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INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND LAND TOOLKIT



INTRODUCTION

Each year, millions of women are physically and sexually assaulted by intimate or domestic partners. The World Health Organization estimates that as many as 30 percent of women have experienced this kind of violence (2013), making it the most common form of gender-based violence. The U.S. Government (USG) is committed to preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV).¹ This commitment is articulated in several policies, laws and other guidance documents. Addressing violence against women is also one of the three pillars of the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy ([link](#)).

While the causes of and motivations for IPV are complex, some research suggests that when women are able to accumulate assets in their own name they may experience lower levels of IPV and their partners may be less likely to engage in abusive behavior.² This suggests that one possible strategy to reduce the incidence of IPV may be to empower women with more secure rights to land and other property. In some contexts, when women hold secure rights to assets such as land and housing their status within households and communities rises, their agency and empowerment increases, and this may shift men's behavior. In addition, having housing in her own name may help women escape abusive relationships.

Securing land rights for women is important because land remains a critical asset, particularly (though not exclusively) for rural dwellers who depend upon agricultural for a livelihood. Land provides a place to build a home, grow food and livestock, and build a business. However, in the developing world, women's land rights are often weak, creating a range of insecurities: risk of displacement, loss of housing and livelihoods, and health risks (USAID 2016). Providing women with secure tenure over the land and resources is an important element in the fight against poverty and hunger and to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment. USAID works with governments, businesses, and communities in 23 countries to support efforts to secure land rights and strengthen land governance systems to increase economic prosperity and promote resilience among women and men.

PURPOSE

This Toolkit supports the objectives of the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally (updated, 2016) and USAID's Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy. It addresses activities and projects that USAID staff may design to strengthen and secure land tenure, property rights, and land governance in rural, peri-urban and urban areas. The Toolkit is one of several gender-based violence (GBV) Toolkits that USAID has developed to address concerns related to GBV in other sectors including, but not limited to, Economic Growth, Energy and Infrastructure, Monitoring and Evaluation, and the Rule of Law.

The Toolkit is meant to be an easily-accessible resource designed to increase awareness of concerns related to IPV in land-related policies and programming (noting that a more comprehensive companion analysis of this issue can be found at: [Intimate Partner Violence and Land Tenure, 2018 \(link\)](#)). It

¹ This Toolkit focuses on a subset of GBV: violence perpetrated by intimate or marital partners and experienced by women. The Toolkit defines intimate partner violence (IPV) to include emotional, physical, and sexual violence committed by a current or former partner or spouse. We focus on IPV rather than the broader category of gender-based violence, because the literature on linkages between land tenure and IPV is more developed than the literature on land tenure and the GBV.

² An asset may be defined as "a stock of financial, human, natural or social resources that can be acquired, developed, improved and transferred across generations" (Moser, 2016). Having opportunities to accumulate assets enables agency that, in turn, supports empowerment. Agency is often defined as the ability to act independently and make one's own choices.

provides recommendations for activities that can build an understanding of this issue and address the needs of women and men for more secure land and resources. This Toolkit also provides recommendations related to monitoring and evaluation of land activities and suggests indicators that projects may wish to use to measure outcomes.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF IPV IN THE LAND SECTOR

When laws, policies, social norms and/or practices allow for women's unequal treatment in relation to land and other property, this often violates women's rights under national and international law and constrains economic and social development. It also impacts the broader enabling environment for business and economic growth by creating disincentives for women to conserve assets and invest to improve productivity. When these rights are weak, and women have limited decision-making control over assets (limiting agency), they may have fewer resources to invest in the health and education of household members. In addition, women with weak land and property rights may be more at risk of land grabbing by more powerful actors. Addressing these negative impacts of gender inequality in land tenure is important to promote economic prosperity and resilience and to reduce conflict within families and communities.

Conversely, when women have secure rights to access, use, control, benefit from and inherit land and other property, through sole or joint ownership, in many contexts they experience increased economic and social empowerment. Providing and upholding women's land tenure rights may shift power dynamics within households and communities by enabling asset holders to bargain or make decisions about how to use resources (or income from resources) in ways that align with their needs and preferences. With more secure land and property rights women may also be better resourced to leave abusive relationships. Increased empowerment, bargaining power and agency may reduce gender discrimination and the likelihood of IPV. However, context matters: promoting women's secure ownership and control over land and property under conditions where traditional leaders, men and boys perceive these activities to threaten their power, authority, or status may frustrate or block empowerment and, in some cases, contribute to IPV. Land tenure and property rights interventions may be more impactful if they also help women build social and financial capital and if they work with and strengthen social support networks for women who face IPV.

