping and valuation activities.[25]
  - Finding sympathetic allies, including any community members, customary leaders and other socially influential figures (such as sports and culture figures) and encouraging them to take a leadership role educating other men and boys.

Cause: Exclusion linked to land, water, and natural resource scarcity

As competition for land and water increases, and the value of land rises, some communities are shifting their ideas of who is a community member from more flexible, negotiated systems to more rigid and exclusive systems that lead to the disenfranchisement of women and minority groups. Women and minority groups are increasingly not considered community members with all the rights that their identity comes with. For example, widows are increasingly being evicted from their marital home after the death of their husbands, and unmarried or divorced daughters are not being granted land by their siblings and parents.

Strategies

- Together with the local guides and gender consultant and through the various community engagements, **build an understanding of whether and how scarcity has impacted community definitions of inclusion or exclusion over time**.
- **If the community identifies that certain community members are generally excluded, ensure they are present or represented at meetings** (see also *Barrier: Intersectionalities may make it even harder for certain women to participate*).
- **Work with local governments to ensure that they are implementing progressive national policies** that address gender equity and protect and defend women's rights, generally and in the context of all community engagements.

2. Specific barriers that exclude women from meaningful participation in community engagements and strategies to overcome them

Barrier: Meeting times and venues may exclude women

Women often hold multiple household and caregiving responsibilities that restrict their availability to attend meetings, especially at particular times of day or months. For example, during planting and harvesting seasons, many women cannot afford to leave their fields during working hours.

The venue or place where an engagement is being held may also be hard for women to get to because it is far away, is in a place that women are not normally permitted to enter, is not physically accessible, or is too intimidating (*see Barrier: Intersectionalities may make it even harder for certain women to participate*).

Strategies

- **Consult local women and female leaders** (perhaps by visiting them in places where they routinely visit or gather, such as at wells, markets, and home) about what might stop women from attending meetings or other engagements and find out information such as:
  - What days, times, and locations are women most likely to be available?
  - What weeks of the year should no meetings be held, as they overlap with agricultural cycles or other important events?
  - How else might the facilitation team ease or eliminate other barriers to women's attendance?
  - Map out women's schedules carefully to find out when that might be suitable (for example, after breakfast has been cooked, firewood collected, and water fetched but before dinner preparation).

Do not schedule community meetings during planting and harvest times, unless potential female participants agree to that in advance.

- Find out what support would enable women to be able to attend, such as providing childcare, transportation, and food.

- **Schedule meetings for days and times that women are most likely to be able to attend meetings.** Avoid scheduling meetings during times that women are preparing family meals or during mealtimes.

- **Organise meetings close to where local communities live.** Choose a venue for meetings that is central and accessible to people across the community (in terms of distance but also non-exclusionary: churches, mosques, or political headquarters may alienate segments of the population). Meeting outside may be best, as long as there is adequate shade and appropriate seating. For women-only meetings, it can be helpful to find out where women informally meet and congregate, and then hold meetings there.

- **Arrange transport** for those women who live far from the meeting venue (as well as for people with disabilities and the elderly).

- **Provide childcare.** To ensure women can attend and be fully present, it may be helpful to provide childcare at the meeting.

Country solution examples

In Uganda, an NGO addressed this challenge by sending the raw ingredients for a community meal to the meeting location, where they were cooked on-site by a group of local paralegals, enabling community women to take part in meetings at lunchtime.[26]

In four Tanzanian villages, local communities adopted bylaws to regulate the use and governance of natural resources at village level. Their bylaws provide that meetings cannot take place unless at least 50% of the community's women are in attendance. This is achieved by scheduling meetings at times that suit women.[27]

Barrier: Women may not know that meetings are happening or have access to information to understand why it is in their interests to attend

There are many reasons why women may not receive information about or relevant to community engagements, including:

- **Information is shared only between men.** Women and men may receive information through different channels: often women get information from other women, or at schools or health centres, while men may have certain cafés or buildings they congregate in to discuss and share information. Information may also be posted in locations that only men go to or transmitted through male leaders, who pass information along to men verbally.

- **Information is guarded by male elites.** Land deals are often negotiated in secrecy by a few male leaders, or a council of male elders, with information intentionally withheld from women and others. Even when communities elect or select negotiating teams, they may not have a female representative on the team.

- **Literacy.** Girls commonly receive fewer educational opportunities than boys and are often withdrawn from school early to assist with household duties or to be subjected to early (sometimes forced) marriage, especially in contexts of poverty. As a result, women may not be as able as men to read and understand information. Notices of meetings may be posted in written signs, and relevant information might be in documents that women who are not literate cannot read. As a result, women may not even know that a meeting is happening.

- **Lack of access to media or community centres where information is shared.** Women may not have access to technology or social media platforms that provide information, such as radios, cell phones, and computers.

If women do not know an engagement, such as a meeting, is happening, there is no way they can attend.

Even if women do know that a meeting is happening and are not prohibited to attend by male family members or social norms (see *Cause: Men are afraid they will lose power if women gain power* and *Barrier: Women may feel that they cannot or should not attend meetings about land*), women still might not attend if they do not understand how the meeting will impact them and why their presence and participation are crucial—and wanted. Women generally lead incredibly busy lives and bear the disproportionate burden for household responsibilities and other unpaid work. Leisure time is a foreign concept for many women. If they do not understand the urgency and necessity of their participation, women may not carve out time to go to the meeting.

Strategies

- **Translate information into local languages.** Work with translators and interpreters you can trust, selecting especially for female translators and people who have a nuanced understanding of local culture.
- **Use creative nonwritten ways to share information.** For example, the project team might:
  - Broadcast details of meetings on local radio programs that women listen to. Ask the radio station for a short segment to discuss relevant information (for example, a question-and-answer session between two hosts about a prospective land deal).
  - Arrange for community leaders or mobilisers to visit households, verbally share information about and relevant to meetings, emphasise the need for women's active participation, and proactively request women's attendance.
  - Encourage verbal, word-of-mouth communication between women.
- When using written materials to publicise a meeting, **tailor the design, content, and display location to make it easy for women with low literacy to access and understand**. For example:
  Design
  - Large font with explanatory pictures and other visual aids.
  Content
  - Simplified text.
  - Key information, such as meeting venue(s), time(s), information about the topics to be discussed, what practical arrangements will be made so women can attend the meeting (for instance childcare).
  Display
  - Public places where women congregate, such as boreholes and wells, washing sites along rivers, and markets.
  - Diverse community gathering venues (such as churches, mosques, schools, and health centres).
  - Local preferred forms of social media to target women who are literate and have devices (such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, and Messenger).
- **Provide technological support** if needed. This might include providing access to a computer with an internet connection or a smartphone to review relevant information that may only be available online.
- **Support the community to take every effort possible to ensure that leaders do not have private, secret meetings with investors.** Hold an open community discussion on this matter designed to help the community brainstorm strategies to hold leaders accountable to public negotiations.

Barrier: Women may feel that they cannot or should not attend meetings about land

In societies where land ownership is patrilineal, men are often assumed to be the arbiters of land governance and management in a community. As a result, when a meeting is called about land-related decisions, both men and women in the community may assume that the meeting is for men only.

Even in countries where the formal legal system recognises women's tenure and other rights, local norms may still impede women's participation in meetings about land governance (see more on this tension in **Box 1**). This may be because men may be reluctant to share this authority with women (see more *Cause: Men are afraid they will lose power if women gain power*) and because of a lack of local knowledge of women's land, civil, and other human rights.

Finally, even if women know about a meeting and are aware that women are invited to attend, often women from only the most elite families (such as traditional leaders' wives) may feel or be entitled to attend. In such instances, women whose families own no land, migrant women, or women who are from minority groups within the community may feel that they are not welcome. Yet the most disenfranchised members of a community are often the ones who stand to lose the most from land-based investments.

Strategies

- **Explain to the whole community how women will be directly impacted by the matter to be discussed.** Explain that women's voices matter and how the subject matter of the engagements will impact their lives; therefore, they need to be there.

- **Teach the entire community about women's rights.** Include targeted training for men to understand why women's presence, voice, and power in community meetings is important and why they should bring women in their homes and surrounds to community meetings. Rather than lecturing, seek a participatory and interactive approach that starts with what the community already knows about women's rights, then build knowledge and awareness from there.

