Global Women's Land Rights Protocol

A DONOR-FACING GUIDE TO FUNDING THE LAND TENURE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS, AFRO-DESCENDANT, PASTORALIST, AND LOCAL COMMUNITY WOMEN

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1. Introduction

This Women's Land Rights Protocol (WLRP) is a practical guide for donors and funders supporting women's land tenure rights, particularly those of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, pastoralist, and local community women, who have been historically excluded as land rightsholders.

This working document is intended to support transparent dialogue between funders and grassroots and civil society organizations. It draws on a scoping review of more than thirty legal instruments, funding landscape reports, and practitioner toolkits; a funder needs assessment with bilateral, philanthropic, and multilateral funders and donor organizations; and engagement with women's rightsholder organizations to validate findings. It was revised through stakeholder input, including a feedback workshop in Nairobi on July 23-24, 2026, and remains a living document.

Led by RRI and WLRI, the protocol seeks to strengthen funder support for women's land tenure rights (WLTR) equality in land and resource governance and women's meaningful participation and decision-making. It also provides a pathway to strengthen women's contributions to climate and conservation efforts through recognition and protection of their land tenure rights.

1.1 The critical role of securing women's land tenure rights

Securing women's tenure rights is fundamental to gender equality, equitable participation, and benefit sharing under the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Global commitments under the three Rio Conventions also provide opportunities for coordinated action to advance and safeguard these rights.

Through a vibrant array of customary practices, women sustainably manage community lands, sustain livelihoods, and maintain knowledge and resources that supports their communities' health.[1] Yet across countries, they continue to encounter legal, institutional, socio-cultural, political, and economic barriers to secure land tenure. The UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 shows that in 80 percent of countries with available data, fewer than half of women hold ownership or secure rights to agricultural land, and in nearly half of these countries, men's land ownership rates are at least twice as high as those of women.[2]

Across the world, policy attention on women's land rights has often focused on individual property rights, leaving unanswered how women's rights are defined and secured within collectively held, owned, and managed lands.[3] Within the "bundle of rights" approach on lands held and managed collectively—which includes access, management, exclusion, and inheritance—women cannot be assumed to hold the same rights as their peers.

Growing international recognition of the tenure rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, pastoralist peoples, and local communities highlights women's roles as land stewards, knowledge holders, and leaders in territorial governance.

Yet today, the tenure rights of women within these groups remain systematically overlooked and underfunded.[4] Their right to secure land tenure is established across the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), but realization remains incomplete:

- Formal legal protections remain inconsistent even where tenure systems are otherwise well established: 38 percent of countries do not guarantee women's equal inheritance rights without a will, 56 percent require spousal consent for jointly held land transactions, and only one-third require joint registration of matrimonial property.[5]
- In nearly half of countries with comparable data, women's land tenure rights for agricultural land are more than 20 percent lower than men's, a gap that persists even where collective tenure recognition has strengthened.[6]

Tenure insecurity is not evenly distributed. Rural women and women in larger households face greater insecurity than their urban or smaller-household counterparts.[7] Moreover, sex-disaggregated data on tenure rights is significantly underdeveloped.[8] This constrains efforts to measure the scale of women's tenure insecurity and funders' basis to fund it.

Because collective land tenure rights systems vary across countries and continents, this protocol focuses on how to address funding for the land tenure rights of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, pastoralist, and local community women within community-based land tenure regimes (CBTRs). No legal international instrument reviewed for this protocol specifies how gender operates within a collective right. This protocol therefore treats this gap, not the existence of CBTR itself, as the structural problem that donors need to address.

1.2 Funding the "W" in WLTRs: is existing funding reaching women?

To assess whether funding reaches women specifically, it is worth establishing how little funding reaches land tenure rights at all.

To begin, there are some positive trends that are worth noting. International donor funding for Indigenous, local community, and Afro-descendant tenure rights has grown substantially in recent years, up 46 percent since 2022.[9] However, most of the funding pledged passes through re-granting organizations. For example, direct funding to Indigenous and local community organizations accounts for less than 8 percent of Forest Tenure Pledge disbursements between 2021 and 2024, and bilateral direct funding was narrower, at under 2 percent.[10] Funding specifically designed to support WLTRs sits within this already narrow pool, and is not at an appropriate level or structured in a way to directly reach local WLTR organizations.

However, increased donor funding has not reached women within these groups, and an allocation gap remains between different types of women's organizations.[11] For example, Afro-descendant women's organizations often operate with median budgets less than half those of their Indigenous and local community counterparts.[12]

To close the funding gap for women's land tenure rights, donors require a translation of considerations for their funding to be effective at each stage of the funder-partner relationship, not only in how funds are disbursed, but in how tenure systems are understood, how partnerships are structured, and how outcomes are tracked. This protocol is intended to provide that translation.

1.3 WLTRs are already present in donor portfolios

WLTRs are foundational to contributing to climate mitigation and adaptation, forest governance, biodiversity conservation, food security, and land degradation. As such, WLTRs are already built into existing programming and global funding portfolio focus areas, but are not receiving an appropriate level of funding. **Table 1** articulates the specific ways in which WLTRs fit within existing donor funding focus areas.

Such global funding focus areas can be anchored in the three Rio Conventions, meaning that most donor funding is linked to the outcomes and actions articulated in these conventions.

