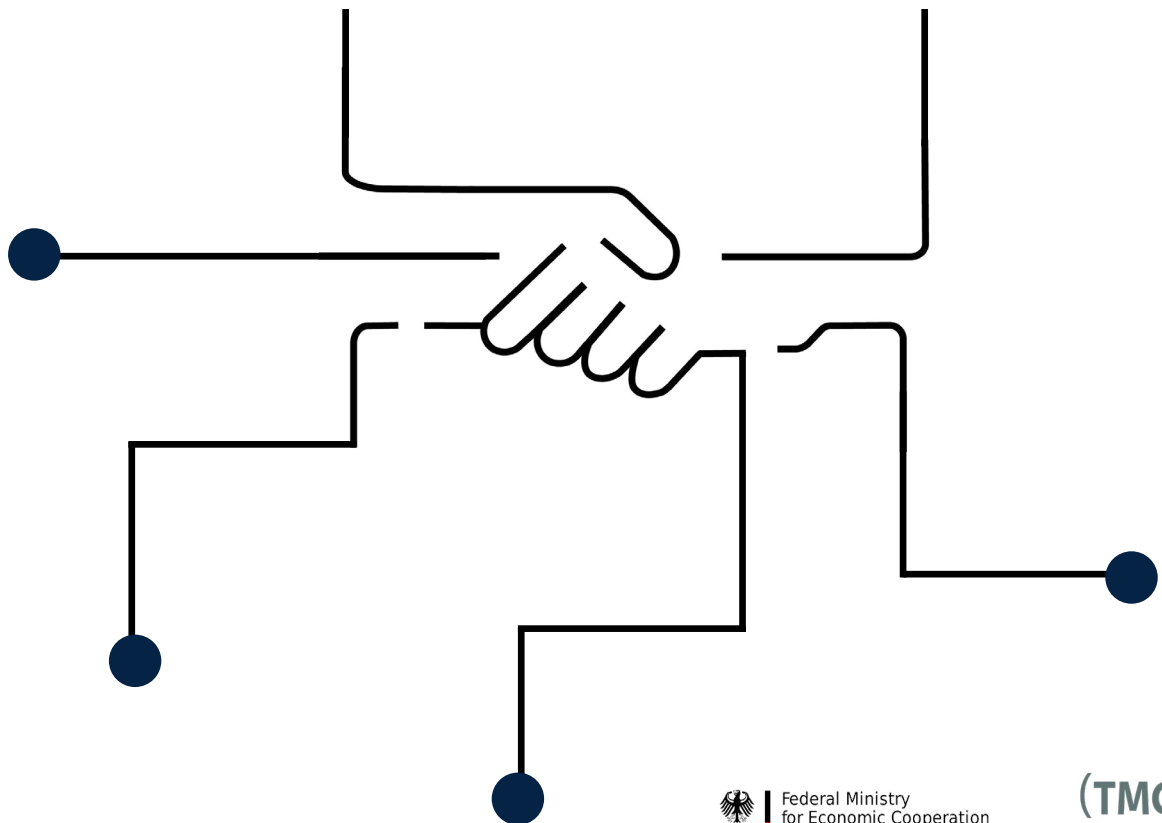# SEWOH LAB

Women's Tenure Security and Digitalization

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

(TMG)
ThinkTankforSustainability
Töpfer Müller Gaßner

The special initiative "ONE WORLD - no Hunger" (SEWOH)

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) envisage, by 2030, a world without hunger, in which every person has a sufficient and balanced diet, and agriculture is organised sustainably so that future generations can also be fed. With the special initiative "ONE WORLD - no Hunger" (SEWOH), the German government has committed itself to support the achievement of these targets in countries where at present hunger, malnutrition and poverty are particularly rampant (BMZ 2021).

Woman packing her cotton after harvest in Sinawongourou village (Northern Benin).
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Prioritizing women's land rights and tenure security

Hunger, malnutrition and poverty have multiple causes, but insecure or unresolved land rights are unquestionably a particularly decisive factor. The BMZ has therefore identified securing land rights as one of the priority targets for the SEWOH. SEWOH's ambition is, that by the initiative's finalization in 2023 at least 465.000 land users will have been granted secure land rights (BMZ 2019).