- Where they exist, **compare constitutional or other domestic legal norms that promote gender equality with corresponding customary norms**. This exercise could be part of any legal literacy sessions that should be organised for the communities to address land governance and environmental human rights in the context of land-based investments.

- **Emphasise the role of traditional leaders as protectors of community members and the inherent rights, dignity, and equality of all**, ensuring that the importance of protecting women's rights and interests is formulated in a way that is attractive to leaders and inspires them to defend women's rights.

- **Train women about their rights**—both their substantive rights and their right to play an active role in community governance—and the investment-related relevant information. Such trainings can include both national laws and international legal frameworks protecting women's right to be included in community decision-making.

- With support from the local guides, the consultant, and women's organisations, **brainstorm locally appropriate strategies to ensure that women attend engagements in high numbers**. For example:
  - Asking husbands to bring wives and female family and household members.
  - Encouraging women to bring friends to meetings.
  - Building on existing networks or preexisting women's groups, such as local tree planting and microcredit groups.

- **Support the community in deciding whether to set its own quota and quorum requirements for women and marginalised groups** (for example, youth, pastoralists, people with disabilities,

migrants, members of minority ethnic or tribal groups, and poorer families), ensuring that the women attending are representative of all subgroups. See **Box 2** for a nuanced consideration of the risks associated with quotas and the strategies in *Barrier: Women may be afraid, uncomfortable, or not allowed to speak in front of men* to address those risks.

- **Identify and encourage contextually relevant role models and inspiring women** to spread information and encourage other women to be involved.

Box 2: The risks associated with quotas

Laws that require quotas and quorum requirements for women's attendance provide a good starting point to ensure women's physical presence at meetings, but quota requirements do not: 1) ensure that women are well prepared and informed to meaningfully participate; and 2) ensure that women actually speak at meetings. In many instances, field teams, government officials, and investors may work to get women to attend meetings so they can check off the legal requirement (in the form of a quota) that women are involved, but then fail to ensure that women actually speak up at meetings.

In addition, women may come to the meeting in large numbers, thus fulfilling the quota, but the women present may be from elite families, the dominant ethnic groups, adherents of the dominant religion, or aligned with one leader (who has called the meeting) to the exclusion of those with different families, groups, religions, allegiances, and other minority groups (see more *Barrier: Intersectionalities may make it even harder for certain women to participate*).

Barrier: It may not be safe for women to attend meetings

It may not be safe for women to attend meetings or participate in other engagements for three main reasons:

- Depending on the culture and the family, husbands may be reluctant for their wives to interact with other men outside the family and refuse to let them attend meetings where men who are not relatives will be present. In such instances, attending a meeting might expose a woman to domestic violence.
- If women do attend meetings, speaking up publicly may lead to social ostracization, domestic conflict, or even violence in some cases.
- In some contexts, leaving their home and traveling to a meeting may endanger women—especially if the meeting takes place far from their home, requiring them to take public transport or walk for miles through unsafe areas. For example, walking long distances through forests may expose women to gender-based violence, including sexual assault.

Gender-based violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and financial.[28]

Strategies

- **Seek the advice and counsel of the gender consultant, local guides, and women's rights organisations to identify risks women may face (whether because of gender-based violence, conflict, or militarisation)** if they wish to take part in meetings or otherwise engage, express their opinions, and simply assert power.
- **Organise men-only meetings as early as possible to specifically address gender issues with them and get their perceptions, concerns, and views**. This can help prevent misunderstandings that may lead to domestic violence and allow you to identify male champions for the gender agenda.
- **Take measures to preemptively protect women's safety.** For example, consider the safety of local transportation options, suggest pairing up to navigate potentially unsafe situations. It may be necessary

to put in place processes for identifying when women are at risk of violence and setting up appropriate response and grievance mechanisms, not only for participation in meetings and other engagements but also for the impacts of the decisions made. Note that the prevention actions can take time and would be best undertaken by experts (such as an NGO) who are retained by the engagement team.

- **Seek advice from your local guide, community representatives, and women's rights organisations regarding how best to structure engagements so that women's safety is not in danger**. Depending on the context, it may be helpful to hold meetings at local places that women feel are safe. These meetings might be safer if they are women only; in other circumstances, it might be safer for women to select trusted men to be present.

- When it is not safe for women to actively participate in community meetings, **be creative about how to gather women's input and feedback** and consider sending female team members to:
  - Seek their input by phone
  - Go house-to-house for one-on-one conversations
  - Meet women at places where they work (for instance, where they gather water, wash clothing, sell farm produce)
  - Use anonymous audio recordings, and
  - Use other ways to gather feedback, such as text messaging or messaging through social media (such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Messenger), considering digital security and encrypted platforms (such as Telegram or Signal).

  It can be helpful to compile women's feedback (anonymously) into a short document or a flyer, so it can be shared more widely, such as with government officials or representatives of the potential investment.

- **Partner with the local government** to organise meetings with community women, since husbands or other male relatives tend to respect and feel more comfortable with meetings or programs that involve the government.

- **Work with local authorities and leaders to ensure that women who attend meetings and speak up are protected from violence and intimidation**.

Barrier: Intersectionalities may make it even harder for certain women to participate

In the context of overlapping identities, each of the challenges that women face related to attending meetings (but also speaking up and holding power if they are physically permitted to attend) may be exacerbated by other factors that can further marginalise a woman, such as being a:

- Widow (for example, running a household alone with extra burdens and reduced capacity for attendance).
- Woman with a disability (for example, physically unable to get to meetings without assistance or unable to see materials or hear discussion).
- Woman who is Indigenous, Afro-descendant, or from a different or minority tribe or ethnic group (for example, the rest of the women in the community are from another culture, they may alienate her).
- Woman who is not originally from the community (for example, a young wife who has yet to build essential alliances and either is not invited or fears further exclusion if she attends or speaks up).
- Women who marry or enter relationships with outsiders.
- Woman who was assigned male at birth but now identifies as female (for example, not everyone in the community accepts her as a woman, but she is not included in male forums).

Other intersectionalities include marital status, class and poverty, age, sexual orientation, and health status (for example, HIV positive).

Strategies

- **Seek to understand who is being included and who is being excluded and ensure that you take measures to reach all community residents** (see ideas in *Barrier: Women may not know that meetings are happening or have access to information to understand why it is in their interests to attend*).
- **Collaborate with local organisations that are already working with marginalised groups** and seek their help identifying and including marginalised community members.
- **Make sure that married women are not the only ones present or represented at meetings**— require attendance by or on behalf of widows, single women, women with disabilities, and women from other ethnic or minority groups.
- **Identify women with extra needs (such as physical disabilities or those with extra household responsibilities) and provide support to ensure their involvement in meetings**. This may include arranging transport for women who live far from the meeting venue, as well as elderly individuals and people with disabilities. It may also involve other interventions such as sign language interpretation and using a microphone and an amplifier.
- Pay attention and provide support to women who may enjoy a more conducive family environment to attend meetings to be **gender equality ambassadors or even represent** those who may not be able to attend because of the barriers mentioned above.

Barrier: Women may be afraid, uncomfortable, or not allowed to speak in front of men

Presence does not automatically mean voice or power: Even if women attend a meeting in large numbers, they may not feel able or empowered to speak up and share their concerns and ideas. In some contexts, if a woman speaks up and articulates a different opinion from a family member who is also at the meeting, she may face social or physical repercussions and gender-based violence. Women may also not feel comfortable disagreeing publicly with men. In some cultures, women may be discouraged from talking with men outside their family, including in community meetings. Or women may not speak in public meetings due to cultural norms that men speak on behalf of their household.

Even when women's rights are recognised and they are allowed to attend relevant meetings, women must have the confidence and courage to speak up and express their interests, opinions, and ideas.[29] Women might lack the confidence and experience in speaking to a roomful of people because they have never done so, or they fear that they will not be listened to (for example, they may be spoken over, or their ideas may be dismissed, or they may be mocked for their contributions).