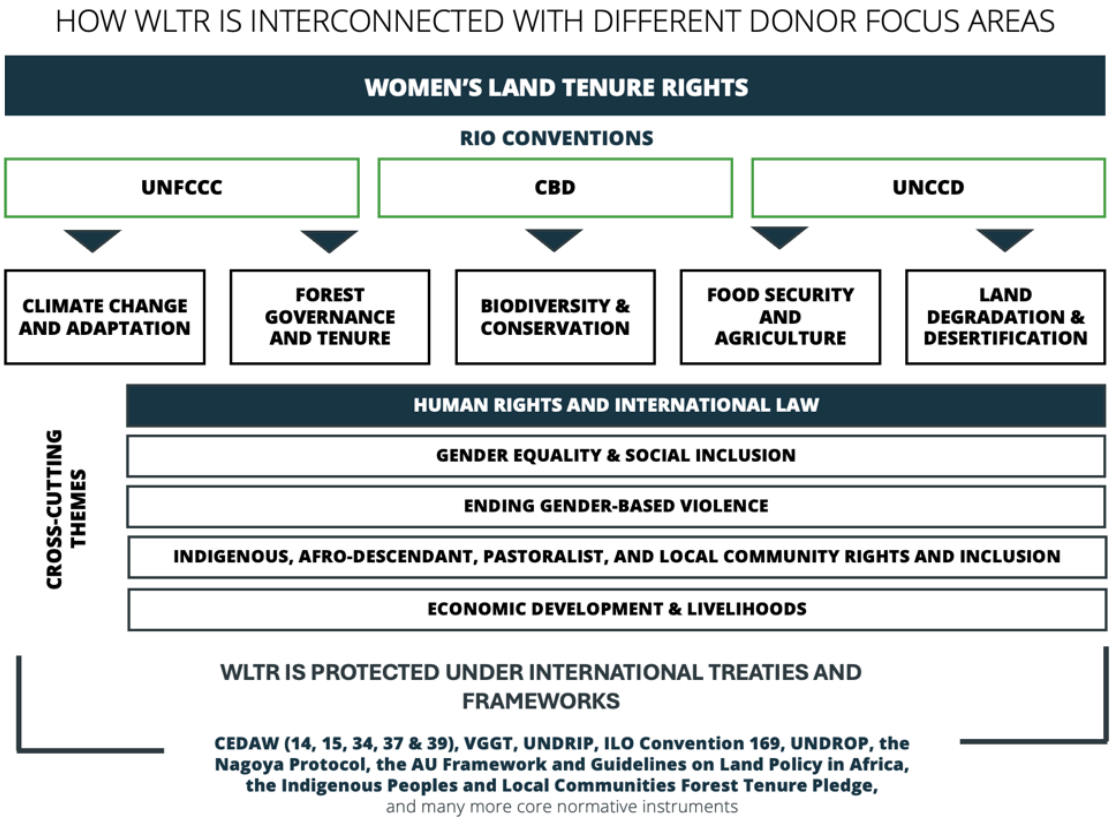
Table 1: How WLTRs intersect with donor subject matter areas

Donor Focus Area	How It Intersects with WLTRs
Climate Mitigation and Adaptation	Secure tenure is increasingly treated as a precondition for durable climate outcomes, because adaptation and mitigation efforts depend on clarity over who holds the right to manage a given landscape, a clarity that remains least resolved when it comes to women's standing within that claim.
Forest Governance and Tenure	Forest tenure is the most extensively documented entry point in this space, yet women's rights within collective forest claims remain one of the least defined dimensions of that architecture.
Biodiversity Conservation	Traditional ecological knowledge, disproportionately held and transmitted by women, is a documented contribution to conservation outcomes, though the benefit-sharing protections meant to recognize that contribution typically apply only where tenure is already legally formalized, a condition woman are less likely to hold.
Food Security and Agriculture	Secure land access is a recognized precondition for agricultural productivity and food security, and the persistent gender gap in ownership stands as a direct constraint on outcomes across both.
Land Degradation and Desertification	Land degradation and sustainable land management outcomes depend on secure tenure, particularly over customary lands, where gender gaps in ownership persist most visibly and remain least addressed.

The diagram in **Figure 1** shows how the five subject areas connect to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Each convention focuses on outcomes that require land tenure security to be achieved in different ways: secured forest cover under the UNFCCC, restored land under the UNCCD, and biodiversity conservation under the CBD. These existing conventions advocate for funding land tenure to achieve their goals, which includes women’s land tenure rights.

Across the different global funding focus areas, there are four cross-cutting themes, **all of which fall under human rights and international law.** They can showcase why land rights security does not automatically extend to women: a program can secure collective title to a community while women within that same collective hold no enforceable claim to it, because inheritance, governance, and economic benefit each operate on separate rules from the land claim itself.

Figure 1: Diagram highlighting where WLTRs sit within different global funding portfolios



Gender-based violence compounds this directly: women who assert land claims, participate in governance decisions, or contest inheritance are frequently exposed to retaliatory violence for doing so, which makes tenure security and protection from violence inseparable in practice—not two separate agendas addressed by two separate instruments.

Therefore, who is this protocol for? The protocol is written for organizations that fund or intend to fund WLTRs, including bilateral and multilateral donors, philanthropic foundations, governments, and international organizations alike, as well as for those seeking to understand current best practice or improve how their existing funding serves WLTRs effectively and meaningfully.

2. Foundational concepts and principles

2.1 Defining key terms and concepts

It is important to consider how WLTRs operate once a tenure claim is recognized. Widowhood dispossession, disinheritance by in-laws, and gendered exclusion from land allocation decisions are frequent occurrences. The tools in this protocol are intended to help donors understand how to work on WLTRs to mitigate these situations.

Table 2 synthesizes the distinct legal and practical realities of women's land tenure across the four rightsholder groups addressed in this protocol, drawing on a scoping review of existing global and regional protocols, frameworks, and instruments. The table articulates the importance of WLTRs to the specific women's rights-holder group. These findings received feedback and, in several cases, were directly informed through key informant interviews with women working on land tenure rights from Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist communities and organizations. These communities' realities can vary significantly by region—a distinction that donors and funders should weigh when shaping support across the broader funding ecosystem.

Table 2

Afro-descendent women	With presence in Latin America and the Caribbean dating back to the 15th and 16th centuries, predating the national states later formed after independence, Afro-descendant peoples' have a basis for recognition closer to the ancestral occupation ILO Convention No. 169 affords Indigenous and tribal peoples than to displacement alone. Despite this, legal recognition of Afro-descendant land rights has come only recently and unevenly.[13] Afro-descendant Peoples have gained constitutional or legal recognition of their rights to ancestral lands in several Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Chile, with Chile's recognition extending the same status Indigenous peoples hold under ILO Convention No. 169. Despite this recognition, the tenure rights of Afro-descendant women within these collective claims remain as weak as those of Indigenous women in similar collective arrangements.[14] International recognition at the UN Rio Conventions is still catching up: Afro-descendant Peoples were only formally recognized under the CBD in 2024, and that recognition has not yet translated into the tenure protections women need to stand as distinct rightsholders.[15]
Indigenous women	Indigenous Peoples are the most internationally codified of the four groups, principally through UNDRIP, but the collective right it establishes says nothing about women's roles within it. For Indigenous women, land tenure is inseparable from their role as knowledge holders, the basis for traditional ecological knowledge, food sovereignty, and customary medicine passed down through generations. Indigenous women safeguard a majority of the world's remaining biodiversity, while representing roughly 6 percent of the global population.[16] Yet, women's stewardship within that role is often acknowledged rhetorically rather than structurally, included to satisfy a requirement, not to govern.[17]
Pastoralist women	Across all seven countries examined in a 2026 review of pastoralist and mobile peoples' rights, all of which have ratified CEDAW, none has enacted pastoralist-specific legal protections.[18] Tenure underpins livestock management, dairy income, water access, and