While some research suggests that empowering women with rights to land and property (particularly housing) may help prevent or mitigate IPV, other research reaches a more ambiguous or even contradictory conclusion. Research strongly suggests that the incidence or experience of IPV is highly context specific. Other factors, including prevailing social norms and support networks, the use or misuse of alcohol and drugs, socio-economic conditions and childhood experiences may play important roles in determining if a woman experiences IPV. It is important to understand that land programming can be transformative and contribute to women's economic and social empowerment; however, under some conditions, tenure-strengthening activities may generate resentment and backlash and lead to harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MORE EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS IPV IN PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE LAND SECTOR

Preventing and responding to IPV in development programming requires an integrated approach that looks beyond technical sectoral “solutions” towards better understanding of the factors that contribute to a woman’s experience of IPV. This section provides guidance to help address the possibility of IPV in land activities and projects.

The following recommendations will help strengthen land programming and so should be integrated into activities to expand the knowledge base and prevent and/or respond to IPV.

SUPPORT RIGOROUS RESEARCH

USAID staff should *use internal Agency research capacity and/or research-oriented procurement mechanisms to fill critical evidence gaps* in the connections between land tenure, property rights and IPV. More rigorous research is needed to understand which kinds of land sector interventions are most effective at preventing and responding to IPV because there is a dearth of existing evidence. Staff should prioritize supporting research that addresses the questions identified in Box 1.

Box 1: Fund research activities that address the following questions:

- Which assets (physical, financial and social), in what combination, work best to prevent or reduce IPV in a particular context?
- Under what conditions does joint titling of property help to prevent or reduce IPV? Under what conditions, if any, might joint titling of property increase women’s risk for IPV?
- What is the association between relative property wealth within a couple and the likelihood of IPV?
- What interventions work best to enhance women’s control and decision-making authority over land and property and under what conditions do these interventions work to prevent or reduce IPV?
- What interventions work best to shift men’s attitudes towards and use of IPV in response to women’s exercise of land and property rights?
- Is secure homeownership for women a positive strategy for preventing or reducing IPV and under what conditions does it work best?

ENSURE PROJECT DESIGN IS BASED ON A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL CONTEXT

Staff need to *collect information about the local conditions related to gender relations and IPV before designing land interventions*. This can involve a review of academic and grey literature. It would also be useful to consult the USAID Land Tenure Country Profile for the project location ([link](#)), each of which includes a section on gender. Staff can also *develop a stronger understanding of gender-related constraints related to land and other assets* by answering the questions in Box 2.

Box 2: Ask context-setting questions when developing land programming and interventions:

- How are decisions about the use of land and other property typically made?
- Who typically controls benefits or income associated with the use of land and other property?
- Will the proposed activities be perceived as harming men or their natal families?
- Will the proposed activities be perceived as providing women with an undeserved or “windfall” benefit?
- Do women tend to have social support networks or access to confidential support services in this environment?

It is essential to *understand if programming that is being proposed will be located in a gender-supportive or unsupportive environment*. Staff should review Table I to help make this determination.

Table I. Characteristics of Environments with Strong, Moderate and Limited Support for Gender Equality

Environments with Strong Support for Gender Equality (Gender-Supportive)	Environments with Moderate Support for Gender Equality	Environments with Limited Support for Gender Equality (Unsupportive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/regulatory framework mandates provides for gender equality in land, marital and personal property, inheritance and employment • Laws prohibit GBV, marital rape/sexual assault and other forms of IPV • Laws are enforced equitably • Social norms support women’s empowerment and autonomy • Women and men are educated • Strong social networks exist for women • Land tenure and property rights conditions are generally stable and secure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/regulatory framework provides for gender equality in land, marital and personal property, inheritance and employment • Sometimes laws are enforced equitably • Social norms are somewhat supportive of women’s empowerment and autonomy • Women and men have some education • Some social networks exist for women • Some land tenure and property rights conditions are generally stable and secure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/regulatory framework has significant gaps or fails to provide for gender equality in land, marital and personal property, inheritance and employment • Laws are not enforced equitably • Social norms do not support women’s empowerment and autonomy • Women and men have little or no education • Weak social networks exist for women • Land tenure and property rights conditions are often unstable and insecure

Weak or ambiguous land laws, poor enforcement of existing laws on gender equality and rights to land, limited representation of women among technical land administration staff, discriminatory social norms and justice systems, and limited awareness of legal rights may combine to limit women’s status and opportunities to exist abusive relationships, increasing vulnerability to IPV. Other important social and economic factors may make women who lack secure land rights more vulnerable to IPV. These factors vary across countries and between regions within countries. Interventions should be designed with the specific local context in mind. Table I can help staff designing and implementing land sector projects and activities identify (in broad terms) the degree to which the local context is, or is not, gender equitable/supportive.