Strategies

Address underlying norms and develop community understanding of importance of women speaking

- See the strategies under *Cause: Men are afraid they will lose power if women gain power.*

Structure meetings in such a way that creates opportunities for women to speak

- **Have standing agenda items for women and other marginalised groups to raise their concerns and share input.**
- Consider holding women-only meetings where **women can elect those who will represent their opinions and interests at mixed-gender meetings and make sure there are representatives for different subgroups of women.**

- Break the meeting into smaller groups, including women-only groups, and have each group report back their ideas, opinions, and interests to the broader meeting.
- Support women to **elect strong, courageous representatives** who are comfortable speaking on their behalf during mixed-gender meetings.
- **Take** proactive **measures to ensure that the women present at the meeting speak, by:**
  - Scanning the meeting for women whose faces are expressive, who are clearly having thoughts and ideas, then call on them to speak.
  - Calling on women to speak as often as you call on men to speak, even if you have to urge a woman to share their ideas.
  - Asking questions that solicit information that only women know, requiring women's verbal participation and showcasing their knowledge and expertise.
- Find creative ways to **collect women's suggestions/opinions/concerns**—see ideas in *Barrier: It may not be safe for women to attend meetings* above, including on the issue of gender-based violence.

Support women's knowledge and skill development

- **Provide targeted training to strengthen women's skills and capacity** to:
  - Confidently speak in public
  - Engage in economic and financial discussions related to land deals, and
  - Understand the risk factors of prospective investments and the ability to advocate for risk reduction tactics.[30]
- **Arrange sessions that are run by women for women** (and separate sessions for other marginalised groups), but first have sessions with men too so they understand why. Consider doing so through a trusted local or community organisation. At these "women conferences," teach women about their rights and prepare them to self-advocate as a group.
- **Ensure women are represented both as a stakeholder group and as individual and collective rights holders**. In this effort, take care to recognise that women may have different views among themselves depending on factors such as their level of wealth or poverty, education, and background.

Country solution examples

In communities in Tanzania, the Philippines, and Mozambique, women who were attending meetings often remained silent.[31] A Tanzanian NGO that had been supporting local communities to develop gender-sensitive village bylaws found that women were more likely to open up and participate in meetings if the NGO representatives spoke with them separately and women were well informed about the content of the meetings from the start of the process.[32]

In communities in Uganda, women were not actively participating in local community meetings to develop bylaws.[33] Facilitators convened special regional "women's conferences" with representatives from each community. They focused on developing the women's understanding of their rights and how they might lose land access if they did not get involved in the process. Through these meetings, the importance of the grazing land for household necessities was discovered and strategies were developed for getting their voices heard. Women went home to their communities and held similar meetings, documented their land use, and decided the preferred courses of resource protection and management. The women then began to attend the broader community meetings in greater numbers and advocated to have their needs met in the community bylaw drafting process.

An NGO working in northern Kenya found leadership training that incorporates role-playing, a very effective method of developing women's confidence and preparing them for public speaking in the context of governing communal lands.[34]

Barrier: Women are not listened to by men, who undervalue their land- and natural resource-related expertise

As described above in the *Introduction* of this toolkit, women's meaningful participation in community engagements is crucial for responsible and successful investments. This is because women most often rely on shared community lands like forests, bodies of water, and grazing lands for their household's survival and subsistence. Women's work—including growing food for consumption and local sale or trade, foraging, and cooking—has incredibly high value. It is critical for:

- Realising families' human rights to food, nutrition, water, education, and health, and
- Continuing the wider community's traditional knowledge of local biodiversity—for example, where to gather critical herbs for medicine, where to gather the best thatch for house building, where wild mushrooms can be found.

However, these benefits are commonly not acknowledged or given appropriate monetary value by communities, governments, or investors. Denying women's voice and power in community engagements not only disempowers women but may be detrimental to the whole community. This is because these shared common lands are very often the places men frequently offer to outsiders for investment. If community engagement facilitators (and the community members themselves) do not understand the value of women's activities within common areas, they will not factor women's work into community decision-making, impact assessments, compensation and resettlement plans, and other important processes and outcomes.[35]

Strategies

- **In community meetings, expressly recognise and elevate the importance of women's work responsibilities.**
- **Show men by example (do not lecture or tell) how women hold important land and natural resource–related information that men may not know as a result of different, gendered livelihood-related tasks**—for example, where necessary medicines can be gathered, or places where thatch grows and should be protected. Help men understand how women's knowledge and wisdom must be present for a full picture of the context, impact, and long-term implications of any land-based project. Help all community members reflect on their own specific wisdom, skill sets, interests, and prejudices, then engage community members in devising their own self-generated lists of strategies to ensure all voices are heard.
- **Find ways to showcase women's knowledge and expertise.** This might be done by leading the community to brainstorm and list all the natural resources gathered and used by the community, highlighting how, because of their gendered responsibilities, men and women hold different, complementary knowledge. Alternatively, it can be helpful to support women to comprehensively map local biodiversity and list foods and medicines they gather and use, then share those lists with the whole community.
- **Teach men about the connections between women's land tenure security, increased household income, and improved children's nutritional, health, and educational outcomes.** Lead brainstorming sessions where men volunteer ideas about how their mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and sisters use land to support family well-being and tend flourishing ecosystems.

- **Illustrate the true value of women's work by ascribing monetary value to the list of natural resources gathered by women** from forests, watersheds, and grazing areas. A simple "valuation" exercise can showcase both women's household contributions as well as the value of the natural resources found in common areas and available to community members.[36]

Barrier: Men are relied on as proxies for women but do not actually represent women's interests, leaving women little opportunity to share their opinions and perspectives

In some contexts, investors or government officials may feel it is appropriate to enter a village and speak only with male leaders and elders. However, men are not and should not be considered representatives or proxies for women. Men often have different motivations and incentives than women relative to land-based investments. They also do not have the lived experience of being a woman, including the same pressures, livelihood work, day-to-day responsibilities, family roles, burdens, and experiences of danger.

For example, if the investment is linked with a change in land use by local people, such as the opportunity to grow cash crops in an outgrower scheme, it is likely that men will be the primary beneficiaries of that scheme and stand to gain more than women. In this scenario, men may be eager for the community to accept the investment and fail to truly represent women's interests.

Country barrier example

In West Africa, field staff from a local NGO provided an investment compliance monitoring questionnaire to separate identity groups within a number of communities (impacted by different investments).[37] The results of how the different identity groups completed the questionnaire highlight discrepancies between women's and men's different understandings and priorities. Across both groups [Bantu-descended and Indigenous Peoples], the women's perception and assessment of investor compliance was generally low, based on the investments' impacts on their children's health and their own daily work, such as firewood gathering and water quality. In contrast, Bantu-descended men assessed the investments as mostly in compliance. When the local NGO discussed the results of the questionnaires filled out by the Bantu-descended men with the Indigenous women, their response was essentially, "They don't know what they are talking about." Yet when the NGO staff talked with the Bantu-descended men about what *they* thought that the Indigenous women think, the men very accurately described the Indigenous women's answers, indicating that they were indeed aware of those impacts.

Strategies

- Ensure that women attend all engagements related to potential investment or development projects; make sure women are present at key decision-making meetings.
- **Call on women directly to speak (at least as much as men) and solicit their viewpoints, ideas, and opinions.** Facilitators can scan women's faces for strong opinions (even if they are not raising their hands) and proactively and respectfully ask women to speak. Facilitation is an art: meeting facilitators must be well trained and skilled at giving women the floor and getting men to listen to, understand, consider, and take action to implement women's opinions, concerns, and contributions.
- **Ensure women lead in collecting and sharing their own experience-based expertise and knowledge.** One way to do this is through breakout groups: Partway through meetings, split meeting attendees into discussion groups of men, women, youth (and any other subgroup that is appropriate) to discuss key points. Then have each group elect spokespeople to report back on the groups' discussion.

- **Encourage women to create a women's caucus that makes presentations to the full community** at whole-community meetings.
- If women prefer to have a man representing their views in community meetings, **support women to fully share their views with their chosen representative**. Work with him to ensure he represents women's ideas correctly and in a way that is taken seriously by the community at large.

Barrier: During meetings, facilitators do not ask women the right questions, or any questions at all, resulting in a lack of nuanced understandings of women's priorities and the ways a project will impact women's lives

Understanding the full picture of women's perspectives (including all various subgroups) around land governance matters in general and community engagements in particular requires persistent, considerate investigation. It is often not enough to ask just one question on a topic and expect a complete answer; follow-up questions (discussed further in **Box 3**) are necessary.

Often, questionnaires or lines of inquiry are directed at capturing the status quo. For example, they seek to capture only a baseline understanding of what is happening at the time of questioning. This risks maintaining a status quo that might be highly discriminatory against women. It also overlooks women's ideas and aspirations about what they would like a situation to be, missing a critical opportunity for gender-transformative development.