	transhumance logistics, yet women rarely hold registered rights to the land this work depends on. When grazing land is lost to mining, conservation, or infrastructure, women's standing as stewards is routinely disregarded in resolving the resulting disputes. Their stewardship carries ecological weight too; pastoralist mobility and grazing management sustain rangeland ecosystems through adaptive practices refined over generations, tying tenure security to conservation outcomes.[19]
Local community women	Local community women's status is frequently addressed only through generic community-based language that doesn't distinguish it from Indigenous or Afro-descendant collective claims, leaving local community women's specific tenure realities analytically undifferentiated.[20] Across multiple countries, legal frameworks tend to define "local community" as a residual, catch-all category rather than a distinct one. Global environmental frameworks, including the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol, consistently group "Indigenous peoples and local communities" as a single category rather than distinguishing the two.

2.1.1 The considerations for funding WLTRs

The three lenses that follow, **foundational, operational, and financial**, are interconnected considerations for funding WLTRs, and each carries a set of specific factors donors should account for at every stage of the funding relationship. To define the sub-categories of each lens, the scoping review examined the current funding landscape donors operate within for WLTRs, and the barriers grassroots women's and community-based organizations face in accessing it.

FOUNDATIONAL

The legal and contextual grounding a donor brings, informed by their own research, staff, or place-based knowledge:

- *Understanding of legal recognition by tenure system*: Locating a claim within the bundle of rights it holds; not assuming a tenure label guarantees a specific set of protections.
- *Context analysis of customs and pathways to land ownership*: Understanding how membership, inheritance, and customary practice determine whether a woman can hold land at all.
- *Differentiated approach*: Recognizing that these dynamics vary across Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women, and even among women within the same community.

OPERATIONAL

How a donor structures and manages a funding relationship once engagement begins:

- Access barriers to funding: Identifying what excludes organizations from funding in practice beyond stated eligibility criteria.
- Power dynamics in partnership models: Assessing how a partnership structure gives women real influence, not just formal representation.
- Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL): Tracks whether the partnership itself remains functional over time.

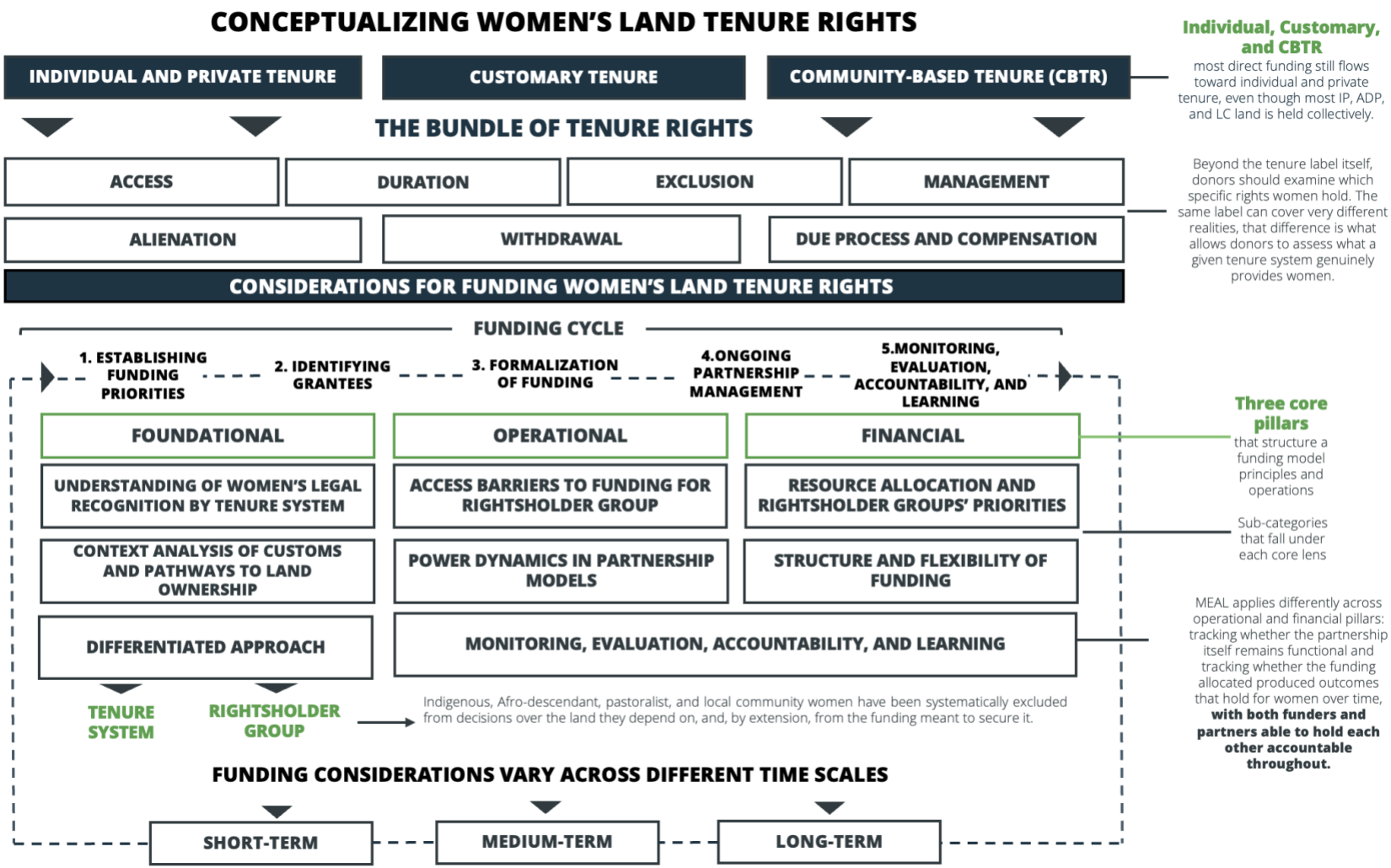
How resources are properly allocated and structured to reach women rightsholders groups:

- *Resource allocation and partners' priorities:* Directing funding towards what organizations themselves identify as needed, rather than an externally assumed capacity gap.
- *Structure and flexibility of funding:* Matching funding terms, duration, and reporting to the realities or the organization receiving it.
- *Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL):* Tracks whether the funding allocated produced meaningful, lasting outcomes for women.

