



DECISION-MAKER'S BRIEF

LAND

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND

SOCIOECONOMIC

DEVELOPMENT

IN THE ARAB REGION

EVIDENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES

A WORLD IN WHICH EVERYONE ENJOYS SECURE LAND RIGHTS

LAND, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION. EVIDENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES. DECISION-MAKER'S BRIEF.

Copyright © United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2023

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit services with permission from the copyright holder and acknowledging the source. No use of this publication may be made for resale or any other commercial purpose whatsoever.

HS Number: HS/034/23E

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel.: +254 20 762 3120
Fax: +254 20 762 3477
www.unhabitat.org

Disclaimer:

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this brief do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries, or regarding its economic system or degree of development. The analysis, conclusions and recommendations of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme or its Executive Board.

This brief is produced with data gathered by the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) researchers and both primary and secondary data sources were used. While UN-Habitat checks data provided to the fullest extent possible, the responsibility for the accuracy of the information lies with the original providers of the data. Information contained in this brief is provided without warranty of any kind, either express or implied, including, without limitation, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose and non-infringement. UN-Habitat specifically does not make any warranties or representations as to the accuracy or completeness of any such data.

Authors:	Sawsan Al-Sarsour and Do'a Zayed
Reviewers and contributors:	Mariam Barghouti, Hind Bata, Joseph Schechla and Sina Schlimmer
Task managers:	Ombretta Tempa and Eleonora Francesca Serpi
Editing:	Mary Ann Llanza and Nikola Stalevski
Cover photo:	Union of Agricultural Work Committees
Layout:	Stefanie Heereman
Strategic partners:	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of the Federal Republic of Germany, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC).

For more information, please consult the referenced documents, visit www.gltanet.net, www.arabstates.gltanet.net, www.unhabitat.org or write to unhabitat-gltanet@un.org.



DECISION-MAKER'S BRIEF

LAND

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND

SOCIOECONOMIC

DEVELOPMENT

IN THE ARAB REGION

EVIDENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This decision maker's brief captures the findings and recommendations emerging from the study "Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region. Evidence-based perspectives" developed by the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) in partnership with the Arab Land Initiative of the Global Land Tool Network and UN-Habitat.

The study contributes to the body of knowledge documenting the positive correlation between land tenure security and socioeconomic development in the Arab region. It analyses the factors affecting women's land tenure security and explores the extent to which land tenure impacts the access to basic services and the participation in decision-making of women and men, as well as their perceived security, resilience and protection from gender-based violence.

Analysed through the field-based perspective and experience of UAWC, the research draws from qualitative and quantitative methodologies: information from literature review, consultations with land experts active in the Arab region and in-depth field assessments conducted in Palestine, Tunisia, Iraq and Kuwait. The results of the field assessment are disaggregated by sex and analysed to describe the gender-related patterns in the region.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

LAND TENURE SECURITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Securing land tenure for women and men is essential to realise human and socioeconomic development. The study demonstrates there is a positive correlation between land tenure security and improved living conditions:

73%
MEN

70%
WOMEN



... report that secure land tenure rights have helped them **improve** their **living standards**

69%
MEN

66%
WOMEN



... report that secure land tenure rights have allowed for **higher incomes**

67%
MEN

69%
WOMEN



... report that secure land tenure rights have helped them ensure **a more dignified life** for their families

36%
MEN

39%
WOMEN



... report that secure land tenure rights have a positive correlation with the **protection** from **gender-based violence**