Further, when questions are not grounded in understandings of the wider social, legal, institutional, and cultural contexts that local women operate within, they risk perpetuating the exclusion of women. For example, customary tenure systems may preclude women from owning land. This leaves widows and other women without a man in their household especially vulnerable. If ownership is the only line of questioning, then these particularly marginalised women will be entirely overlooked.

Strategies

- **Ask questions that reflect an understanding of local custom**—for example, probing into who uses a certain area of land, not just who owns it. Be as specific as possible when framing questions.
- **Ask follow-up questions to vague answers to find out how things really work**—for example, which households and which members of those household access, use, make decisions about, and benefit from the land and land-based resources?[38] It may be helpful to keep asking, "Does anyone else [for example, nomadic groups] use the land? What do they use it for?" until the respondent has nothing left to say. See also **Box 3**.
- **Ask questions that seek to understand how the topic in question** (for example, natural resources use or decision-making power) **has evolved over time** in the community (that is, how it used to be versus how it is now) and what the various subgroups of women would like it to be.

Country solution example

A sugar company in an African country was designing a social-benefit project for local communities and identified some suboptimal land on which to grow food.[39] In principle, using that land for the project could have been beneficial to some in the community. However, it would have been devastating for the women who were already using that land to grow food to support their households' survival. It was only when follow-up questions were asked that widows were identified as the key users (and therefore losers) and the scheme was amended.

Box 3: The importance of follow-up questions

During community engagements, often, to find out the true answer from a woman's perspective, follow-up questions need to be asked. For example, take the following scenario:

Interviewer:	"Is this land vacant?"
Male leader:	"Yes."

Too often, questioning stops at that first response. However, further inquiries might reveal more nuanced, gender-relevant information:

Interviewer:	"Do any pastoralists use this land?"
Male leader:	"No."
Interviewer:	"Does anyone forage on this land?"
Male leader:	"Yes. Women in our community harvest firewood and wild yams on this land."
Interviewer:	"Women, what do you/they use the firewood and wild yams for?"
Widows X and Y:	"We use the firewood to heat our house—to sell—and the wild yams are a main source of food for us and our children."
Interviewer:	"Do women own or have legitimate tenure rights over other lands where they can gather these resources critical to family survival from?"
Male leader:	"No."

In that scenario, if the interviewer had not pursued further questioning, land that was classified as vacant but was actually used by community women could have been allocated for investment, leaving local women without an important source of fuel and nutrition for their families.

Project staff should work to analyse the land-use patterns of a diverse range of community members and be alert for the range of necessary follow-up questions that are likely to arise organically during meetings. Some of these questions can be anticipated and included as part of any lists of questions to ask during community engagements.

Barrier: Men make the final decisions on behalf of the community

Even if women are present at meetings and they have voice, this does not necessarily mean that men will let them help make decisions. This exclusion can be formal or de facto.

First, **formal** community leadership bodies (such as elders councils) or community land-management bodies may be composed entirely of men who make decisions according to their own best judgment, which may or may not factor in women's interests.

Second, as a **de facto** rule or presumption in community meetings, after the community has discussed an issue at length, male leaders and male elders may make the final decision. In doing so, they may not factor in women's concerns and interests. In such instances, even though women have managed to make it to the meeting and have spoken out and actively participated in community discussions, the final decision being made may not be the outcome they would choose.

At the end of the day, the relevant outsider may also fail to comply with the community's decision, including one that meaningfully includes women's voices.

Strategies

- Change is more effective when men—especially elders and chiefs—become women's allies. **Work with chiefs, elders, and religious leaders to support women's inclusion in community decision-making**, framing women's expertise and wisdom as a benefit to the whole community. See *Barrier:*

Women may feel that they cannot or should not attend meetings about land for strategies directed at developing local knowledge of women's rights.

Planning for engagements

- **Support the community to carefully craft a plan for how they will make decisions related to the community engagement, especially during consultation and negotiation processes.** Discussing it all in advance and arriving at general action plans can help to make decision-making more equitable and inclusive. These discussions could address:

  - Who gets to decide whether an investment is welcome, and how it will interact with the community? Will all residents, including women, youth, and members of marginalised groups be given a chance to voice their opinions and be listened to? What will happen if a minority group strongly disagrees with the majority?

  - How will the decision be made? What percentage of community residents must agree? Will both women and men have a vote?

  - What process can the community follow if their leaders or certain elders and leaders agree to allocate to outsiders a large amount of land without community participation and approval? What strategies can women pursue if male leaders make decisions that disenfranchise women or impede their access to lands they depend on to ensure their family's survival?

- Where relevant, **encourage and support women to seek election to leadership roles in community governance structures, and provide mentorship and training to prepare them for these roles**.

- **Identify and promote historical or customary examples in which women had roles in leadership, decision-making, and land stewardship.** Invoking traditional stories or ancestral practices can help shift perceptions and remind men that women's leadership is also traditional custom.

Engaging with outsiders

- **Support community-wide discussions about who should be on any community-outsider negotiating team.** Emphasise that women have different expertise and knowledge than men, as a result of their gendered work, and that any negotiation will be incomplete without women's knowledge. To choose the right people to do this, the community might hold a big meeting and discuss the following questions:

  - Will community elders, elected leaders, or a special negotiating team of men, women, youth, and elders specially chosen for the role represent the community?

  - How can the negotiating team be representative of all stakeholder groups in the community, so that the opinions of all members of the community can be considered?

  - What qualities, skills, expertise, and knowledge should team members have to ensure comprehensive protection of community interests?

- **Require that information and all drafts of negotiated agreements are shared verbally with the entire community at well-publicised community meetings**, as well as in written form, and that women have time to review and understand these documents before decisions are made.

- **Support female representatives to feed women's priorities into all community engagements and agreements.**

- **Support women to elect strong, courageous female leaders** who can speak on their behalf in all community governance meetings and during engagements with outsiders.

Endnotes for Tool 1 can be found at the end of the consolidated toolkit.

Tool 2

WOMEN-INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

HOW TO USE TOOL 2

This tool is part of the Enhancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements Toolkit.[V] Information about word use and context can be found in the *Introduction* of the toolkit.

This checklist sets out in actionable and adaptable form the strategies laid out in Tool 1: Identifying and Addressing Barriers Women Face to Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements. It is designed to help users preempt and address some of the challenges they might face when seeking meaningful (presence, voice, and power) participation of women in community engagements.

As explained in the *Introduction* of the toolkit, community engagements can take a number of different forms across the land-based investment life cycle. To recap, the sorts of land-based investment-related community engagements Tool 2 might be useful for include:

- Ongoing relationship building
- Capacity building, sensitisation, and education
- Consultations
- Impact assessments and social performance
- Negotiations
- Agreement making
- Requests for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, and
- Grievance mechanism design and implementation.

Formal group meetings (whether all community or women only) are a very common form of community engagement, but there are many other ways of engaging with community members on an individual or smaller-group level, such as conversations with women while they are working (for example while gathering water at boreholes and wells), visiting people in their homes, and exchanging text or audio messages by phone. These alternative approaches can be very supportive for overcoming the barriers set out in this toolkit.

Tool 2 seeks to make the strategies set out in Tool 1 more easily applicable by breaking them down into strategies that can apply to all engagements (including group meetings) and those that are more relevant to a group meeting context. These categories are not fixed; they are just a suggestion for how to organise the content. Working with Tool 2 in the Word document form will enable users to customise the tool by editing, deleting, arranging, and adding strategies. Importantly, this checklist does not describe everything that should be done to ensure maximum participation by women; we urge users to take this checklist as a starting point for their own critical, creative thinking, and planning.

V   Toolkit landing page: https://ccsi.columbia.edu/content/women_participation_toolkit.

Navigation – Checklist content

Pre-engagement preparation

These are strategies that can be helpful to try for all types of engagements.

1. Plan and budget

☐ Prepare a plan and estimated timeline for your community engagements. Keep in mind that for engagements to be meaningful, you will need to build trust and not rush people. Allocate as much time as you can for your engagement processes.

☐ Prepare a budget to show how the strategies you intend to apply will be resourced. Remember to include lines for paying external team members, such as gender consultants, civil society organisations, local contact points, and others.

