



# Responsible Land Governance: Towards an Evidence Based Approach

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## **USING PARTICIPATORY VIDEO TO PROMOTE LAND RIGHTS OF WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF HOW CORRUPTION IMPACTS ON WIDOWS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA**

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## **Abstract**

*In rural Ghana, Women constitute a major source of labor force in terms of agriculture. This means how they access, use and hold land is critical, considering the fact that land is a primary asset of production in dominantly agrarian communities. Fundamentally, land governance revolves around understanding the power and political economy of land. Land governance is ultimately focused on how people use and interact with land. It encompasses different decision-makers, processes and structures, including statutory, customary and religious institutions. Ghana's case is no different, however, the issues surrounding land and corruption remained conspicuously absent from Ghana's national conversation as the country prepared for the 2016 elections in December. 'Pakorpa Susangho' (Widow's Cry) is a unique 14 minutes film devised and shot by the ten widows to document land issues affecting them, so they can push for change in traditional practices and, ultimately, put an end to the corruption and abuse they face; countless widows are evicted from their meager farmlands by their late husband's families. Unless they will agree to remarry (typically their brother-in-law) the land is seized; rendering grieving widows unable to support themselves and their children. As is usually the case, behind the scenes lurks the silent hand of corruption. 'Moogre' (as corruption is known locally) is now almost invisible by its ubiquity. The impoverished widow doesn't stand a chance. The video showed that when women are trained to tell their own story they become empowered to fight for their own rights.*

**Key Words:** Ghana, Women Land Rights, Corruption, Livelihoods, empowerment

## **Introduction**

Women have globally been recognized and remains a vital labor force in the agriculture value chain, yet their access to and control over land tend to be weak, largely as a result of socio-cultural barriers (Kevane, 2004; FAO, 2015). This state of affairs, in many instances is the outcome of entrenched discriminatory cultural practices which inhibit women's land rights (United Nations, 2010). Land is a delicate asset with multiple attributes. As an economic asset, it is a major source of employment and livelihood, especially in dominantly agrarian societies such as Ghana. As a social asset, land is a source of socio-cultural identity and the basis for the construction of families and ethnic groups. The centrality of land in the socio-economic discourse makes it critical in the very existence and development of societies such as Ghana. Indeed Wickeri, 2011 argues that land is 'life'. Accordingly, take away one's land and the implications become far reaching. Despite its importance, the land arena is characterized by competing and contesting interests and all these occur in the context of imbalanced power relations. This creates the situation where people who are driven by different motivations may be

backed by different power dynamics in the pursuit of their land related goals and aspirations. In this regard, the subject of land represents a congested terrain for claims and counter claims by different actors. This predictably creates many losers although there are some winners, especially those who have been entrusted with power to act for the collective interest of others (Women, Land and Corruption in Ghana: Evidence from Selected Case Studies, 2015).

Since land is recognized as a critical factor of production, ensuring fair and even access and control over land is critical in ensuring shared prosperity. In effect, land right is central in ensuring inclusive growth in many areas of human endeavor such as access to food and adequate shelter (Amanor and Moyo, 2008). Land rights are thus human rights (Tsikata and Golah, 2010). Therefore, any practices which tend to undermine the land rights of women, who constitute about 50 percent of the population, are therefore inimical to inclusive development (Amanor and Moyo, 2008; Tsikata and Golah, 2010). Over 78 per cent of land in Ghana is directly governed by traditional authorities, so the effects of gender-biased customary land tenure rules are far-reaching. Land is an indispensable asset, it is a source of livelihood and social identity, and men and women should have equal opportunities to benefit from it. Unfortunately, when entrenched patriarchy tips the power scales, and corruption reinforces cultural norms, the impact on women can be devastating. Women are usually not consulted under the customary land administration system, and therefore are often not involved in taking decisions that have a bearing on land administration in their communities. In other words decisions on land matters are taken by men and more often than not from a biased perspective (Women, Land and Corruption in Ghana: Evidence from Selected Case Studies, 2015).

## **Materials and Methods**

It is difficult to give a definitive meaning for Participatory Video (PV) and equally difficult task is to describe how it works. The concept is very broad, ambiguous and built around a number of strains. Historically, PV has configured itself more as a label which encompasses different practices and experiences on the common ground of incorporating ordinary people to the space of advocacy through film production (GLOCAL TIMES No. 22/23, September, 2015). Participatory video (PV) is a set of techniques and processes used to build local capacity around issues and produce media materials for communication. It is a tool for positive social change, means of empowerment for marginalized and a process for individuals and communities to take control of their destinies. Audiences for these materials tend to be policy makers and funding agencies that control development programs and projects. PV has also been used for communication between disenfranchised groups facing similar challenges in an effort to build consensus and mobilize action for change.

