

WATED Grassroots Consultations on Land Policy & Climate Justice

Ruvuma, Ifakara and Migoli

Introduction

Over the past weeks, Women Action Towards Economic Development (WATED), in collaboration with WAE-HEAL and Tree of Hope, has been at the forefront of convening grassroots dialogues in Ruvuma (Songea), Ifakara, and Migoli. These sessions brought together women, youth, community leaders, and grassroots groups to deepen understanding and amplify voices around Tanzania’s 2023 National Land Policy and the country’s commitments under the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs 3.0) in tackling climate change.

These dialogues underscored that ensuring women’s and girls’ voices are moved from the margins to the center of land and climate action is not only a matter of inclusion but also of justice and sustainability.

Key Observations from the Consultations

1. Ruvuma (Songea) - Knowledge Gaps on Policy Processes

In Ruvuma the dialogue revealed a significant gap in awareness among grassroots communities regarding the 2023 National Land Policy review process. Out of the 11 participants, only two men indicated that they had previously heard of the 1995 Land Policy, though even they were unaware that it had been revised in 2023. The remaining nine participants, all women, stated that they had no knowledge whatsoever of the policy or its ongoing review.

“Honestly, we are surprised to learn that such a policy even exists. We have never been consulted, and even our local leaders have not informed us,” said Ms. Reventa Rubga, a smallholder woman farmer from Songea.



Figure 1 Participants from Songea in a group photo

2. Ifakara - Land Security as the Basis for Climate Adaptation

The Ifakara consultations brought to light the undeniable link between land rights and climate resilience. Women participants repeatedly emphasized that without secure land tenure, they cannot invest confidently in long-term solutions such as climate-smart agriculture or environmental restoration.

As quoted by Ms. Marietha Mnazi, *“Huwezi kuwekeza kwenye kilimo kinachohimili mabadiliko ya tabianchi kama huna uhakika na ardhi yako. Ukilima mazao ya kudumu unaweza kuondolewa muda wowote.”* (“You cannot invest in climate-resilient agriculture if you are uncertain about your land. When you plant perennial crops, you risk being evicted at any time.”)

The Role of the National Land Policy and NDCs

Women demonstrated an increasing awareness of how both the National Land Policy (1995) and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) influence resilience. They acknowledged that the Land Policy provides legal pathways for women to own land, access land titles, and participate in agricultural projects. Secure land tenure was seen as critical in reducing land conflicts, safeguarding natural resources, and enabling households to plan for the future.

One participant noted: *“In the past, women could not own land in many communities, but the Land Policy has created space for women to claim ownership, obtain land titles, and secure access to productive resources. With land rights, we can guarantee food security and reduce pressure on forests through the promotion of alternative cooking energy such as clean cooking gas.”*



Figure 2. Ms. Catherine contributing her views on the National Land Policy in relation to addressing climate change

At the same time, the discussions revealed gaps in awareness. For instance, in **Igugilo Village**, limited knowledge of the Land Policy meant women missed out on opportunities to benefit from an agricultural project on palm oil cultivation, which had to be suspended due to their lack of engagement.

Participants also highlighted that youth and widows are particularly marginalized. Ms Neema Ulage said *“Tuna changamoto kubwa ya mila zinazowazuia wanawake kumiliki ardhi. Hata hivyo, serikali za mitaa zinahitaji kufanya kazi ya karibu zaidi na vikundi vya wanawake kuhakikisha wanapata hati miliki.”*



Figure 3 Women from Ifakara, Lupilo, and Malinyi engaging in group discussions on the National Land Policy and its role in addressing climate change.

The session ended with a strong collective affirmation:

“There is no food security without land security.” This statement was echoed by nearly all participants, underlining that land is the first pillar of climate adaptation.

3. Migoli - Deep-Rooted Cultural Barriers and Women’s Lived Realities



Figure 4 Community Mobilization Group in a joint photo with WATED representative, Mr. Wolflam Kiri – Project Assistant & Legal Coordinator.

Community consultations in Migoli revealed deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that systematically restrict women from accessing, using, or owning land. Inheritance practices remain strictly patrilineal, with women dependent on husbands, brothers, or other male relatives for access to farmland or grazing areas.

As participants explained, most land is ancestral and passed down through generations without formal documentation. Women are excluded from ownership under customary practices, and widows or divorced women are often left vulnerable. As one participant, Bi. Rose Leyani, described:

"Katika mila na desturi zetu, mwanamke huruhusiwi kabisa kumiliki ardhi. Ukiolewa unaenda kwa mumeo, akikuacha au akifariki, unateseka. Hata ukirudi nyumbani, ni vigumu kukubaliwa— wanaona mali ni ya wanaume pekee."

Beyond exclusion, some women reported instances of gendered corruption in land allocation processes. **Bi. Mather Melumu**, noted: *"Kuna baadhi ya viongozi wa mitaa wanawaambia wanawake wafanye 'mengineyo' ili kusaidiwa kupata hati. Hii inakatisha tamaa na inaleta udhalilishaji mkubwa."*

Even local government leaders acknowledged the seriousness of these barriers. **Mr. Optatus K. Mlowe, WEO Migoli**, emphasized: *"Tukikubali kuendelea na mila hizi bila kubadilisha sheria na mifumo, wanawake wataendelea kubaki nyuma. Tunapaswa kuweka kanuni ndogo ndogo za kijiji ili kulinda haki za wanawake."*



Mr. Optatus K. Mlowe, WEO Migoli akijumuika katika mazungumzo ya pamoja na wanakikundi wa hamasha-migoli

Despite the cultural and systemic challenges, women in Migoli demonstrated resilience and determination to push for reforms. Proposed community-driven solutions included:

- I. Establishing village by-laws to prevent land dispossession and protect women’s rights,
- II. Supporting collective women’s groups to jointly apply for land titles, and
- III. Strengthening awareness campaigns to improve understanding of legal rights to land ownership and use.

Emerging Solutions & Way Forward

Across the three regions, women consistently called for:

- a) Stronger communication channels from government to communities on national policy updates.
- b) Simplification of legal processes so women can easily obtain land titles.
- c) Engagement of faith leaders, elders, and traditional structures in shifting cultural norms.
- d) Integration of land rights into climate action plans at both local and national levels.

Policy Implications & Global Advocacy

These consultations form part of WATED’s flagship initiative: “From the Margins to the Center: Elevating Rural Women’s and Girls’ Voices in Land and Climate Action.”

The voices collected will be compiled into a Grassroots Women’s Observations Report, to be shared at both national-level policy dialogues and global climate spaces including COP.

By bringing forward the authentic voices of women, WATED and its partners are ensuring that land and climate justice become inseparable in Tanzania’s sustainable development agenda.

Acknowledgement

We sincerely thank the womens of Ruvuma, Ifakara, and Migoli who bravely shared their stories. Their voices are shaping a gender-responsive and inclusive climate movement in Tanzania.

Special appreciation goes to all partners whose tireless commitment and collaboration continue to drive this work forward including WFT-T and UAF . Together, we are laying the foundation for gender-responsive and community-driven climate solutions in Tanzania.