2. Curate the team and establish alliances

☐ In collaboration with the community, identify and establish a working relationship with two local people (a man and a woman) responsible for supporting your team's communication with the community. Be thoughtful about who will play this role: Select people who are honest, respected, and trusted by the community—regardless of the status, background, or the group those people belong to—as well as reflective and thoughtful about the community's culture, norms, and dynamics. It may be best to select individuals who represent the range of local socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to ensure that the whole community feels represented by them. To honour their time, consider paying them in money, skills training, and airtime (mobile phone credit) and in other ways.

☐ Appoint a gender consultant to the engagement team. The consultant will be responsible for creating and executing a gender strategy and also making sure everyone on the team is engaging with that strategy. Choose someone who has had significant gender-inclusivity experience working at the community level in the region you will be working. If possible, select someone who truly understands both the culture and language of the region, as well as the nuances of power and exclusion at the village level. The consultant should be given the authority to make relevant decisions and implement necessary actions. If there is not budget for a gender consultant, consider hiring a field team member with this experience and knowledge and make this one of her responsibilities.

☐ Identify and establish a (when appropriate, renumerated) working relationship with relevant local civil society or women's rights organisations working with women and marginalised groups that can:

- Provide insight, advice and support
- Identify marginalised groups
- Facilitate meetings, and
- Identify and mobilise relevant women's groups and networks.

☐ Partner with the local government to organise engagements with community women, since husbands or other male relatives tend to respect and feel more comfortable with meetings or programs that involve the government.

☐ Emphasise the role of traditional leaders and chiefs, elders, and religious leaders as protectors of community members and the inherent rights, dignity, and equality of all, ensuring that the importance of protecting women's rights and interests is formulated in a way that is attractive to leaders and inspires them to defend women's rights.

3. Ensure the team understands the local context

☐ Seek the advice and counsel of the gender consultant, local guides, and women's rights organisations regarding how to best understand and navigate relevant local cultural norms and traditional practices in a manner that does not inadvertently disrespect such norms and practices (and in so doing alienate community members) while still elevating women's voices. This may entail documenting such norms and practices to make them visible to all and provide a basis from which to start orienting concrete and participatory changes.

- Together with the local guides and gender consultant, discuss and draw up a list of what might stop women from attending and participating in community engagements. This may include uncovering and understanding community prejudices in relation to women, as well as how local power dynamics may be affected by the proposed policy, investment, or other land-based intervention.

- Start developing an understanding of the power dynamics that might be affected by the proposed policy or investment and consider how they might manifest.

- Seek advice from your local guides, community representatives, and women's rights organisations regarding how to best structure engagements so that women's safety is not in danger. Depending on the context, it may be helpful to hold meetings at locations that women feel are safe. These meetings might be safer if they are women only; in other circumstances, it might be safer for women to select trusted men to be present.

- Consult local women and female leaders (perhaps by visiting them in places where they routinely visit or gather, such as at wells, markets, and home) about what might stop women from attending meetings or other engagements and find out information, such as:

  - What days, times, and locations are women most likely to be available?
  - What weeks of the year should no meetings be held, as they overlap with agricultural cycles or other important events?
  - How else might the facilitation team ease or eliminate other barriers to women's attendance?
  - Map out women's schedules carefully to find out when that might be suitable (for example, after breakfast has been cooked, firewood collected, water fetched, and before dinner preparation). Do not schedule community meetings during planting and harvest times, unless potential female participants agree to that in advance.
  - Find out what support would enable women to be able to attend, such as providing childcare, transportation, and food.

It may be most effective to meet local women in places where they routinely visit or gather, such as at wells, markets, or home. This same strategy may be used throughout the project to ask local women about their experiences and involvement with the project.

All engagements

These are strategies that can be helpful to try for all types of engagements. As a prerequisite to all engagements, it is crucial to **build trust with communities and not rush them.** *It is particularly helpful to build trust with both male and female community leaders (including leaders who may not be elected but hold leadership in other ways).*

1. Share relevant information in appropriate ways

What information is relevant will depend on each context. For example, it may be details about a planned all-community or women-only meeting, information that is going to be discussed at that meeting, information about a planned policy or project to generally inform the community, details of an impact assessment, or requests for input, among many other types of information.

- Translate information into local languages. Work with translators and interpreters you can trust, selecting especially female translators and people who have a nuanced understanding of local culture.

- Broadcast details of meetings on local radio programs that women listen to. Ask the radio station for a short segment to discuss relevant information (for example, a question-and-answer session between two hosts about a prospective land deal).

- Encourage verbal, word-of-mouth communication among women.

- If appropriate, use local preferred forms of social media to target women who are literate and have devices (using apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, and Messenger).

- ☐ Design flyers and other handouts in simplified text in a large font with explanatory pictures and other visual aids.

- ☐ Display flyers with information where women congregate, such as bore holes, wells, and markets, as well as diverse community gathering venues (such as churches, mosques, schools, health centres). Make sure that these flyers include key details. For example, if the flyer concerns a planned meeting, include details of the meeting venue, the time, the topics to be discussed, and what practical arrangements (such as childcare) will be made so that women can attend.

- ☐ Arrange for community leaders or mobilisers to visit households, verbally share information about and relevant to the meetings, emphasise the need for women's active participation, and proactively request women's attendance.

- ☐ Require that information and all drafts of negotiated agreements are shared verbally with the entire community at well-publicised community meetings, as well as in written form, and that women have time to review and understand these documents before decisions are made.

- ☐ Provide technological support if needed. This might include providing access to a computer with an internet connection or a smartphone to review any relevant information that may only be available online.

2. Expand community awareness and understanding of women's rights, expertise, and wisdom

This may happen in all-community meetings or in other more private forums.

- ☐ Organise men-only meetings as early as possible to specifically address gender issues with them and create space for them to express their perceptions, concerns, and views. This can help prevent misunderstandings that may lead to domestic violence and allow you to identify male champions for the gender agenda.

Women's expertise and wisdom

- ☐ Find ways to showcase women's knowledge and expertise. This might be done by leading the community to brainstorm and list all the natural resources gathered and used by the community, highlighting how, because of their gendered responsibilities, men and women hold different but complementary knowledge. Alternatively, it can be helpful to support women to comprehensively map local biodiversity and list foods and medicines they gather and use, then share those lists with the whole community.

- ☐ Illustrate the true value of women's work by ascribing monetary value to the list of natural resources gathered by women from forests, watersheds, and grazing areas. A simple valuation exercise can showcase both women's household contributions as well as the value of the natural resources found in common areas and available to community members.[VI]

- ☐ Showcase this knowledge and expertise and show men by example (do not lecture or tell) how women hold important land- and natural resource–related wisdom that men may not know, as a result of different, gendered livelihood-related tasks. For example, project staff might:

  - Lead brainstorming sessions in which men volunteer ideas about how their mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and sisters use land to support family well-being and tend flourishing ecosystems.
  - Support women's verbal descriptions of or physical site visits (when appropriate) where necessary medicines can be gathered, thatch grows and should be protected, wild foods are foraged, women practice important cultural or spiritual rituals, water is collected, where clothing is washed, and so on.

- ☐ Help men understand that women's knowledge and wisdom are crucial to understanding a full picture of the context, impact, and long-term implications of land-based investment.

VI For a an explanation of how to undertake a valuation exercise See Knight, Vogelsang, and Brinkhurst, *Valuation of Community Lands and Natural Resources.*

Women's rights

☐ Explain to the whole community how women will be directly impacted by the matter to be discussed. Explain that women's voices matter and how the subject matter of the engagements will impact their lives, therefore they need to join community engagements.