Unequal, unfair and insecure land rights intersect with socially generated axes of disadvantage. In a majority of the 35 countries on which the SEWOH focuses, including Kenya, Malawi and Benin, women are disproportionately excluded from secure land tenure rights, despite their central role in food production and rural income generation. Women are therefore also exceedingly vulnerable to food and income insecurity. Furthermore, women face far greater obstacles in becoming stewards of sustainable land use, which is widely recognized as a vital prerequisite for the interrelated ambitions of halting soil degradation, securing food security and promoting rural income generation for the rural poor. It is therefore essential to design support processes that allow women to improve their tenure security and gain more secure access to land resources. TMG's SEWOH Lab - Gender and Land Rights workstream (GLR) is designed to address this concern.

The Gender and Land Rights workstream: Women's tenure security and digitalization

TMG Research's SEWOH Lab is one of some 300 projects tasked with the realization of the SEWOH. The SEWOH Lab was designed to identify, analyse, and strengthen new entry points in the field of digitalization for achieving the Agenda 2030, with a focus on SDG 2, and particularly the "leave no-one behind" principle. The SEWOH Lab pursues this research agenda through a comparative research approach. It has therefore deliberately chosen three work streams, Urban Nutrition Hub, Soil Organic Carbon and Gender and Land Rights, each of which are characterized by different degrees of digitalization. The Gender and Land Rights workstream focuses on how digital tools, such as participatory tenure mapping tools and user-oriented databases, can be used to support women's land rights.
A range of hardware and software solutions are available commercially to record, register and monitor land rights. These digital tools offer a range of opportunities to improve established approaches to land registration. For example, Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT), e.g. blockchain technology, holds the promise of storing land tenure rights in a corruption-proof way. In remote rural areas, digital tools can also grant land users' quick and cheap access to relevant information.

Digitalization in land governance, however, also poses major risks as well as considerable challenges for accompanying interventions, such as around social organization or conflict

resolution. Digital technologies for mapping and registering land tenure rights, including user rights, do not in themselves guarantee an improvement in the situation of marginalized sections of the population. When introduced under inappropriate conditions, digitalization risks contributing to a further reinforcement of pre-existing structural inequalities including an even deeper marginalization of women and other vulnerable groups.

On this point, for example, the question of who gets access to and control over the technologies associated with digitalization is crucial. Equally crucial is fair access and control over the data generated by digitalization. In fact, the development of technology and the question of what data are recorded can already determine whether digitalization will lead to an improvement or a deterioration of the situation of women. Digital registration projects must also provide for the registration of women's secondary tenure rights, which have a special significance for women, but are often not considered in the registration and titling of land ownership. Thus, there can be negative concomitants of registering ownership of land, often in the name of the (male) head of household. Taking this into account, the Gender and Land Rights workstream aims equally at an in-depth analysis of the opportunities as well as risks of digital innovations in the context of strengthening tenure security for women.

Portable GPS devices are used to support community based tenure mapping in Burkina Faso. © Victor Emeghara

A special emphasis on process and information

Central to any meaningful land governance approach – regardless of whether analogue or digital tools are used - is the clarification and securing of tenure rights and the allocation of these rights to users. Against this backdrop, responsible administrative and social processes are an essential prerequisite. Digitalization cannot serve as a substitute for responsible land governance but, as an innovative complement to existing "analogue" governance processes.

In a majority of the SEWOH countries these analogue processes are often incomplete. This is especially true for the establishment and implementation of approaches to land governance that are inclusive and participatory. Inclusive and participatory approaches are not only new political territory in many contexts. They also require particular attention to the design of processes and monitoring mechanisms. The SEWOH Lab GLR workstream emphasizes, accordingly, that introducing and testing digital tools in the politically sensitive and contentious context of land rights requires carefully planned social processes to accompany their introduction.