FINANCIAL

This section is structured around each step in the funding cycle, demonstrating how the guiding principles to transformative funding of WLTRs are practiced throughout the donor-partner relationship. There is also a time dimension—as these considerations are not all equally achievable at once—and are addressed as **short-term, medium-term, and long-term** actions throughout this protocol.[21]

Figure 2: Donor-facing diagram that conceptualizes WLTR and its funding

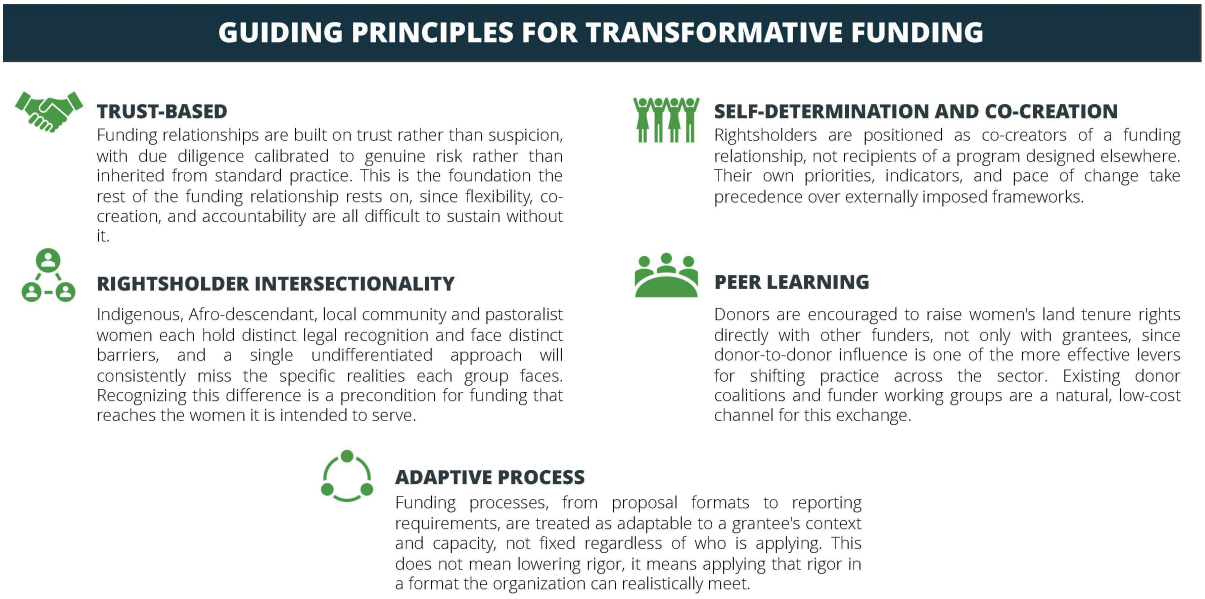


2.2 Guiding principles for transformative funding of WLTRs

Figure 3 outlines the core principles that should underpin funding approaches for women's land and territorial rights, ensuring that funding practices are equitable, accountable, and community-led. These principles are carried forward into the following section.

To operationalize the guiding principles, the following section provides an overview of key considerations and actions for funders and donors to fund women's land rights at each step of the funding.

Figure 3: Diagram for guiding principles on transformative WLTRs



3. Best practices for funding women's land tenure rights

3.1 How to navigate this section

Section 3 provides recommendations for actions organized around the donor funding cycle.

Each step includes:

1. **Overview of the step**

> **Objective:** A summary of what the step aims to provide for donors.
>
> **Key activities:** The key donor activities that may fall under each step.

2. **Practical tips:** Several practical actions that donors may take internally to help guide the integration of WLTRs within their activities. Each step has been categorized by the three pillars of the conceptual framework (page 12) for understanding how to fund WLTRs:

   - **FOUNDATIONAL:** How to establish the foundational understanding needed to assess and define how and where to fund WLTRs.
   - **OPERATIONAL:** How to apply foundational concepts when establishing and working with a partner on WLTRs.
   - **FINANCIAL:** How to manage and allocate resources when funding WLTRs.

The tips are then presented with the following information:

- **Timeframe:** Each tip is presented in timeframe order, which is based on the intended timeline for donors to implement the activity:
  - **Short-term:** Activities that can be completed with relatively minimal resources (including personnel, time, and effort).
  - **Medium-term:** Activities that require more time and resources from a department or individual and the institution.
  - **Long-term**: Activities that require institutional buy-in and change to implement.
- **Tip:** Practical action for the donor to take.
- **Description:** An elaboration of the tip with tangible activities and additional context that may be required for the tip.
- **Guiding principle:** An indication as to which guiding principles are most aligned with the tip.

3. **Assessment questions:** Questions that serve as a starting point for this step:

Self-reflection questions: A set of questions for donors to ask themselves.

Conversation-starting questions: A set of questions for donors to ask organizations focused on WLTRs.

We recognize that funders and donors—like grassroots organizations focusing on WLTRs—face changing priorities, competing mandates, and real institutional constraints. For these reasons, this protocol is not written to ignore that reality. Its recommendations are offered as a starting point for what is possible within those constraints, not as a standard a donor must fully meet to participate meaningfully in this work. Where full alignment is not yet feasible, partial engagement, taken seriously, **still moves the funding relationship forward.**

The actions presented in this section are meant to be a reflection exercise for donors to look inward to their own processes. **Donors should not translate this guidance into additional requirements, safeguards, questionnaires, or compliance burdens for the organizations they fund or intend to fund.**

FOUNDATIONAL

Step 1: Establishing funding priorities - foundational

1. **Overview of the step**

Objective: This step sets out the key considerations for the inclusion of WLTRs when approaching a new funding cycle, grant opportunity, or partnership.