☐ Help men and other key stakeholders understand that the whole community will benefit by meeting women's and marginalised groups' needs generally and in the context of investment projects. For example, project staff can act out two scenarios: one where women's knowledge is overlooked and problems arise, and the other where women's knowledge informs project design and implementation and the outcome is better for all. These scenarios can build in:

- Unique insights about the land in question (for example, the women using that marginalised land know that there is less rain in that site so a commodity crop with high water needs will not survive on rainwater alone)
- Forward-looking solutions and ideas (for example, they can suggest crops that do thrive there and the specific users of that land can be employed to manage the work on that site, which will lead to higher yield), and
- Potential future problems and negative impacts with problem-solving for their proactive prevention (for example, if land is cleared in an area where an important medicinal plant grows, those women will be unable to treat a common community ailment; but if particular areas are preserved and those women can still access them, then the investment and the community medicinal needs will be met)

☐ Address men's fear that strengthening women's rights will reduce their power. Mobilise men to become champions of gender equity by developing their understanding:

- That empowering women and girls is also empowering men (working with the youth—young men— might provide better and faster results since they may be more exposed and open to cultural changes).
- That the balance of power is not men versus women but how a community can be in the strongest overall position to engage and negotiate with outsiders. Men and women will benefit if women are also given a seat at the table: women's knowledge and expertise will augment men's, allowing the community as a whole to leverage that combined wisdom and power for better outcomes.
- Of the connection between women's land tenure security, increased household income, and better outcomes for children and community members.
- Of the benefits of addressing both men's and women's needs in project planning and risk reduction.

This can be done through different avenues such as:

- Meetings with customary leaders
- Specific agenda items in general community meetings
- Formal men-only meetings, including young men, and
- Informal discussions with men at the places they spend time

Different approaches can be useful, such as:

- Showing this through mapping and valuation activities, and
- Finding sympathetic customary leaders and other socially influential figures (such as sports and cultural figures) and encouraging them to take a leadership role educating other men and boys.

☐ Where they exist, list and compare constitutional or other domestic laws that promote gender equality with customary norms that discriminate against women. This exercise could be part of the legal literacy sessions that should be organised for the communities to address land governance and environmental human rights in the context of land-based investments. When appropriate, work with community leaders and members to address contradictions between customary laws and national and international laws and create dynamic opportunities for communities to critically reflect upon their traditions and adapt them to evolve with the current context.

- ☐ Identify and promote historical or customary examples where women had roles in leadership, decision-making, and land stewardship. In many cultures, community decision-making and leadership were more gender equitable before colonisation. Invoking traditional stories or ancestral practices can help shift perceptions and remind men that women's leadership is also traditional custom.

- ☐ Teach the entire community about women's rights (see Tool 3). Include targeted training for men to understand why women's presence, voice, and power in community meetings is important and why they should bring women in their homes and surrounds to community meetings. Rather than lecturing, seek a participatory and interactive approach that starts with what the community already knows about women's rights, and build knowledge and awareness from there.

- ☐ Work with schools and youth programs to instil gender-equitable attitudes in the next generation, ensuring long-term transformation.

3. Gather information and feedback from women

- ☐ Be creative about how to gather women's input and feedback, especially when it is not safe for women to actively participate in community meetings or other engagements. Female project staff might:
  - Call local women to seek their input by phone
  - Visit women at home for one-on-one, private conversations
  - Meet women at places where they work (for example, where they gather water, wash clothing, sell farm produce)
  - Record or receive anonymous audio recordings
  - Use other ways to gather information and feedback, such as text messaging or messaging through social media (such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Messenger), considering digital security and encrypted platforms (such as Telegram or Signal), and
  - Support the community representatives to collect feedback from women individually.

  It can be helpful to compile women's feedback (anonymously) into a short document or flyer so it can be shared more widely, such as with government officials or representatives of the potential investment.

- ☐ Support female representatives to feed women's priorities into all community engagements and agreements.

- ☐ Identify and encourage contextually relevant role models and inspiring women to spread information and encourage other women to be involved.

- ☐ Pay attention and provide support to women who may enjoy a more conducive family environment to attend meetings to be gender-equality ambassadors or even represent those who may not be able to attend.

- ☐ Ask questions that reflect an understanding of local custom, for example, probing into who uses a certain area of land, not just who owns it. Be as specific as possible when framing questions.

- ☐ Ask questions that seek to understand how the topic in question (for example, natural resource use or decision-making power) has evolved over time in the community (that is, how it used to be versus how it is now) and what the various subgroups of women would like it to be.

- ☐ Ask follow-up questions (see tips in **Box 3** in Tool 1) to vague answers to find out how things really work. For example, which households and which members of those household access, use, make decisions about, and benefit from the land and land-based resources? It may be helpful to keep asking, "Does anyone else (like nomadic groups] use the land? What do they use it for?" until the respondent has nothing left to say.

Scheduling and organising all-community meetings

These are strategies that can be particularly helpful when holding group meetings.

1. Choose meeting times and locations to ensure that women can attend

☐ Schedule meetings for days and times that accommodate women's work routines to ensure that women are more able to attend meetings.

☐ Organise meetings close to where local communities live. Choose a venue for meetings that is central and accessible to people across the community (in terms of distance but also non-exclusionary: churches, mosques, or political headquarters may alienate segments of the population). Meeting outside may be best, as long as there is adequate shade and appropriate seating.

2. Publicise the meeting to women and institute strategies that ensure diverse women attend

☐ Encourage women to bring friends with them to future meetings.

☐ Ask husbands to bring wives and female family and household members with them to meetings.

☐ Build on existing networks or preexisting women's groups, such as local tree planting and microcredit groups.

☐ When appropriate, arrange future sessions that are run by women for women (and separate sessions for other marginalised groups) (see below), but first have sessions with men too so they understand why. Consider doing so through a trusted local or community organisation.

☐ Recognise that women may have different views depending on factors such as their level of wealth or poverty, education, and background—and ensure that women from diverse backgrounds take part, including women with disabilities, migrant women, and women from other ethnic or minority groups.

☐ Make sure that not only married women are present or represented at meeting—require attendance by or on behalf of widows, single women, women with disabilities, migrant women, and women from other ethnic or minority groups.

☐ Support the community in deciding whether to set its own quota and quorum requirements for women and marginalised groups (for example, youth, pastoralists, people with disabilities, migrants, members of minority ethnic or tribal groups, and poorer families).

3. Identify and address barriers that may stop women from attending

☐ Avoid scheduling meetings when women are preparing family meals and at mealtimes.

☐ Arrange support that can enable women to be able to attend meetings, such as providing on-site childcare.

☐ Identify women with extra needs (such as disabilities or those with extra household responsibilities), and provide support to ensure their involvement in meetings. This may include arranging transportation for women who live far from the meeting venue, the elderly individuals, and people with disabilities. It may also involve other interventions such as sign language interpretation and using a microphone and amplifier.

☐ Seek the advice and counsel of the gender consultant, local guides, and women's rights organisations to identify risks women may face (whether because of gender-based violence, conflict, or militarisation) if they wish to take part in meetings or otherwise engage, express their opinions, and simply assert power.

☐ Take measures to preemptively protect women's safety. For example, consider the safety of local transportation options, and suggest pairing up to navigate potentially unsafe situations. It may be necessary to put in place processes for identifying when women are at risk of violence and setting up appropriate response and grievance mechanisms, not only for participation in meetings and other engagements but also for the impacts of the decisions made. Note that prevention actions can take time and would be best undertaken by experts (such as an NGO) who are retained by the engagement team.

□ Work with traditional leaders and local government to ensure that women who attend meetings and speak up are protected from violence and intimidation.

□ With support from the local guides, the consultant, and women's organisations, brainstorm locally appropriate strategies to ensure that women attend engagements in high numbers. As you do so, consider intersectionalities and resource scarcity constraints, and make sure to understand which kinds of women are being included and which kinds of women are being excluded (because of class or ethnicity, for example). Ensure that you take measures to include and involve all community residents.

Facilitating all-community meetings

1. Ensure women speak at meetings and that their inputs are taken seriously

□ Incorporate standing agenda items that give women and marginalised groups the opportunity to raise their concerns and share their ideas.

□ Ask questions that solicit information that only women would know and so require women's verbal participation and showcase their knowledge and expertise.

□ Ensure women lead in collecting and sharing their own experience-based expertise and knowledge. One way to do this is through breakout groups: partway through meetings, split meeting attendees into discussion groups of men, women, youth (and any other subgroup that is appropriate) to discuss key points. Then have each group elect spokespeople to report back on the groups' discussion.

□ Call on women to speak at least as much as men. Facilitators can scan women's faces for strong opinions (even if they are not raising their hands) and proactively and respectfully ask women to speak. Facilitation is an art: Meeting facilitators must be well trained and skilled at giving women the floor and getting men to listen to, understand, consider and take action to implement women's opinions, concerns, and contributions.

□ If women prefer to have a man representing their views in community meetings, then support women to fully share their views with their chosen representative. Work with him to ensure he represents women's ideas correctly and in a way that is taken seriously by the community at large.

