



# Women's Land Rights **Learning Journey**

Myanmar 4th- 11th November 2018

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# Background



*Participants reviewing the draft womens' land rights strategy. Photo Courtesy*

Since time immemorial, women have nourished, cared for and defended their land and community. They have worked the soil to grow food for themselves and their families. They have built businesses and market stalls, they have looked out at the land, rivers and all that they hold and mapped their future and those of the coming generations. Yet all too often, women's rights to land have been suppressed and women leaders at the forefront of local, national and global land rights struggles have been rendered invisible.

Globally, there is increased acknowledgement of the importance of women's land rights. Women's land rights are now embedded into the Sustainable Development Goals and in many other global and regional frameworks such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, (VGGTs) among others. The increased recognition of the importance of women's land rights has pushed the conversation further; not only to the rights that women hold but the extent to which these rights are secured in different tenure systems. This, especially because, even where women's land rights are legally recognised, they are limited

by social factors and low enforcement.

Acknowledging the need to harmonize the struggles for land justice and gender justice, Oxfam and its partners came together on 4th -11th November 2018 for a Women's Land Rights Learning Journey in Yangon, Myanmar. Twenty-eight participants from 15 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia joined a journey to learn, share experience, inspire one another and reaffirm the need to strengthen our work on securing women's land rights. The event, a series within Oxfam's "Land Learning Journey", provided a great opportunity to show resilience, commitment, solidarity and boldness in addressing the struggles of women in accessing and controlling land and land-based resources

# Highlights of the Women's Land Rights Learning Journey



*A participant from Kachin State making a presentation during the field visit. Photo by: Eileen Wakesho*

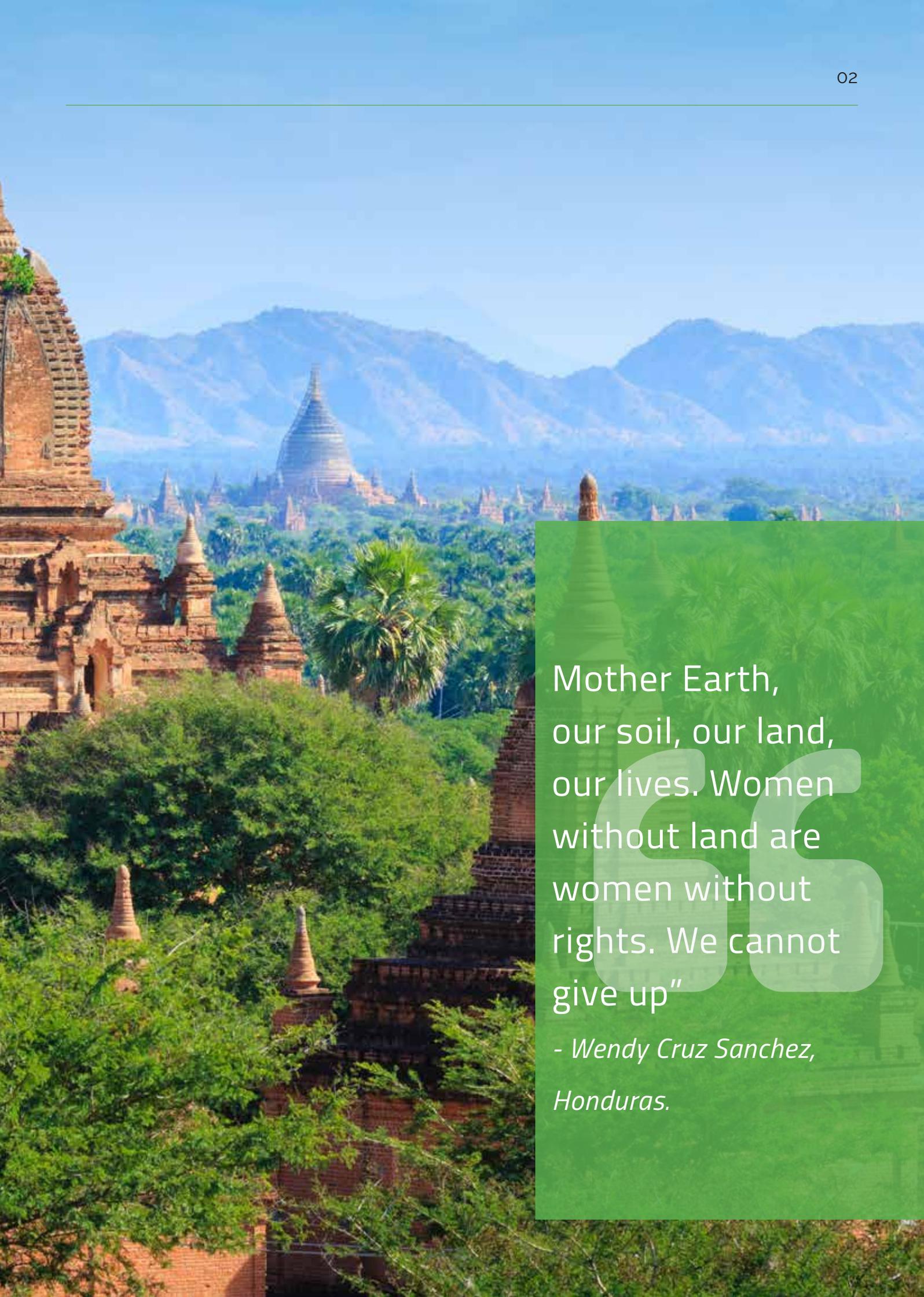
On day one of the learning Journey, participants from 15 countries shared presentations on their inspiring work while highlighting the challenges that they face. Although the speakers spanned different continents and languages, what unfolded was the need for more solidarity inspired by common struggles.

