



LANDESA: One of the world's top think tanks on land rights and policy in the Global South

I suppose that the holy grail of environmentalism, and environmental scholarship, is integrating equity concerns with global priorities. The environmental justice movement has sought to do this, sometimes with success and sometimes less so.

Now Jennifer Duncan of [Landesa](#), one of the most innovative think tanks focusing on land rights and the Global South, [thinks that drawing a new connection is necessary](#):

Securing women's rights to land is one approach that can offer a range of benefits tied to both climate change and socio-economic development. This approach can be particularly effective in developing countries, whose rural populations tend to depend on land, forests, and agriculture for their livelihoods, where women make up the majority of agricultural labor, and where women's land rights are the most insecure. Since the agriculture, forestry, and other land use (AFOLU) sector produces [roughly a quarter](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions, the confluence of land, women and sustainable development—and how nations manage that confluence—has critical implications for climate change.

[Research suggests](#) that secure land tenure leads to a greater sense of ownership over land, better prevention of soil erosion, and increased likelihood of afforestation (tree planting) which is an important method of creating emissions-mitigating carbon sinks, and which can also provide immediate benefits to rural women who depend on ecosystem health to continue successfully farming, gathering firewood, and accessing potable water.

As I read this, here is how the causal chain goes:

1. Climate change is severely and significantly exacerbated by bad land use and forestry practices;
2. Bad land use and forestry practices derive from insecure land tenure and property rights;
3. Insecure land tenure and property rights derive at least in part from the fact

that so many of the users of land are women; thus

4. Improving land rights for women will improve the security of tenure, which will improve land use and forestry practices, which will mitigate climate change.

It's a nice argument, and theoretically makes some sense. But that's a causal chain with several steps, and I wonder if there is leakage there. Improving gender equity and women's land rights makes sense on its own terms, but if priorities are to be set well, we need to know a little more about whether we are getting bang for the buck. Certainly this seems like an area that could use a real investment in research — for example, seeing if we can find a relationship between women's land rights and emissions. Moreover, we should also find out which way the causation runs — I could easily see more progressive countries, which are more proactive on climate policy anyway, also establishing greater land rights for women. An enterprising graduate student — or even some professors — should move ahead on this.