56%
MEN

49%
WOMEN



... report that secure land tenure rights have helped them **access education**

52%
MEN

42%
WOMEN



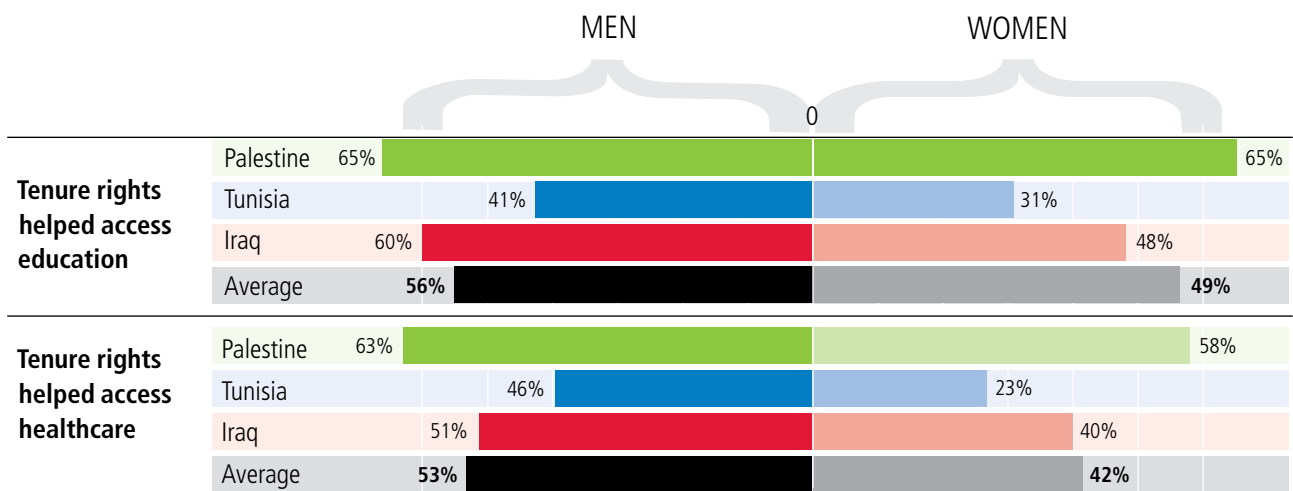
... report that secure land tenure rights have helped them **access better healthcare**

However, gender inequalities permeating the society make this less beneficial for women, reflecting the structural gender inequalities in the region and the extent to which opportunities are more available and accessible to men and boys than women and girls.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



CORRELATION BETWEEN LAND TENURE RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES NEGATIVELY IMPACT WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

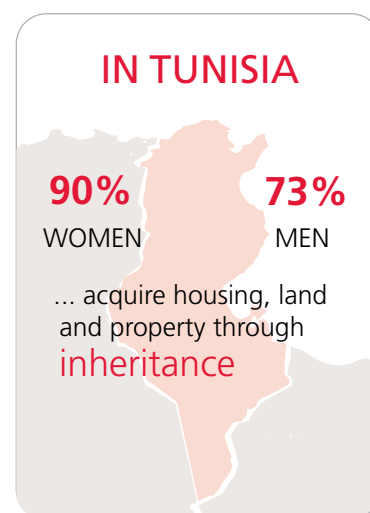
Men and women have different opportunities to acquire and control land, and to maximise its potential. While, generally, laws in the Arab region do not prevent women from owning and controlling housing, land and property, these are not sufficiently responsive to mitigate the real-life hurdles women face. Community dynamics and families' understandings of housing, land and property rights shape the gender gap in accessing and benefitting from land, often prioritising men's access to land and reinforcing women's dependency on male family members.

HOW DO WOMEN AND MEN ACQUIRE LAND

IN THE ARAB REGION?

Inheritance is the primary avenue for acquiring housing, land and property in the Arab region for both women and men however, this trend is particularly clear for women:

67%	of respondents acquired land through inheritance	71% WOMEN	58% MEN
27%	of respondents acquired land through purchase	24% WOMEN	35% MEN
6%	of respondents acquired land through other means such as lease, grant from the government , through a union or association	5% WOMEN	7% MEN



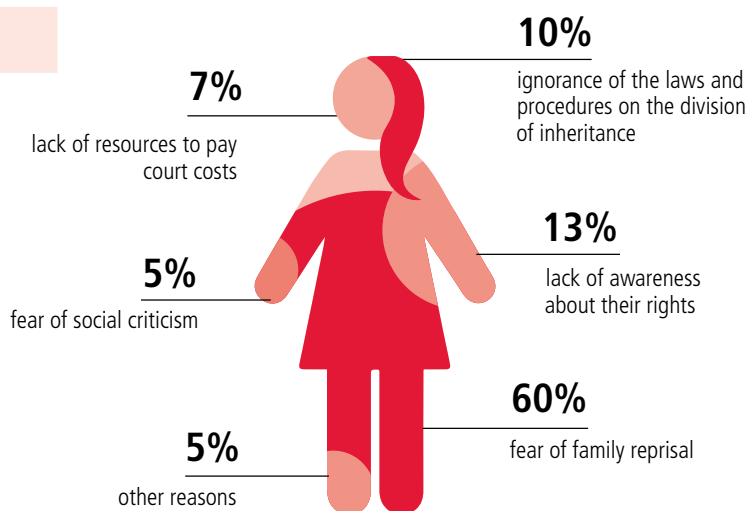
These patterns reflect women's lesser purchasing power and magnify the negative impact of the widespread inheritance renunciation practices in the region.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

WHY DO WOMEN

RENOUNCE TO THEIR INHERITANCE RIGHTS?

A survey conducted in Gaza in 2006 revealed that women are discouraged from claiming their inheritance rights due to various reasons:



(WAC, 2006; UN-Habitat/GLTN, 2018)

DID YOU KNOW ...