CREATING GENDER-SENSITIVE LAND PROGRAMMING

With a clearer sense of how supportive (or unsupportive) the local environment is towards gender equality, staff should take the following steps to address gender equality concerns and, where needed, incorporate the following elements and activities into land programming:

More-Supportive Environments

1. Review literature on land and IPV and discuss local land conditions with Foreign Service Nationals and civil society.
2. Identify existing gaps in legal/policy framework and support efforts to fill gaps and clarify rights in land, family and inheritance laws.
3. Work with national and sub-national government authorities to increase support for women's land and property rights.
4. Include behavior change and legal awareness raising activities around women's land rights⁴.
5. Work with men and boys to raise awareness of women's existing land rights and benefits for everyone that occur when rights are enforced ([link](#)).
6. Identify and test context-sensitive strategies to hold men accountable for violations of women's land and property rights.
7. Include activities that increase women's ability to speak publicly, negotiate within and outside households, and manage conflict⁵.
8. Be attentive to concerns for women's safety during mapping and data collection⁶.
9. Conduct focused monitoring and evaluation to track potential for IPV during project implementation.

Less-Supportive Environments

1. Conduct a GBV risk assessment or GBV safety audit ([link](#))³ during concept note stage.
2. Identify high-priority gaps in legal/policy framework and support efforts to fill gaps and clarify rights in land, family and inheritance laws.
3. Work with national and sub-national government authorities to increase support for women's land and property rights.
4. Include behavior change and legal awareness-raising activities around women's land rights.
5. Identify and work with trusted male traditional authorities who can serve as champions for women's land rights.
6. Identify and work with trusted women who can serve as champions for women's land rights.
7. Enable access to confidential support services for women who face IPV as a result of obtaining or exercising land rights (such as health care, mediation and/or paralegal services).
8. Be attentive to concerns for women's safety during mapping and data collection.
9. Conduct focused monitoring and evaluation to track potential for IPV during project implementation.

³ Women's safety audits have been used for over two decades to identify unsafe urban spaces for women. Action Aid has a helpful safety audit toolkit "Making Cities and Urban Spaces Safe for Women and Girls," at: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaid_safety_audit_participatory_toolkit.pdf. In addition, safety audits are used in the humanitarian response sector to identify IPV (or GBV) risks, identify trends across sites (such as IDP camps) and to help identify risk mitigation strategies. They can be used in post-conflict or post-disaster environments as well.

⁴ Hidrobo, Hoddinott and Ahmed present evidence of reduced incidence of IPV when behavior change activities were combined with asset transfers (in this case, transfers were either food or cash, not land rights) in Bangladesh: <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/transfers-behavior-change-communication-and-intimate-partner-violence-postprogram>.

⁵ The IMAGE program in South Africa combined a group-based microfinance program with empowerment training designed to increase confidence, communications skills and critical thinking (among other topics). It resulted in a 55 percent reduction in IPV among the treatment population: <http://www.image-sa.co.za/PROGRAMME/THE-INTERVENTION>.

⁶ Speak with women separately before projects begin to understand if joint titling exercises will raise any safety concerns for participating women.

ADAPTIVELY MANAGE PROGRAMS TO REDUCE IPV

Staff should **work with implementing partners to design monitoring and evaluation activities that track changes in laws, capacity, attitudes and behavior related to IPV** in order to understand the outcomes associated with land tenure and property rights interventions and IPV. Monitoring and evaluation work can also identify unanticipated concerns or unintended consequences that arise during project implementation, enabling course correction. **Data should be both sex and age disaggregated. Standard indicators that address GBV (GNDR-1 through 8) should be used** and staff should **incorporate specialized indicators** such as those listed in Box 3.

Box 3: Incorporate custom indicators:

- Percentage of women who report an incidence of IPV associated with obtaining or exercising a right to land or property.
- Percentage of women who believe their status has increased within the household (and community) as a result of obtaining or exercising land and property rights.
- Percentage of target audience that has been exposed to communications/behavior change messages related to discontinuing IPV when women obtain and exercise land and property rights.

CONCLUSION

Land is a critical asset for billions of people. Having a stronger and more nuanced understanding of the role that secure land and property rights and other socio-economic factors play in preventing and responding to IPV will help USAID and the USG meet critical development goals, improve the lives of women around the world and build more resilient and prosperous communities.

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