



Voice, Agency and Participation
Consultation at the Commission on the Status of Women, New York
March 12, 2013

Jeni Klugman presented an overview of the report. Her presentation was followed by reactions from two invited discussants – Cheryl Doss, Director of Graduate Studies Master of Arts Program on International Relations and Senior Lecturer at Yale University, and Sarah Degnan Kambou, President International Centre for Research on Women. Comments from the two discussants and the wider participants were as follows:

Cheryl Doss and Sarah Degnan Kambou:

- Owning land and having control over land is correlated in all kinds of ways with women's agency - it helps to reduce vulnerability of women and plays key role in their being more productive – and for this reason it's great to see it included as one of the Report's five expressions.
- There is limited rigorous hard evidence in this area, but we can agree that ownership and control are important. There is space for a lot of rigorous work to show what the impacts are, and in particular better data are needed, including on who owns assets/land and who has control.
- Important to consider land in terms of what it means to own land. We get different responses when we ask people if they own it, so it will be valuable to consider ownership in all its nuances and what it actually means to people in different contexts.
- Good to avoid getting into a discussion about whether joint or individual ownership is better – the question is really around which is better when and under what kinds of circumstances.
- We are often interested in decision-making questions – previously has been assumed that women making autonomous decisions was best but now not always sure that is case. There are many instances in which joint decision making is better – where both partners have agency. This is a very context specific area, and will need to really put some thought into these issues.
- Report says it will focus on LAND – this focus is important but we need to not just look at land to exclusion of all other assets. And in particular now that half world is urban, need to think about housing. We need to also think about other assets as well – productive assets, businesses, other assets. When do women own them? When do they have decision-making power over them? Should keep working on issues around women's access to and ownership to land but not at expense of thinking about other kinds of asset ownership that may be easier to secure.
- Another critical question is around how we make sure that as more people are moving in to urban areas, more women own houses they live in, and have access to and ownership of financial assets? It may be easier to do and in long run have just as much potential impact.
- Voice and agency is valuable as way of understanding what are problems within communities, and in terms of solutions that can be expressed in policies, programs and services.

- The articulation of policies into something that matters for girls and women is an area where we are still struggling.
- What we really need is ‘*gender transformative*’ agency – adjust underlying values, norms, institutions.

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

- Ownership in most African communities and access to that land is difficult to assess (Kenya is an exception). But some data is available from DHS surveys.
- Adolescent girls face double discrimination on basis of being female and young. Can we distinguish this in analysis?
- Need attention to dynamics of time in terms of data gathering. In particular: Is Western concept of time as accurate for many different cultures worldwide or is it more generational? Is it difficult to assess what has happened over time in non-Western settings, how does this affect data we gather and programs we intend to produce?
- Small businesses are helpful for widows. Training needed.
- The discussion about land and property needs to be broadened beyond titling, and empowerment or disempowerment to take a broader approach – work that goes into getting titles, lot of participatory mechanisms to obtain land, regularize land. Women who have participated in these processes learn about land governance, it will be good to look at what happens prior to titling but also ways in which women may be insecure post-titling.
- Will be critical to build strong partners on ground – a main concern is land ownership, land titling, customs and traditions they want to challenge. Tension between when it is appropriate to have individual versus joint ownership and the need to include customs and traditions.
- Access to credit for urban women – is there information on this?
- Need for focus on decent work agenda, access to credit cannot be obtained without access to land as collateral. As urbanization is spreading we need to explore effects on women.
- There is a need to focus on the empowerment of young women, to ensure that they value themselves so that they will be self-confident autonomous adults. Need to continue to invest in female leadership because only women leaders can convincingly represent women’s issues in decision making.
- Question on conflict and women in conflict areas is key:
 - How do we make sure women do not lose own property after conflict;
 - Women who accessed land through their husbands – what happens when husband is killed in conflict?