Under Islamic law, **women and men are equally allowed** to purchase housing, land and property, to be allocated a portion of the deceased's real estate through wills, to receive gifts and donations, and to jointly own properties.

UNDER WHOSE NAME

IS THE LAND REGISTERED?



Women are less likely to have land ownership rights registered in their name compared to men. This is a widespread practice to ensure that the property remains within the family:

35%
MEN

58%
WOMEN

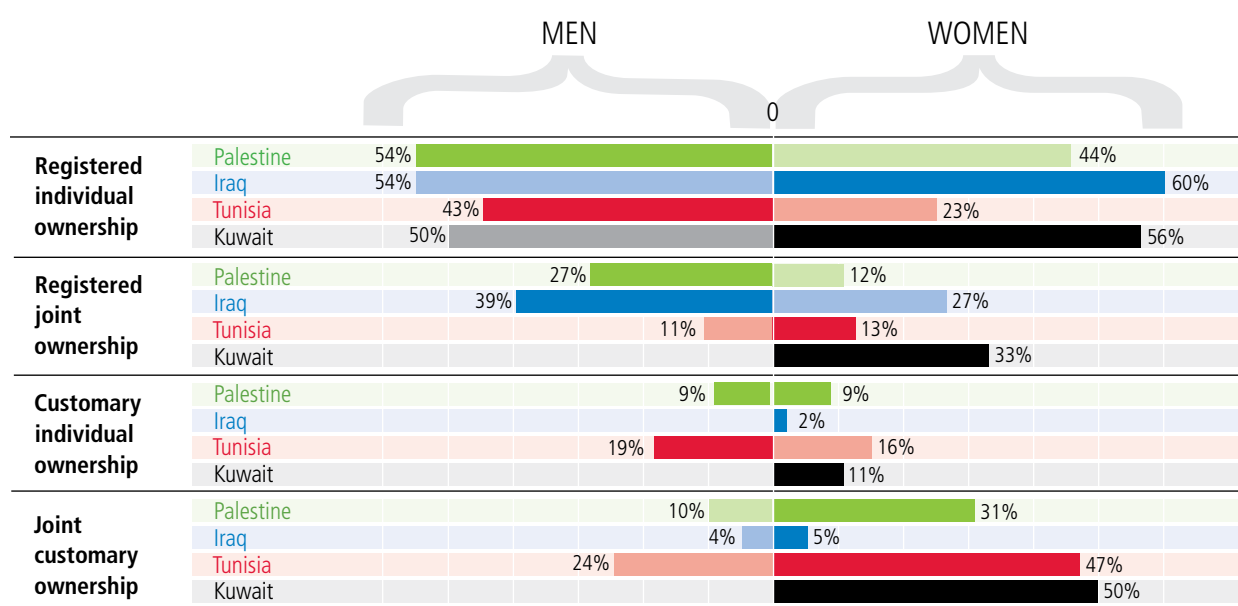


... report having **land registered** in the **name of a male family member**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

GEOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

TYPE OF LAND OWNERSHIP BY COUNTRY



HOW IS LAND

USED AND CONTROLLED?

Gender inequalities are not limited to land ownership and land acquisition. The study revealed the gender disparity regarding use and control over land and the opportunity to secure financial gains from its utilization. Half of respondents use their land or property for economic activities (commercial use, lease, agriculture, etc.) with a higher percentage among men compared to women:

63%
MEN

46%
WOMEN

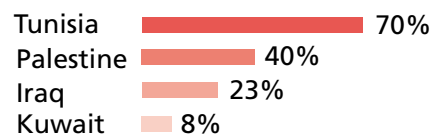


... use their land or property
for **economic activities**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

WHERE IS LAND

MOST COMMONLY USED FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES?



Further, the economic structures that prioritize men's access to land limit women's agency to take control of their resources and assets, reducing their opportunities to maximize land use potential. Male landowners are more likely to manage land-related economic activities, while women are more likely to delegate this to male relatives:

74%

MEN

54%

WOMEN



... lead **economic activities** on their land

Whether delegating the management of economic activities to male relatives secures women an adequate share of the profits needs to be investigated further. However, this is likely to impact the distribution of financial resources within the family and reinforce gender roles that see men as breadwinners and women as unpaid domestic care providers.

WHO MANAGES

LAND-RELATED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES?

