

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 ... 11

Cause: Sociocultural norms and practices and a lack of legal mandate for women's inclusion	11
Cause: Men may fear they will lose power if women gain power	13
Cause: Exclusion linked to land, water, and natural resource scarcity	14

2. Specific barriers that exclude women from meaningful participation in community engagements and strategies to overcome them 14

Barrier: Meeting times and venues may exclude women	14
Barrier: Women may not know that meetings are happening or have access to information to understand why it is in their interests to attend.....	15
Barrier: Women may feel that they cannot or should not attend meetings about land	17
Barrier: It may not be safe for women to attend meetings	18
Barrier: Intersectionalities may make it even harder for certain women to participate	19
Barrier: Women may be afraid, uncomfortable, or not allowed to speak in front of men	20
Barrier: Women are not listened to by men, who undervalue their land- and natural resource-related expertise	22

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.....	23
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	24
Barrier: Men make the final decisions on behalf of the community	25

List of Boxes

Box 1: The tension that can exist between customary law and human rights law.....	11
Box 2: The risks associated with quotas	18
Box 3: The importance of follow-up questions.....	25

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, remunerated) 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, aunts, 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.