The following day, participants provided a review of Oxfam's draft women's land rights strategy. The internal strategy aims to help Oxfam and its partners make visible, and tackle, gender-based discrimination to ensure that all our work on rights to land and natural resources contributes to addressing the inequalities between women and men when it comes to their access and control of land. Participants gave detailed and thoughtful feedback on how Oxfam strategically approaches women's land rights, highlighting the need for tools and approaches that balance the benefits of global perspectives and collective learnings, with ensuring that this work is always locally and context specific.

The third day of the Learning Journey was devoted to a unique public event co-organized by Oxfam in Myanmar and

the INGO Trocaire. The event brought together over 40 local and international CSOs, women leaders and activists from Myanmar to exchange, learn and share with the learning journey participants. The public event was the first of its kind and served to open discussion on a 'not so common topic' of discussion in the Myanmar context on women's land rights. Community leaders and civil society organisations in Myanmar shared their experiences on securing women's land rights in a context of weak law enforcement and widespread land confiscation for agriculture, mining and other purposes. Rich conversations also took place on legal and para-legal strategies to safeguard women's rights, and how to create strong social movements.

A field visit to Kachin was also a great exposure to understand more about Oxfam in Myanmar interventions around land rights. A photo voice exhibition and presentation from local communities from 8 villages was an inspiring activity for international participants to learn about local land issues and strategies for protecting land rights.



Mother Earth,  
our soil, our land,  
our lives. Women  
without land are  
women without  
rights. We cannot  
give up"

- *Wendy Cruz Sanchez,  
Honduras.*

# Strategic priorities

## A set of strategic priorities were agreed:

1. The quest to secure women's land and property rights is a struggle across all continents; Latin America, Africa and Asia
2. Sexual and Gender-based violence is being used as a tool to silence women land and environmental defenders, and we need clear strategies to address this.
3. Women and their communities must negotiate and set rules of engagement for investments in the communities. Women need an equal seat in negotiations and need access to much more rigorous information about companies and investors.
4. There is need to recognise women's land rights within customary and indigenous land tenure systems, but also to recognise protections for women's rights that these systems can provide
5. Shrinking of civic space continues to undermine efforts to secure women's land rights in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Countries reported criminalization of previously permitted activities, bans on organisations funded by foreign sources, branding of civil society organisations as foreign agents and in extreme cases, the closing of civil society organisations.
6. In Africa, Latin America and Asia, deeply rooted patriarchy, discrimination and stereotypes impede women from having access to and control of their land.
7. While the quest to secure women's land rights across the world is not easy, there are huge gains to be made in coming together to share tools, experiences, learnings, strategies and create a collective agenda for action in support of women's land rights.



Participants engaging during the public event on womens' land rights in Yangon, Myanmar. Photo Courtesy

# Recommendations

**In light of the above observations made, participants recommended that:**

1. Oxfam and its partners must prioritise creating spaces and platforms for women to share their lived experiences and ensure that these are a driving force behind all our women's land rights work.
2. Acknowledging the similarities in the struggles to secure women's land rights in Africa, Latin America and Asia, there is a need to strengthen solidarity across continents and tap into global pressure to demand accountability and inclusivity in land governance.
3. In addressing shrinking civic spaces and its implications for securing women's land rights, there is need to address the demobilisation happening among CSOs that weaken the joint strength of CSOs, ensure that our interventions are aligned to the needs and aspirations of the women and communities we work with.
4. Efforts to secure women's land rights must be cognisant of different tenure regimes and local contexts. Communal/ customary land rights and individual land rights may appear competing, but none is superior to the other. The

- focus should instead be ensuring that women's land rights are secure in all tenure systems.
5. Efforts to secure women's land rights require a multifaceted approach at all levels.

# Conclusion

Securing women's land and natural resource rights is about dismantling gender inequalities that reinforce existing inequality in land and natural resource governance and management. The Land Learning Series is a critical space for continuous learning and sharing, strengthening solidarity across continents and sustaining the momentum to continuously challenge the enablers of gender inequality in land and property ownership.



**Website:**

[www.indepth.oxfam.org.uk/land-rights](http://www.indepth.oxfam.org.uk/land-rights)