24%

FATHER

41%

HUSBAND

8%

BROTHER

7%

SON

3%

MOTHER

12%

OTHER CLOSE FAMILY MEMBER

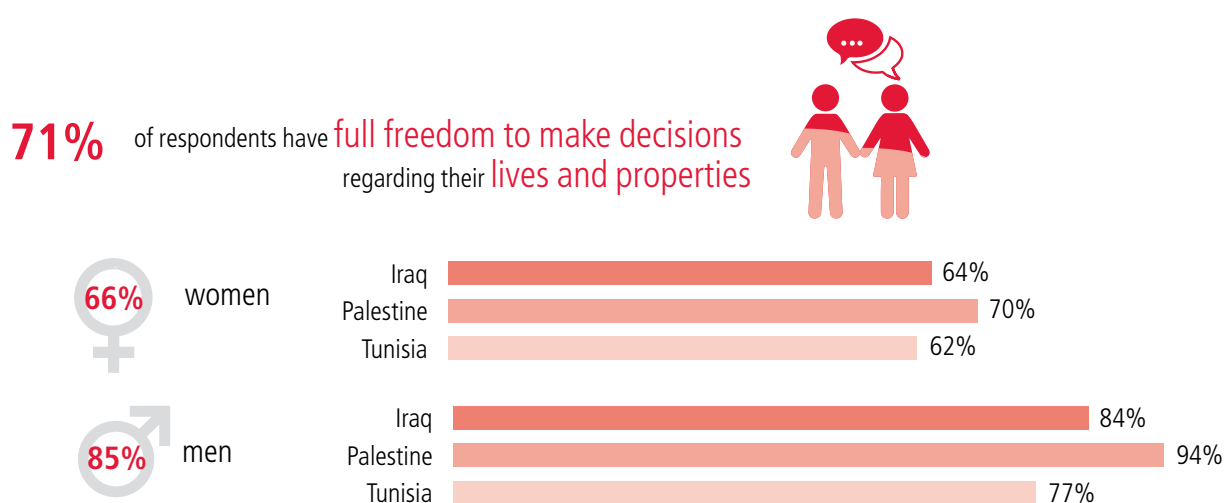
5%

PROFESSIONAL PARTNER

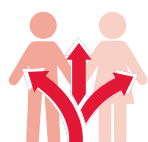
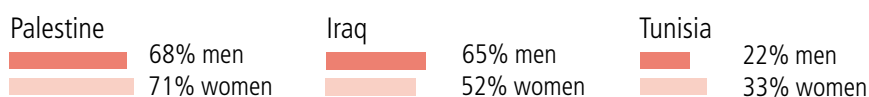
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

LAND TENURE SECURITY, EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

In the Arab region, women's participation at all levels of decision-making is stymied and limited, and their engagement in the paid labour force is significantly constrained by the disproportionate burden they carry in the unpaid labour force. This is reflected in the unequal control women and men exercise over their lives and properties:



Securing their housing, land and property rights can help closing this gap. Land tenure security supports and upholds women and men's social rights, empowering them to make decision about their lives and to join social movements in their communities:



... report that secure land tenure rights have enhanced their **decision-making power** within their families

PALESTINE

reports the highest rates of increased **social participation** when enjoying land tenure rights:

47% MEN **61%** WOMEN

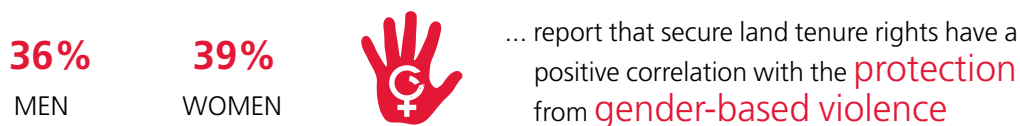
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

THE FEELING OF SAFETY BUILDS RESILIENCE

Conflict, especially armed and organized conflict, impedes efforts to ensure, protect and uphold housing, land and property rights. It fragments and destabilizes the social relation networks that provide a basis for land access and tenure systems. During displacement, many lose their legal documents: identity cards, marriage certificates, and housing, land and property documents. Such negative impact is particularly burdensome on women and vulnerable communities who often lack the knowledge and the financial means to claim and register their land rights. The respondents' perception of their ability to withstand potential future shocks informs the connection between land tenure rights and overall human security:



Further, by enabling better shelter and financial/nutritional security, land tenure rights also contribute to protection against gender-based violence:



On the other hand, literature shows that women may be exposed to gender-based violence when they attempt to pursue or exercise their land tenure rights without the social protection of community mechanisms that can ensure safety, accountability and monitoring.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: WHAT WOMEN DON'T KNOW MAY HURT THEM

Awareness is a crucial step towards securing land tenure rights. From the research it emerges insufficient knowledge and awareness about land tenure rights and their positive impact on human development:



This negatively affects women and men's land tenure security, particularly the landless and in case of forced eviction or in the absence of adequate documentation. Women's land tenure security heavily depends on social factors and their economic and civil status. Women are more likely to lose their house, land and property in the event of divorce or death of the husband as they lack the knowledge of the property regime options available to them at the time of marriage through the marital contract. This results in disadvantaging further those who already are in a position of weakness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY

From decision-makers to communities, **increase awareness on the importance of gender equality and land tenure security and the impact they have on men, women, families, and communities.** Efforts must be made to reach remote communities and populations affected by conflict – especially the youth - and to convey the experiences and needs of women.