2. Ensure that women play an active role in community decision-making processes and engagements with outsiders

□ Work with chiefs, elders, and religious leaders to support women's inclusion in community decision-making, framing women's expertise and wisdom as a benefit to the whole community.

□ When decisions are made during community meetings, pay careful attention to whether women's perspectives, expertise, interests, concerns, and suggestions have been heard, considered, and incorporated into any resulting decisions and plans.

□ Support the community to carefully craft a plan for how they will make decisions related to the community engagement, especially during consultation and negotiation processes. Discussing it all in advance and arriving at general action plans can help to make decision-making more equitable and inclusive. These discussions could address:

- Who gets to decide whether an investment or project is welcome, and how it will interact with the community? Will all residents, including women, youth, and members of marginalised groups be given a chance to voice their opinions and be listened to? What will happen if a minority group strongly disagrees with the majority?
- How will the decision be made? What percentage of community residents must agree? Will both women and men have a vote?

- What process can the community follow if their leaders or certain elders and leaders agree to allocate to outsiders a large amount of land without community participation and approval? What strategies can women pursue if male leaders make decisions that disenfranchise women or impede their access to lands that they depend on to ensure their family's survival?

☐ Support community-wide discussions about who should be on any community-outsider negotiating team. Emphasise that women have different expertise and knowledge than men as a result of their gendered work, and help community members understand that any negotiation will be incomplete without women's knowledge. To choose the right people to do this, the community might hold a big meeting and discuss the following questions:

- Will community elders, elected leaders, or a special negotiating team of men, women, youth, and elders specially chosen for the role represent the community?
- How can the negotiating team be representative of all stakeholder groups in the community, so that the opinions of all members of the community can be considered?
- What qualities, skills, expertise, and knowledge should team members have, to ensure comprehensive protection of community interests?

☐ Support the community to take every effort possible to ensure that leaders do not have private, secret meetings with investors. Hold an open community discussion on this matter designed to help the community brainstorm strategies to hold leaders accountable to public negotiations.

☐ Support women to elect strong female leaders who can speak on their behalf in all community governance meetings and during engagements with outsiders.

Supporting women-only meetings

Alongside or as an alternative to mixed-gender meetings and dialogues, create women-only spaces where they can freely discuss concerns, build confidence, and strategise. At these meetings, facilitators can 1) gather more information about women's concerns, ideas, and reflections, and 2) support women to speak more effectively in all-community meetings. At root, these meetings can be a forum to empower and prepare women to advocate for themselves as a group.

☐ Hold meetings where women informally meet and congregate.

☐ Train women about their rights—both their substantive rights and their right to play an active role in community governance—and the investment-related relevant information. Such trainings can include both national laws and international legal frameworks protecting women's right to be included in community decision-making.

☐ Provide coaching and training designed to support women to 1) most effectively speak in meetings, 2) engage confidently in economic and financial discussions related to land deals, and 3) understand risk factors of investments and advocate for risk-reduction tactics.

☐ Encourage women to create a women's caucus that makes presentations to the full community at all-community meetings. Support women to elect representatives who are comfortable speaking on their behalf during mixed-gender meetings.

☐ Encourage and support women to seek election to leadership roles in community governance structures, and provide mentorship and training to prepare them for these roles.

Tool 3

SOURCES OF LAW AND GOOD PRACTICE FOR WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

HOW TO USE TOOL 3

This tool is part of the Enhancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements Toolkit.[VII] Information about word use and context can be found in the *Introduction* of the toolkit. **Tool 3** can be used as a reference point for advocacy efforts that support the meaningful participation of women in community engagements.

VII Toolkit landing page: https://ccsi.columbia.edu/content/women_participation_toolkit.

Obligation / Action / Principle	Source or Example
International & regional law & good practice	
Governments must respect, protect, and fulfil human rights including the right of access to information. Governments must respect, protect, and fulfil women's rights such as gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.	• Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Recital and articles 2, 7 and 19 • International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), articles 2(1), 3 and 19(2) • International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), articles 2(2) and 3 • African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) (ACHPR), articles 9.1 and 18.3 • American Convention on Human Rights (1969), articles 1.1 and 13.1 • Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)
Indigenous and Tribal People have the right to participate in the use, management, and conservation of the natural resources pertaining to their lands. In cases in which the State retains the ownership of mineral or subsurface resources or rights to other resources pertaining to lands, governments shall establish or maintain procedures to consult these people, with a view to ascertaining whether and to what degree their interests would be prejudiced before undertaking or permitting programs for the exploration or exploitation of such resources pertaining to their lands. Where the relocation of Indigenous and Tribal People is considered necessary, such relocation shall take place only with their free and informed consent.	• Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (1989) (ILO 169), articles 15 and 16.2
Women have the right to participate at all levels of decision-making, and to participate in and benefit from rural development and to participate in all community activities.	• Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), articles IX.2 and XIX.b - including women with disabilities (article XXIII.a) • CEDAW, article 14.2(f)
Governments should recognise the collective rights of Indigenous women over their customary lands and require their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent before authorising economic, development, and extractive projects on their lands and territories and affecting their natural resources.	• CEDAW, General recommendation No. 39 (2022) on the rights of Indigenous women and girls, paragraph 57

Obligation / Action / Principle	Source or Example
Free, Prior, and Informed Consent is required in cases of relocation of Indigenous People from their lands; before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them; and before the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilisation, or exploitation of mineral, water, or other resources. Particular attention needs to be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous women. States are required to take measures to ensure that Indigenous women enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.	• United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007), articles 10, 19, 22 and 32.2
Before adopting and implementing decision-making processes that may affect the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, States are required to consult and cooperate in good faith with peasants and other people working in rural areas through their own representative institutions: engaging with and seeking the support of peasants and other people working in rural areas who could be affected by decisions before they are made, and responding to their contributions, taking into consideration power imbalances between different parties and ensuring active, free, effective, meaningful, and informed participation of individuals and groups in associated decision-making processes. States are also required to take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas and to promote their empowerment in order to ensure, on the basis of equality between men and women, that they fully and equally enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms and that they are able to freely pursue, participate in and benefit from rural economic, social, political, and cultural development. States are required to ensure that peasant women and other women working in rural areas enjoy without discrimination the rights to participate equally and effectively in the formulation and implementation of development planning at all levels; to participate in all community activities; to equal access to, use of and management of land and natural resources, and to equal or priority treatment in land and agrarian reform and in land resettlement schemes; and to be free from all forms of violence.	• United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018), articles 2.3, 4 and 10.1

Obligation / Action / Principle	Source or Example
Governments should comply with international good practice to ensure gender equality, non-discrimination, and transparency. Any project affecting the resources for which the communities hold rights should ensure active, free, effective, meaningful, and informed participation of individuals and groups in associated decision-making processes and for Indigenous Peoples, should be based on an effective and meaningful consultation to obtain their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent under UNDRIP.	• Sustainable Development Goals, including goal 5 • Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, paragraphs 3B.4, 3B.6, 3B.8, 4.4, 4.6, 9.2, 9.6, and 9.9
Business enterprises have the responsibility to respect human rights in light of international law, including women's rights. States should provide assistance to business enterprises to assess and address both gender-based and sexual violence. When business enterprises may adversely affect Indigenous women, they should take into account the rights, including to self-determination and of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, set out in ILO 169 and UNDRIP.	• United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (GPBHR), principles 7(b) and 12 • Gender dimensions of the GPBHR (2019), illustrative action under principle 12
The client needs to conduct an informed consultation and participation process that will result in the affected communities' informed participation. The consultation process should (i) capture both men's and women's views, through separate forums or engagements if necessary, and (ii) reflect men's and women's different concerns and priorities about impacts, mitigation mechanisms, and benefits, as appropriate. The client is also required to obtain the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of Indigenous communities.	• International Finance Corporation, Performance Standard (PS) 1, Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts, paragraph 31; PS 5 and PS 7