Participatory video involves a group or community creating its own film. The film-making process can enable participants to take action to solve their own problems, or to communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers. Participatory video can also be an effective tool to engage and mobilize marginalized people (Lunch, N. and Lunch, C. 2006).

The land issues affecting widows in the Upper East region of Ghana are many. They are closely intertwined with well-established cultural practices and norms, to which the women were likely, party to prior to the loss of their own husbands. Picking apart and fully understanding the complex picture of causes and effects is a difficult and exacting process which the women did with energy and enthusiasm. They collectively managed to explore the issues in great depth during a series of participatory exercises and discussions over the course of the PV workshop. Together they developed a sophisticated understanding of the issues and the actions required to change the situation, if not for themselves directly but for those women who will be widowed in the future.

The participants who initially had not held any camera or film making equipment, through the training provided by isightshare –UK developed a good level of skills and confidence with iPads and equipment to produce the ‘Pakorpa Susangho’ (Widow’s Cry). A unique 14 minutes film (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ka3hp8MMkTk>) developed and shot by the ten widows to document land issues affecting them, so they can push for change in traditional practices and, ultimately, put an end to the corruption and abuse they face; countless widows are evicted from their meager farmlands by their late husband’s families. Unless they will agree to remarry (typically their brother-in-law) the land is seized; rendering grieving widows unable to support themselves and their children. As is usually the case, behind the scenes lurks the silent hand of corruption. ‘Moogre’ (as corruption is known locally) is now almost invisible by its ubiquity. ‘Tipping’ the Chief or the Tindana (traditional land custodian) is expected, even mandatory. Yet ‘tipping’ is just a lazy euphemism for corruption. Those with the deepest pockets give the most generous ‘tip’, which will invariably leads to land disputes being resolved in their favour. The impoverished widow doesn’t stand a chance.

## **Results**

### **Powerful video advocacy**

The video produced by the women clearly communicates their experiences and the wider situation facing widows in the Upper East region of Ghana. They were able to interview key local actors (the village Chief, Tindana and an Assembly Member) and recorded their commitment to supporting widows’ land rights as well as their assessment of the role of corruption in the structures that facilitate the removal of lands from widows. The final version of the video provided a useful tool for the women to undertake important lobbying of local stakeholders.

### **Increased visibility and status of widows**

The land issues affecting widows in Northern Ghana are many. They are closely intertwined with well-established cultural practices and norms, to which the women were likely party to, prior to the loss of their own husbands. Picking apart and fully understanding the complex picture of causes and effects is a difficult and exacting process which the women did with energy and enthusiasm. They collectively managed to explore the issues in great depth during a series of

participatory exercises and discussions over the course of the PV workshop. Together they developed a sophisticated understanding of the issues and the actions required to change the situation, if not for themselves directly but for those women widowed in the future. On numerous occasions the participants described the level of discrimination, abuse and segregation they experience as a result of having been widowed. They shared how widows are excluded from community gatherings and ceremonies. They are denied opportunities to engage in any community-level activities and felt they would never have been considered for participation in a similar project were it not exclusively organized for engaging widows. Through participation in the workshop and fieldwork - where the women were seen independently operating high-value video production equipment in the community - they felt their status and visibility had been increased significantly. Formal meetings with the village Chief and Tindana, followed by in-depth interviews conducted by the women, further underlined their new-found confidence to assert their right to full participation in community life and overturn years of injustices and abuse.

### **Conclusion and Ways Forward**

This is the central theme of 'Pakorpa Susangho'. The widows turned filmmakers have explored their personal experiences, and those of their neighbors. They interviewed Chiefs, Assembly Members and numerous Tindanas; challenging them on the role of corruption in decisions to evict widows from their land. They hope that shedding light on this hidden issue will eventually lead to a fairer society for any woman unfortunate enough to outlive their husband.

Numerous community and district screenings and dialogues were held after the development of the film, the event were held for community members, local traditional leaders, civil society organizations and national duty-bearers. After the screenings, all the local leaders who attended the screenings pledged to support widows and protect their land rights. These included representatives from the House of Chiefs, village Tindanas and Chiefs, as well as representatives from civil society organizations in the district.

The participants have lobbied traditional leaders to forego the traditional widowhood rites and supported women recently widowed to refuse the practice. Widows in Kulbia village have reported some successes, including several women who have avoided these harmful practices. Many widows in the immediate community have reported significant changes in their relations with fellow community members, and overall standing within community life. Married women (non-widows) have been sensitized to the issues and have asked to be involved in discussions. As a result two community members have been trained as community paralegals and their roles recognized and approved by the village Chief and Tindana. These paralegals are to provide basic legal information to community members, especially helping women assert their rights.

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