Simplify, translate and popularize laws, administrative regulations and legal documents to make them more accessible to the general public. Specific efforts must be made to popularise inheritance laws, counter the negative attitude towards women claiming inheritance rights and combat renunciation practices.

Enhance the understanding of key stakeholders - such as judges, parliamentarians, decision-makers, civil society organizations, and women's groups - **about land-related national, regional and international legal frameworks, religious and customary laws.**

RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE AND DATA

Continue undertaking field assessments and analysis to refine the understanding of gender and land issues, monitor progress, and develop targeted information and awareness messages. Data should always be disaggregated by sex, age and by socio-economic indicators.

Analyse the nexus between tenure insecurity and the various phases of conflict to draw lessons and design strategic interventions and develop systematic and up-to-date surveying systems to **monitor the housing, land and property rights violations committed.**

Promote the role of civil society organizations for collecting and analysing data, and for sharing the results, capitalising on their role of mediators between institutions and communities.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE REFORMS

Reform and align national policies and regulations with international human rights frameworks protecting women's rights, especially housing, land and property rights and amend the discriminatory laws that are restraining women's access to land (e.g. citizenship laws, guardianship laws, etc.).

In countries with legal pluralism, **harmonize the provisions on women's rights to land and property and ensure that they do not violate the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups,** including during emergency and crisis response.

Review and reform land registration and land administration systems to be more gender-responsive and fit-for purpose, facilitating their access for women, poor, illiterate people and other marginalized groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Remove practical barriers limiting women's access to land administration services by reducing the high costs and simplifying bureaucratic procedures, and by decentralising them from the main urban centres to limit travel costs and distances.

Provide practical support for women at the grassroots level by helping them to access justice, legal assistance, counselling, representation and mediation, by reporting violations, and protecting them from gender-based violence.

INHERITANCE AND MARITAL PROPERTY

Regulate and combat inheritance renunciation practices by developing the capacities of all stakeholders involved in inheritance- and land-related processes, contracting marriages and dealing with the settlement of divorce.

Raise the awareness and encourage a holistic approach to estate planning to complement inheritance, particularly for Muslim women, with other mechanisms for the transfer of land and properties, such as the use of wills, gifts or donations, dower, etc.

Promote the use of written marital contracts for defining the property regime of couples at the time of marriage. Encourage joint property arrangements as the preferred property regime even when couples do not indicate any property regime option.

Provide access to non-confrontational land disputes resolution mechanisms for women to help them safeguard family relationships; and **provide legal support, shelter and protection** for women and children under threat of violence from family or community members when claiming inheritance rights.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Promote knowledge-sharing among entry-level female entrepreneurs seeking to use their land for income generation by developing agricultural initiatives and collaborative working groups with women, especially in rural areas.

Capacitate women's associations to deal with housing, land and property rights and other land-related issues to increase women's participation in land-related decision-making bodies and processes, including peace negotiations and land conflict resolution mechanisms.

Promote and increase women's employment in the different land-related professions.

FURTHER READINGS

FURTHER READINGS

UN-Habitat/GLTN (2018). [Women and Land in the Muslim World. Pathways to increase access to land for the realization of development, peace and human rights.](#)

UN-Habitat/GLTN (2019). [Global Land Tool Network Gender Strategy \(2019–2030\) Towards Securing Women’s and Girls’ Land and Property Rights.](#)

UN-Habitat/GLTN (2021). [Empower and Improve the Life of Women by Protecting their Land, Housing and Property Rights in the Arab Region. Key Messages.](#)

UN-Habitat/GLTN and UAWC (2023). [Land, Women Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region. Evidence-based perspectives.](#)

HS Number: HS/034/23E

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
UN-Habitat
P.O. 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 762 3120
Fax: +254 20 762 4266
Website: www.unhabitat.org

For more information please contact us:
GLTN Secretariat
Facilitated by UN-Habitat
P.O. 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 762 5199
Fax: +254 20 762 4256
E-mail: gltn@unhabitat.org
Website: www.gltn.net