Obligation / Action / Principle	Source or Example
Domestic laws	
Many states have domestic laws that prohibit discrimination against women, recognise women's human rights, and require proactive action by the government to realise these rights.	See, for example: • Sierra Leone's Customary Land Rights Act (2022) guarantees the right to own, hold, use, inherit, succeed to or deal with land under customary law to women and men equally, states that any customary law that excludes, limits or inhibits women from owning, holding, using, transferring, inheriting, succeeding to or dealing with land subject to customary law shall be void, provides that male and female adult members of a community must have equal opportunities to appointment for membership to land committees, at least 30% of each land committee must be women, and a land committee must ensure adequate protection of and respect for the rights of women (articles 5 and 8). Community members, particularly women and youth, must be consulted and meaningfully involved in the processes leading to their displacement and resettlement (article 43.8). • Kenya's Community Land Act (2022) states that women have the right to equal treatment in all dealings in community land and that every woman married to a member of the community shall gain automatic membership of the community (section 30). • The Gambia's Women's Rights Act (2010) expressly prohibits discrimination against women and requires the government to take special measures in this regard for rural women and women with disabilities. Every Ministry, Government department, agency or organ of Government is in particular required to take all appropriate measures to ensure full and equal participation of women including in rural development projects. The Act also recognises women's rights to property, food security, adequate housing, a healthy and sustainable environment, and sustainable development. See sections 9, 10, 11, 14, 33, 48, 49, 51, 52, and 54. • The Mozambican National Land Policy (BR 45/2022, 28 November 2022) promotes and guarantees access to land for women, young people, and marginalised social groups, as a mechanism for achieving equality, social justice, and equity (fundamental principles, point 40.iv). • For more examples, see this publication: UN Women and OHCHR, *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources* (2nd edition), 2020.[VIII]

VIII   https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/realizing-womens-rights-to-land-and-other-productive-resources-2nd-edition

Obligation / Action / Principle	Source or Example
The constitutions of many host states enshrine the right of access to information.	• Bolivia (2009) (article 21.6) • Indonesia (1945, amended in 2002) (article 28F) • Kenya (2010) (article 35) • Mozambique (2004, amended in 2018 (article 4) • South Africa (1996, amended in 2012) (article 32) • Uganda (1995, amended in 2018) (article 41) • Zambia (1991, amended in 2016) (article 173)
The constitutions and/or laws of several states enshrine the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.	• Bolivia: Constitution (2009) (articles 3, 30(II)15, 32, 352 and 403(I)). The Bolivian Constitution requires the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for all affected populations, including Afro-Bolivians and Indigenous Peoples. • Chile: Ley N° 21.151 of 8 April 2019, granting legal recognition to Afro-Chilean Peoples (article 5). This law recognises the right of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for Afro-Chilean Peoples. • Ecuador: Constitution (2008, amended in 2021) (articles 56 to 60) and Public Participation Act of 20 April 2010 (article 81). Read together, the Constitution and the Act recognise the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous Peoples and local communities. • Nicaragua: Constitution (1987, amended in 2014) (articles 5, 89, 91, and 181), Autonomy Statute for the Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (Law 28) of 2 September 1987, Decree of the National Assembly 3584 (Regulation to Law No. 28) of 2 October 2003, and Law of the Communal Property Regime of the Peoples of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (Law 445) published on 23 January 2003. These instruments, read in light of ILO 169, UNDRIP and other international human rights instruments to which Nicaragua is a party require Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples.[40] • Colombia: Free, Prior, and Informed Consent rights of Afro-descendant communities are derived from several legal frameworks, including the Constitution (1991, amended in 2015); Law 21 of 1991 ratifying ILO 169; Law 70 of 1993; Law 99 of 1993 (article 76); Decree 1320 of 1998, regulating prior consultation with Indigenous and Black communities for the exploitation of natural resources within their territory; and rulings from the Constitutional Court, such as Judgment T-576/14 of 4 August 2014.[41]

Obligation / Action / Principle	Source or Example
The constitutions of many host states enshrine the right to equality.	• Bolivia Constitution (2009) (article 14(II)) • Indonesia Constitution (1945, amended in 2002) (articles 27 and 28I) • Kenya Constitution (2010) (article 27) • Mozambique Constitution (2004, amended in 2018 (articles 35, 36 and 39) • South Africa Constitution (1996, amended in 2023) (article 9) • Uganda Constitution (1995, amended in 2017) (article 21) • Zambia Constitution (1991, amended in 2016) (articles 11 and 23)
An increasing number of home states have adopted mandatory laws for companies to undertake human rights and environmental due diligence when investing abroad.	• Including France (Law 2017-399 of 27 March 2017, on the corporate duty of care), Germany (Supply Chain Law of 22 July 2021) and Norway (Transparency Law of 10 June 2021) • See also: https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/mandatory-due-diligence
Industry standards	
Investor companies increasingly have their own standards that require them to ensure their investments respect women's rights.	• Example: Coca-Cola's guidance on responsible land acquisition and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)[IX]: "Entities acquiring land should consult landholders and users who may be affected by the project. Enabling communities and individuals to freely choose their representative(s) is critical to ensuring their active participation. Particular attention is placed on the inclusion of women in the process. [...] FPIC requires the full and effective participation of women who are affected by the project. While there may be cultural challenges to overcome, some simple steps can have a dramatic impact on whether women are involved. For instance, offer women-only meetings and, if applicable, ensure the interpreter is a female to foster more insightful and effective consultations. Additionally, ensure there are not barriers to participation – such as holding the consultation on a market day when women may not be able to attend."

IX The Coca-Cola Company, Responsible Land Acquisition (and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent) Guidance (2017), https://www.coca-colacompany.com/content/dam/company/us/en/policies/pdf/human-workplace-rights/supplier-guiding-principles/responsible-land-aquisition-guidance-2017.pdf.

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2. International treaties, instruments, and standards

(by date of adoption, most recent top)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, General recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls (2022)

Gender dimensions of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2019)

UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018)

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)

International Finance Corporation, Performance Standard, Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability (2012)

Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (2012)

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011)

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)

Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization (1989)

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)

American Convention on Human Rights (1969)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

3. National legislation and policies

Bolivia Constitution (2009)

Chile Ley N° 21.151 of April 8, 2019, granting legal recognition to Afro-Chilean Peoples

Colombia Constitution (1991, amended in 2015); Law 21, of 1991 ratifying ILO 169; Law 70 of 1993; Law 99 of 1993; Decree 1320 of 1998 regulating prior consultation with Indigenous and Black communities for the exploitation of natural resources within their territory

Ecuador Constitution (2008, amended in 2021); Public Participation Act of 20 April 2010

France Law 2017-399 of 27 March 2017, on the corporate duty of care

Gambia Women's Rights Act of 2010

Germany Supply Chain Law of 22 July 2021

Indonesia Constitution (1945, amended in 2002)

Kenya Constitution (2010); Community Land Act (2022)

Mozambique Constitution (2004, amended in 2018); National Land Policy (BR 45/2022) dated 28 November 2022

Nicaragua Constitution (1987, amended in 2014); Autonomy Statute for the Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (Law 28) of 2 September 1987; Decree of the National Assembly 3584 (Regulation to Law No. 28) of 2 October 2003; and Law of the Communal Property Regime of the Peoples of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (Law 445) published on 23 January 2003

Norway Transparency Law of 10 June 2021

Sierra Leone Customary Land Rights Act of 23 September 2022

South Africa Constitution (1996, amended in 2023)

Uganda Constitution (1995, amended in 2017)

Zambia Constitution (1991, amended in 2016)

4. National cases

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ENDNOTES

1   Toolkit landing page: https://ccsi.columbia.edu/content/women_participation_toolkit.

2   Resource Equity, 'Gender, Land, and Extractive Development: Issues and Opportunities for Improved Understanding and Practice', 10 November 2017, sec. 3.2, https://landwise-production.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/03/Resource-Equity_Gender-Land-Extractive-Development_2018-1.pdf.

3   For an overview of the types of real-economy investors and financial investors and associated links in more detail, see Grace Brennan, 'A Launchpad for Deeper Analysis into the Business Case for Respecting Human Rights in Land-Based Investments', *Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment Blog* (blog), 18 June 2025, https://ccsi.columbia.edu/news/launchpad-deeper-analysis-business-case-respecting-human-rights-land-based-investments.

4   Rachael Knight, Marena Brinkhurst, and Jaron Vogelsang, *Community Land Protection Facilitators Guide* (Namati, 2017), 34–35, https://grassrootsjusticenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Namati-Community-Land-Protection-Facilitators-Guide_Ed.2-2017-LR.pdf.

5   See Tool 3 from this Toolkit: *Sources of Law and Good Practice for Women's Inclusion in Community Engagements*.

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