A second important prerequisite in the context of responsible land governance - and particularly in connection to clarifying and securing tenure rights - is free and uncompromised access to adequate information about the legal framework in which land tenure can be negotiated, obtained, and secured. Adequate access to information and the means to understand it are essential prerequisites for stakeholders to be aware of their rights and obligations. Access to information can also counterbalance existing social inequalities, including those between women and men. A systematic compilation and processing of relevant information can support users to develop new lines of argumentation to legitimize their legal claims. At this point, i.e. when information is prepared and compiled for a specific purpose, both the potential and the risk of using digital solutions become apparent.

One research agenda - two work packages

The SEWOH Lab Gender and Land Rights workstream comprises two work packages. The first work package is devoted to the subject of access to and use of information. The work package identifies the conditions under which digital innovations can provide women with free and uncompromised access to critical information and asks how this affects their capacity to strengthen their land rights and tenure security. As a case study serves the development and testing of an innovative digital database that systematically links land tenure issues to the legal frameworks of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) and corresponding human rights instruments. The work package builds on our ongoing collaboration with the Malawi Human Rights Commission and the Danish Institute for Human Rights on developing and applying a human rights-based land governance monitoring methodology in Malawi. In the context of the SEWOH lab workstream, the results of this existing collaboration will be further developed and researched with a specific focus on gender equity issues. The digital tool that is developed and tested here, aims to improve its users' understanding of land issues and the concrete human rights obligations underpinning the VGGT. For example, without prior knowledge of human rights, a user could start with a keyword, and quickly identify, which human rights and binding human rights instruments this topic relates to.

The second work package develops and analyses an innovative social process related to the application of participatory tenure mapping tools. Here, procedural aspects of a digitalized land tenure mapping process will be explored. The aim is to understand,

based on this pilot, how participatory tenure mapping processes need to be organized - and how digital tools can be effective in this context - in order to strengthen women's tenure security. To this end, the use and impact of a digital tenure mapping tool will be examined in case studies in Kenya and Benin. The choice of the country cases rests on the fact that, like Malawi, Kenya and Benin are two of the SEWOH's focal countries which are characterized by particularly severe tenure insecurity among women. In addition to the particularly precarious land rights situation warranting a commitment in Kenya and Benin, the countries also represent suitable case study regions from the perspective of successful project implementation. The work package will thus build on the experiences and results of TMG Research's ongoing work in the field of participatory tenure mapping in the context of Land Degradation Neutrality initiatives in both countries.

strategy is to develop a project framework that, rather than integrating local expertise in a merely one-directional manner, also accounts for the strategic interests of the respective partner organizations. Taking this approach allows the design and local implementation of the research project to become a joint task, the successful execution of which is in the mutual interest of all partners. Cooperation with local partners is essential for the design of a project that is adapted to the contextual conditions of the study region. Context-specific knowledge and established local networks, as provided by the partner organizations, are thus a vital precondition for the project to truly work in the interest of rural women. Along similar lines, to allow for a sound assessment of the potential and impact of digital innovations, the SEWOH lab GLR workstream also seeks close partnerships and collaboration with organizations and experts active in the development of corresponding software tools.

Focus Group Discussion Meeting in Makunga, Kenya
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What's next? The SEWOH GLR workstream in 2021 and beyond

For TMG Research's GLR workstream, 2021 will be dedicated to establishing and institutionalizing partnerships to further develop and plan in detail the two work packages on participatory tenure mapping and the virtual database. In doing so, the project aims at the joint development and implementation of two engagement strategies for the respective work packages. TMG Research is intensifying its cooperation within the partnerships already established in the case study regions. In addition, we are also actively approaching potential additional partners at local, national, and international level.

Success through joint commitment: An emphasis on strong partnerships

In the context of land mapping and registration projects, ensuring a critical and sound analysis of the opportunities and risks of digital innovations requires working closely with local partner organizations. The SEWOH Lab team at TMG Research focuses primarily on building relationships with established civil society organizations in the field of responsible land governance and women's rights, operating locally in the study locations. TMG Research strives for partnerships that allow the local partner organizations to bring their contextual knowledge and experience to bear in decision making.

A basic prerequisite for this is the joint development of an engagement strategy for each of the two work packages. The engagement strategy is a joint strategic work programme that actively integrates all participating partner organisations into the project design and implementation from the very beginning. The goal of each engagement

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