Key activities: The key donor activities that may fall under this step include:

- Identifying areas where WLTRs sit within existing portfolios through research and shared learnings from donors and partners
- Conducting pre-project assessments (e.g. country-level scoping of needs to determine priority areas for funding)

2. Practical tips

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
Short-term		
	Review Foundational Concepts and Principles to determine how WLTRs align with your own portfolio	**Evaluate how WLTRs can be explicitly linked** to existing objectives and topics within the organization. Where organizational governance is led by a council, board, or member-state process, identify where WLTR priorities could be formally proposed and embedded. **Explore women's access to land rights and decision making** over the use of their land within the local context where fund allocation is considered. This includes understanding how the use of shared and non-exclusive land is situated in tenure systems and referring to the CBTR legal indicators to help identify more contextual information related to WLTRs. One key area to consider is to explore local contexts regarding the understanding of women's tenure rights. This can be supported through research and in conversations with rightsholder organizations, who can provide more detail of direct, lived experiences. **Learn about the cultural and historical importance of land rights** for Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women, particularly focused on the historical experiences of women's roles in environment and land governance.
	Address gender-based violence by funding WLTRs	**Explore and leverage funding for climate change, sustainable livelihoods, and tenure security to safeguard women against gender-based violence.** Climate stress disproportionately burdens women, especially Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women who are often required to travel further to access resources for both themselves and their households (such as water, firewood and food). This can increase risk on unsafe routes and heighten household tensions.[22] Securing WLTRs and access to key resources and decision-making strengthens livelihoods and reduces risk of gender-based violence.[23]

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Medium-term
	Engage in donor-to-donor learning	**Organize meetings or informal conversations with other donors** to understand how human rights and climate/conservation intersect with the land tenure rights of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women and how they are managing it or embedding these considerations in their work.
	Conduct a pre-project scoping review to understand contextual the priorities of WLTRs	**Initiate discussions with colleagues, existing partner organizations, and other donors based in potential geographies for funding**, or those working with Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women to identify key priorities that will align WLTRs and tenure security.
	Engage in partner to donor learning	**Engage relevant rights and knowledge holders (civil rights organizations, coalitions, alliances, grassroots, researchers)** in the scoping and design phase to develop inclusive processes and tools that can be embedded throughout the funding cycle. **Consider and explore how Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local-community, or pastoralist advisory bodies can play a role** in your organization's priority-setting or governance processes/meetings.
		Long-term
	Explore additional co-creative funding options to maximize funding impact	**Consider an initial period of core, flexible funding that is not tied to specific activities** to give partners room to determine the most effective path to advancing tenure-related outcomes in their context. This can serve also an initial "getting-to-know-you" grant before making multi-year, longer-term commitments. **Explore funding community-led financing mechanisms** that aim to provide the opportunity for Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist communities to reinvest funds into their livelihoods and take collective and local decisions in relation to funds.

3. **Assessment questions:** Questions that serve as a starting point for this step

Self-reflection questions: For donors to ask themselves

Portfolio priorities:

- ☐ How are gender and WLTRs considered across our existing portfolios?
- ☐ Are there existing programs or funding streams in which WLTRs can be easily integrated into our portfolios?
- ☐ What are the tenure systems that exist within the different geographies where funds may be allocated?

Follow up questions: Reflective questions to consider in relation to existing funder organization practices

- ☐ How can we continue or improve our support of women-led organizations generally?
- ☐ How are our current funding operations affecting current gender norms and the decision-making power of women in the geographies where we operate?
- ☐ Do we have local staff or existing partners, who can help provide context-specific knowledge on gender and WLTR dynamics?

Conversation-starting questions: For donors to ask organizations focused on women's land tenure rights.

- ☐ What would success look like to you in a funding relationship focused on WLTRs?
- ☐ What are the priority areas you work on that you feel intersect with WLTRs?

FOUNDATIONAL

Step 2: Identifying partners - foundational

1. Objective and overview

Objective: This step sets out the key considerations to identify new initiatives and organizations and extend funding with existing partners.

Key activities: The key donor activities that may fall under this step include:

- Mechanisms for identifying partners (including issuing a call for proposals or reaching out through existing networks)
- Funding delivery modality
- Due diligence and vetting of partners to determine funding eligibility
- Strategic alignment between partners and donors
- Evaluation of proposals

2. Practical tips

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
Short-term		
	Extend relationship-based searches beyond existing and immediate networks	**Create dedicated processes or channels for identifying and expanding the search for potential partners.** Refer to grassroots networks and organizations led by Afro-descendant, Indigenous, local community, and pastoralist women that may be looking for funding opportunities.

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
	Review funding qualifications and due diligence requirements and proactively explore ways to increase accessibility to proposal processes	**Consider the potential of constrained resources of prospective partners for funding applications.** Many organizations have limited staff and institutional capacity dedicated to proposal applications, resulting in structural exclusion and oversight. To address this, donors should: • Ensure communications for funding materials are available in local languages. • Accept proposals in local languages and narrative-style proposals, including oral or non-traditional methods (digital tools can be used to assist in the translation of materials). • Fund or provide dedicated proposal-writing support and training so capacity building isn't left entirely to organizations.
		Medium-term
	Consult with rightsholders for partner identification	**Proactively consult Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community and pastoralist women as part of the identification, vetting and selection process.** This can include reaching out to women's networks or Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community and pastoralist women led organizations directly.
	Verify the proportion of money distributed to women-led organizations	**Consider the introduction or requirement of transparency mechanisms for re-granting organizations to disclose the funding split between individual organizations and the re-granters' own operations.** Since WLTRs and tenure security work are most effective when funded at the grassroots level, donors should verify re-granting structures are not diluting the share of funding and decision-making reaches grassroots Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community and pastoralist women organizations directly.[24]

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Long-term
	Conduct due diligence into tenure-related activities	**Consider how an organization may allocate its funds to support WLTRs and factors that effects its ability to complement its activities:** • Women-led organizations are historically underfunded due to stereotypes related to financial management and education; however, they are critical to fund as they understand more about the interconnected facets regarding women's experience with land tenure.[25] • Men-led organizations may have better reach into spaces impacting WLTRs, depending on local dynamics. • Organizations with mixed-gender leadership may have competing priorities with WLTRs, and involve men more in leadership decision-making.[26]

3. **Assessment questions:** Questions that serve as a starting point for this step

Self-reflection questions: For donors to ask themselves

- ☐ How accessible is my application for organizations working with critically limited resources and capacity?
- ☐ Does the application process unintentionally exclude smaller or less-formalized organizations, including Afro-descendant-led organizations who may face compounded barriers?
- ☐ Are there steps that can be taken to increase the accessibility and inclusion of the application process?
- ☐ How are resources allocated to organizations that I am funding or planning to fund? What portion of the funds will women's groups or organizations receive directly?

Conversation-starting questions: for donors to ask organizations supporting women's land tenure rights initiatives.

- ☐ What language and format would make it easiest for you to submit a proposal or application to us?
- ☐ Understanding that many donors may have strict requirements for financial and administrative paperwork and time requirements, is there paperwork or evidence that you currently have that we can use for this application?

OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL

Step 3: Formalization of funding

1. Objective and overview

Objective: This step sets out the key considerations for the inclusion of WLTRs when establishing a new project or funding cycle with a partner.

Key activities: The key donor activities that may fall under this step include:

- Strategic alignment for the funding allocation with partners
- Management and delivery of funds

2. **Practical tips:**

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Short-term
	Review how knowledge and decision-making power of rightsholder groups is reflected in partnership agreements and contracts	**Ensure terminology and ways of working recognize and incorporate** traditional knowledge and community-defined terms, including decision-making pathways and risk mitigations that protect the defined livelihoods, tenure rights, and priorities of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, pastoralist women, and their communities.[27] **Prioritize, decide, and formalize funding priorities and activities through a co-creative and participatory process.** This includes dialogue led by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women that is responsive to their diverse experiences on access to use, ownership, and decision-making over their communal lands.
	Raise awareness and promote action on WLTRs within your network	**Leverage your knowledge and resources to help encourage WLTRs to be fully respected and protected** within the local and national territory, including with government and private sector actors and other peer donors.[28]
	Ensure the integration of FPIC rights within the funding agreement	**Review resources and receive training on integrating Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) within the donor cycle process and policies.**[29] FPIC is integral for ensuring Indigenous Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women's retain decision-making power over their land, resources, and livelihoods. **The integration of FPIC rights should be reviewed periodically throughout the funded project, at minimum, in line with the mid-term and endline evaluations.**

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Medium-term
	Align funding with standards and frameworks that recognize women as environmental stewards	**Proactively build standards and frameworks with funding priorities and requirements. This should include UN SDGs** (Goal 1: No Poverty; Goal 5: Gender Equality; Goal 15: Life on Land; Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals),[30] Land Rights Standard, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), the Gender Dimensions of the UNGPs, and UNEP's Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders, which help protect and promote Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women as environmental stewards.[31]
	Establish a shared agreement on data ownership with funding recipients	**Manage data protection and co-develop data ownership and access with rightsholders.** Data sensitivity is crucial within WLTRs, as data collected often contains personal identifying information about women, including their location and territory. If managed improperly, this can contribute to dispossession of land and resources and gender-based violence.[32]
	Co-create a grievance and accountability system to give space for voicing concerns	**Ensure the system is accessible, affordable, timely, and legitimate** to Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women. Involve them in developing and provide training on the system in consultation with rightsholders so they can effectively raise concerns about the funding relationship.[33]
	Offer resources and training for organizations to adapt to donor budget tools	**Consider how to adapt existing budgeting models to work with organizations' preferences, tools and ways of working so that reporting bottlenecks are avoided.** Otherwise, consider providing training and support for filling out your budget-related templates.

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Long-term
	Integrate the "right to due process" and compensation mechanisms on tenure security within partner funding agreements	**Review policies and documents to ensure due process rights are reflected appropriately and that rightsholders can easily access and engage with the process.** This ensures compensation measures exist for any current and future impacts that funding may have on Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community and pastoralist women's lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and resources.[34 35] This can and should be included in funding agreements, regardless of whether the organization that you are funding is led by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, or pastoralist people.

3. **Assessment questions:** Questions that serve as a starting point for this step

Self-reflection questions: For donors to ask themselves

- ☐ Are Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women part of the project design process? Do we understand their tenure rights within their CBTRs?

  Follow-up questions:

  - ☐ If yes, in what ways are they involved? If not, why? How can we get proper information on their community tenure system?
  - ☐ How can we further support and extend their involvement?

- ☐ How have we established proper grievance and compensation mechanisms that provide space for voicing concerns and due process?

Conversation-starting questions: for donors to ask organizations supporting women's land tenure rights.

- ☐ What common priorities do our organizations share to most effectively work together to support WLTRs?
- ☐ How is the current tenure system impacting your current projects and work?

  Follow up question:

  - ☐ How can we integrate existing challenges relating to the current tenure system into our project scope?

- ☐ How are women in your focus geographies working on the protection of natural resources and land ownership?
- ☐ What type of resource would be most useful to support you to understand how to work with us as a donor?

OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL

Step 4: Ongoing partnership management

1. **Objective and overview**

Objective: This step provides an overview of how to build a relationship with a strong foundation of trust between donors and partners. This is particularly important as organizations working on WLTRs are often managing sensitive issues and topics, and trust is critical.

Key activities: The key donor activities that may fall under this step include:

- Relationship management between donors and partners
- Informal progress reporting between donors and partners

2. Practical tips

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Short-term
	Build communication channels and incorporate informal touchpoints to build trust and strengthen relationships	**Offer translation apps, software and informal communication methods**, such as WhatsApp or phone calls, to help partners easily access information for decisions relating to the governance, use, and management of their land, territories, and resource rights.[36] **Communicate consistently and with a regular cadence** to show genuine engagement with a partner's work. Recognizing there may be restraints to physical visits, it is critical to establish clear channels of communication at the inception and throughout the funding cycle.
		Medium-term
	Establish inflection points and/or mechanisms to revisit funding priorities throughout a funding period	**Review funding priorities with partner organizations during communication touchpoints.** The complexity of WLTRs, tenure systems, and the influence of local dynamics means that priorities may shift during an active funding cycle so reviewing funding priorities enables the alignment of activities with the current realities of WLTRs. **Establish a space for strategic dialogue and the co-creation of solutions.** This helps address standard power dynamics and disproportionate donor control and determination of resources. **Allow partners to co-analyze the data to demonstrate transparency and ensure mutual accountability.** Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women should have access to and understand the impact of the funding—and how it relates to the funding scope and their own community.

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
	Establish legacy strategies to encourage sustained post-funding relationships	**Treat an exit strategy as a sustainability tool** and use it to address how Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women's organizations will continue their tenure and livelihood work once formal funding ends. **Develop a structured, deliberate, and gradual exit process for partnerships** where strategies diverge to preserve trust as funding flows wind down. This is particularly important given that short grant cycles and small reserves can leave partners financially exposed without donor forward-planning.
	Require gender analysis in funding budgets	**Tailor the gender analysis to the specific tenure systems** in which your partners work. Women's rights protections vary significantly by tenure category.[37] A generic template misses these different barriers and entry points, so contextual tailoring is critical. **Build in structured touchpoints at the outset** so organizations funding WLTRs can adjust budgets as gaps emerge and priorities evolve. **Provide financial management training** as Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community and pastoralist women organizations often lack dedicated capacity-building funds to help them to understand how to manage resources.[38]
	Long Term	
	Explore investing in income generating or livelihood-focused activities	**Build livelihood financing into WLTR grants from the design stage** and raise it as a point of conversation with partners rather than an afterthought.[39] **Prioritize sustainable management** and plan for how livelihoods will be sustained beyond project timelines. **Avoid rigid, activity-based funding structures**, which frequently leave partner organizations unable to provide women the capital needed to launch income-generating activities such as agricultural cooperatives.[40]

3. **Assessment questions:** Questions that serve as a starting point for this step

Self-reflection questions: For donors to ask themselves

- ☐ How can we prioritize face-to-face communications (whether in-person or virtually) according to the preference of the partner?
- ☐ What would help us build trust with this partner? What has worked—in the past or currently—that we can apply to this partnership?
- ☐ How are we learning about the management of and stewardship over land and resources within the local context?

Follow up question:

- ☐ How will we apply these learnings to other projects?

Conservation-starting questions: For donors to ask organizations supporting women's land tenure rights

- ☐ What does a trusted, respectful funding relationship look like from your perspective?
- ☐ How would you like us to check in with you over the course of this partnership?
- ☐ What would make our check-ins or communications with you more useful?
- ☐ Is there anything about our funding relationship that has felt inaccessible or difficult to navigate?

OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL

Step 5: Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, & learning (MEAL)

1. **Objective and overview**

Objective: This step sets out the key considerations for the inclusion of WLTRs throughout the MEAL process.

Key activities: The key donor activities that may fall under this step include:

- Development of key indicators and measurable outcomes for Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist communities and women within WLTRs. Consider qualitative indicators reflecting women's participation in land and resources governance, like voice and vote and decision-making engagement rights within their communities.
- Baseline, mid-term, and final evaluations for projects
- Encouraging peer-to-peer learning between other donors

2. **Practical tips:**

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Short-term
	Ensure MEAL data collection is accessible to Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community and pastoralist women	**Use methods such as oral updates, videos, storytelling, and WhatsApp-based reporting** to help simplify and overcome reporting constraints that are linked to extended and complex reporting. **Allow reporting in the preferred local language** using online translation systems or existing networks to support translation efforts when needed to support realistic local capacity constraints. **Co-define success measures with communities.** For numerical requirements, you can use these discussions to translate community-defined metrics to the requirements you have.
		Medium-term
	Work with organizations to identify and integrate indicators aligned with WLTRs	**Co-create locally-led and defined programmatic evaluation indicators** and steer the conversations to include indicators that align with WLTRs. **Align indicators with a tenure rights framework.** Track progress beyond numerical values (such as hectares) and instead—or in addition—record the changes that women have experienced and in terms of women's meaningful role in community governance. **Include gender-empowerment indicators**, such as women's leadership and how their voices and views are included in community decision-making about access, use, and ownership over land and resources, inheritance laws, availability and accessibility to dispute resolution mechanisms, and leadership within governance systems.

Guiding principles	Tip	Description
		Long-term
	Showcase learnings and demonstrate best practices of funding WLTRs for donor-to-donor learning	**Plan awareness-raising and evidence sharing activities** internally, across the donor organization, and with relevant external donors, governments, and other key stakeholders to build the case on the importance of funding WLTRs and encouraging the participation of decision-making for women in these spaces.
	Adapt reporting requirements to fit partner's capabilities	**Where standardized templates exist, co-design adapted versions with partners that capture these values.** Don't just simplifying an existing template. This ensures the templates measure what matters to the organization, rather than what is administratively convenient for the donor.
	Engage in community monitoring techniques for data collection.[41]	**Use MEAL activities to build capacity among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, local community, and pastoralist women.** They often reach spaces and women community members that men-led data collection cannot, which can further enrich data collection for the project and enable ongoing WLTR monitoring.

3. **Assessment questions:** Questions that serve as a starting point for this step.

Self-reflection questions: For donors to ask themselves

- ☐ Do our existing monitoring and evaluation requirements function mainly as a compliance exercise, or do they also create space for genuine reflection and strategic learning for the organizations we fund?
- ☐ Do we rely solely on standardized quantitative indicators, or do we also value qualitative evidence of how rightsholders themselves describe changes in control, voice or tenure security?

Conversation-starting questions: For donors to ask organizations supporting women's land tenure rights.

- ☐ How are you currently tracking or understanding the impact of your work on WLTRs, including formal and informal approaches?
- ☐ When you have previously done monitoring and evaluation activities, what has worked best for your organization?
- ☐ Is there a difference between how you'd like to communicate progress informally versus what you're required to report formally?
- ☐ How has implementation gone so far, and what adjustments have been needed to respond to challenges encountered along the way? (*Also relevant to ask during implementation, not only at this phase)*

Conclusion

Equitable, accountable, and community-led funding is the mechanism for advancing women's land and territorial rights through which every principle in this protocol is either actioned or remains a statement of intent. The evidence reviewed throughout is consistent on this point: the barriers that Afro-descendant, Indigenous, pastoralist, and local community women face in accessing funding for their land tenure rights are well-documented, yet largely unaddressed in practice and implementation.

From the steps outlined in the protocol, a few reflections from this protocol are worth restating:

- Funders and donors do not need to arrive at this work from the same perspective; climate, biodiversity, human rights, or economic development are each a legitimate and sufficient entry point, and funders should not disengage because their own rationale is not the most visibly named in a given section.
- Ambition should not come at the cost of what is realistically implementable within a donor's real constraints. A standard that nobody can act on becomes a dead end for all parties, not a step forward.
- The responsibility this protocol describes does not rest with any single funder. It is distributed across the funding and donor ecosystems as a whole, in which bilateral, philanthropic, multilateral, and regranting actors each hold different levers, and the progress of WLTRs funding depends on more of them being pulled together and working collaboratively with organizations focused on WLTRs.

Long-term engagement with WLTRs and community-based and women's organizations asks for donors to understand the long-term gender equality pace of change that will not always match a grant cycle, willingness to revisit funding practices as trust and evidence accrue, and finally, genuine reciprocity in a relationship that has too often been one-directional. This is an iterative guidance first

and foremost, and it will continue to be shaped by the donors and women's rights organizations that it is written for and with.

Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Rightsholder groups	
Afro-descendant Peoples	"The term "Afro-descendant Peoples" refers to individuals, groups of individuals or people descended from African persons—most commonly, but not solely, in the context of post-slavery populations in Central and South America—who traditionally and primarily hold resource rights at the community level. The UN human rights system has elaborated on the rights of Afro-descendant Peoples through a dedicated Working Group on Persons of African Descent, among other processes."[42]
Grassroots communities	"Grassroots organizations are primarily made up of civilians advocating change at local, national, or international levels. They are associated with bottom-up decision making, encouraging community members to contribute by taking responsibility and action for their community."[43]
Indigenous Peoples[44]	"Peoples who identify themselves as "Indigenous"; Tribal peoples whose social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations; Traditional peoples not necessarily called Indigenous or tribal, but who share the same characteristics of social, cultural, and economic conditions that distinguish them from other sections of the national community, whose status is regulated wholly or partially; They have their own customs or traditions, and whose livelihoods are closely connected to ecosystems and their goods and services. Indigenous Peoples have a distinct set of rights linked to their social, political, and economic situation as a result of their ancestry and stewardship of lands and resources vital to their well-being."[45]
Local communities	"There is no formal definition of 'local communities' under international law, and social movements of local communities are often regionally specific and diverse. Further guidance on how this term is understood and expressed can be found in regional processes, such as the recent Criteria to Identify and Protect Local Communities developed in Latin America, and in the diverse regional and national experiences shared within the Report of the Expert Group Meeting of Local Community Representatives within the Context of Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNEP/CBD/WG8J/7/8/Add.1)."[46]

TERM	DEFINITION
Men-led organization[47]	An organization governed and led by men, with men holding the majority of leadership and decision-making positions.
Mixed organization[48]	An organization in which leadership and decision-making positions are shared between women and men.
Pastoralist	Pastoralists are people whose livelihoods mainly rely on domesticated and semi-domesticated animals that graze on rangelands.[49] While not all pastoralists are indigenous, many nomadic, semi-nomadic, and transhumant herding communities are recognized internationally as mobile Indigenous Peoples whose traditional livelihoods, mobility, and customary resource management reflect deep and long-standing ecological stewardship of their ancestral rangelands.[50]
Peasant people	"A peasant is any person who engages or who seeks to engage alone, or in association with others or as a community, in small-scale agricultural production for subsistence and/or for the market, and who relies significantly, though not necessarily exclusively, on family or household labor and other non-monetized ways of organizing labor, and who has a special dependency on and attachment to the land."[51]
Rural women	"Rural women are women whose residence falls within areas that national offices classify as rural, a classification which according to the UN Statistics Division, has no agreed upon definition that applies uniformly across countries.[52] CEDAW Article 14(1) obligates State Parties to account for the specific difficulties rural women encounter and the essential part they play in sustaining their families economically, including through unpaid and non-monetized labor" despite their rights and needs remaining insufficiently addressed or ignored in laws, national and local policies."[53][54]
Women farmers	"Women farmers include all those working in agrifood systems: farmers, livestock keepers, fishers, beekeepers, processors, traders, and many others. They are present across all segments of value chains, playing a vital role in food production while also bearing a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work."[55]
Women-led organization[56]	An organization governed and led by women, with women holding a defined minimum share of leadership and decision-making positions.
Tenure systems and subsequent concepts	
Claim	"An assertion of tenure to land that may or may not yet carry formal legal recognition, arising from occupation, customary practice, or use, whether or not it has been documented or registered by the state."[57]

TERM	DEFINITION
Collective tenure	"Collective tenure rights refer to tenure rights that are held by a group rather than an individual and are often linked to an area of commons collectively used and managed. Collectively managed commons are essential to cultural identity and well-being. They are crucial for indigenous peoples and local communities, including farmers, fishers, pastoralists, the landless and the most vulnerable, food insecure and marginalized people."[58]
Communal tenure	"One of the forms of tenure formally recognized under the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT)[59], refers to a system in which land or resources is held and governed collectively by a defined community, with use and access rules set by that community rather than individual title."[60]
Community-based tenure regimes (CBTRs)	"A distinguishable set of national, state-issued laws and regulations governing all situations under which the right to own or manage terrestrial natural resources is held at the community level."[61]
Customary rights	"Customary rights to lands and resources refers to patterns of long-standing community land and resource usage in accordance with Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' customary laws, values, customs, and traditions, including seasonal or cyclical use, rather than formal legal title to land and resources issued by the State."[62]
Freehold	"Under freehold land tenure, absolute ownership rights are envisaged, implying the right to own, control, manage, use, and dispose of property. Such land rights, while being held in perpetuity, may however be sequestered through State intervention when land is targeted for expropriation in the case of eminent public interest (For example, construction of roads, expansion of urban areas, etc.). Freehold tenure is a traditionally western concept of individual property ownership."[63]
Land tenure	"Land tenure is central to sustainable natural resource management, and can be defined as the way land is held or owned by individuals and groups, or the set of relationships legally or customarily defined amongst people with respect to land."[64]
Leasehold	"Under leasehold land tenure, ownership of land is based on the notion of rentals for long periods. Land belonging to one entity - either the State or an individual - is, by contractual agreement, leased to another entity. Such leases can be long or short."[65]
Legal pluralism	"The coexistence and interaction of multiple legal orders within a social setting or domain of social life. This concept recognizes that statutory and customary tenure systems may exist side by side or be intertwined as a complex mix, a situation often found in areas used by pastoralists."[66]

TERM	DEFINITION
Matrilocal	"Located at or centered around the residence of the wife's family or people."[67]
Matrimonial property	"Property jointly owned by the spouses following their marriage. The content of this property will depend on the marital property regime applying to the marriage. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with 'matrimonial property.' In legislation, marital property can be referred to using the umbrella terms 'common,' 'community' or 'joint' property or the 'joint estate.'"[68]
Matrilineal	"The matrilineal descent system is a kinship system in which inheritance is traced through mothers and their blood relatives."[69]
Patrilineal	"The matrilineal descent system is a kinship system in which inheritance is traced through fathers and their blood relatives."[70]
Right	"A tenure claim that has gained legal or institutional recognition as legitimate, whether formally recorded or not, and which the state is obligated to identify, respect, protect against infringement, and facilitate the enjoyment of."[71]
Statutory tenure	"The statutory/conventional system normally includes private freehold and leasehold rights, as well as public or State land that is often leased out to private concerns."[72]
Tenure security	"Security of tenure is a central component of the right to adequate housing. Any initiative related to housing, whether in the context of urban renewal, land management or other development-related projects, or in dealing with recovery after conflicts or disasters, will inevitably have tenure security implications. The lack of security of tenure—in law and practice—makes protection against forced eviction very difficult. This leaves the most vulnerable, such as inhabitants of informal settlements, at risk of a range of human rights violations."[73]

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