



# Gender equality in Burundi: Why does support not extend to women's right to inherit land?

By Alain Ndikumana

## Introduction

With 27,834 km<sup>2</sup> of surface area and a population of 10.5 million, Burundi's population density is seven times that of Tanzania and second only to Rwanda's on the African mainland (World Bank, 2014). Its population grows at an annual rate of 2.4%, and more than 90% of the population lives primarily on agriculture.

These factors make land a vital and scarce resource in Burundi, leading to frequent conflicts and particular complications in questions of inheritance (Kazoviyo & Gahungu, 2011). The situation is even more problematic for women and girls, who traditionally inherit nothing from their fathers. In Burundi, women's right to inherit land faces the triple barriers of demography, tradition, and the law.

Promoting gender equality and especially women's right to inherit land is a major focus of women's-rights activists. Although Burundi has signed and incorporated in its constitution most international instruments promoting gender equality, women's succession rights do not yet have full legal protection. Since 2004, government legislation on women's inheritance laws awaits consideration by the National Assembly. "But problems related to the scarcity of land and overpopulation seem to veil the face of leaders who end up believing that a law on female succession would be a problem rather than a solution" (Kazoviyo & Gahungu, 2011, p. 1).

Even if the proposed law is passed, evidence suggests that gender inequality in access to and control over land will remain a problem. Burundi's legislation is based on international agreements and laws enacted by the government. However, there are shortcomings in the regulation of natural resources and the management of land because Burundi has no national land code. In the absence of national texts, local customary rules based on a patriarchal system govern family land and women's access to and inheritance of land. This system recognizes women as usufructuaries (i.e. entitled to use land that belongs to another) but not as heirs. Such social norms are so entrenched among the local population that most women in rural communities view ownership of material assets, such as land, as being exclusive to men (Carpano, 2011). Without a concerted education effort and diligent implementation of new land laws, many women may not know their legal rights, implementation may be gender-biased, and law enforcement may be grossly inadequate or prejudiced against women. In Kenya, for example, laws allow women to own land, yet nearly all land is registered in the names of male elders (Odeny, 2013).

A project in Rwanda, implemented by the Rwanda Initiative for Sustainable Development, showed the effectiveness of awareness-raising activities at public and government levels regarding land rights and land registration. Rwanda's Organic Land Law, which governs land management and administration, states that "women, married or not, should not be excluded from the process of land access, land acquisition and land control, and female descendants should not be excluded from the process of family land inheritance" (Republic of Rwanda, 2004). Both men and women were informed about their rights under the law and about the benefits of registration in terms of security of rights and livelihoods (Carpano, 2011). The National Land Centre estimates that between 2008 and June 2010, 1 million out of 8 million parcels of land in the country had been registered.

Afrobarometer's first survey in Burundi, in 2012, provides insights regarding public attitudes toward gender equality. Findings show that majorities of Burundians support women's rights in general but reject land inheritance by women. This paper examines factors that might contribute to these apparently contradictory views and offers recommendations on how to promote dialogue, sensitization, partnerships, and capacity development in support of women's land rights in Burundi.



## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 adults.

The Afrobarometer team in Burundi, led by the Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui au Développement des Initiatives Démocratiques (GRADIS), interviewed 1,200 adult Burundians in November-December 2012. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

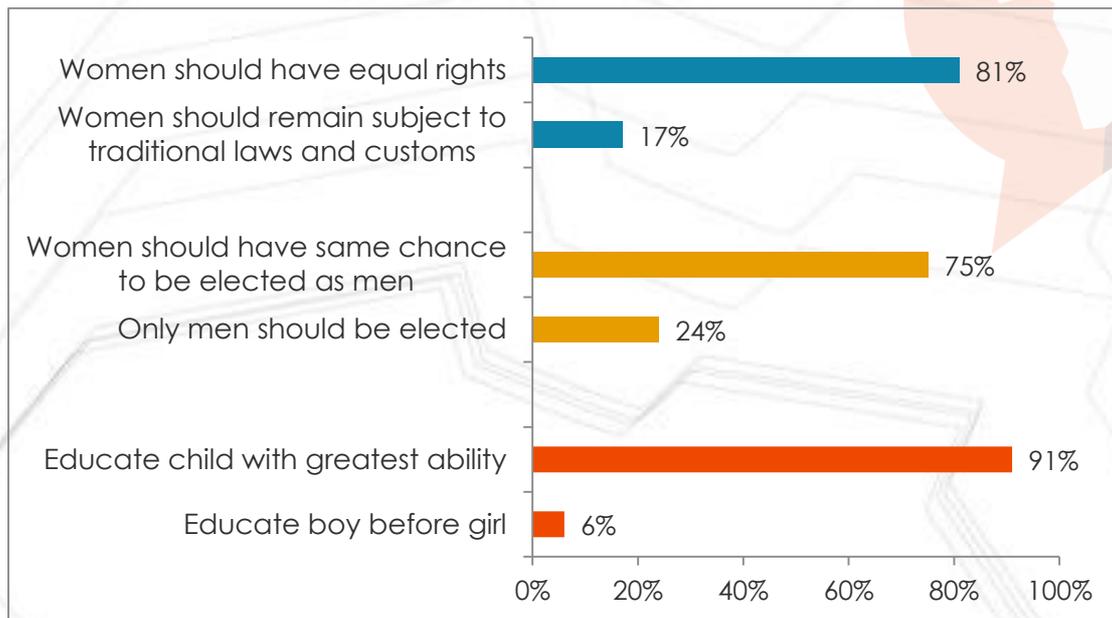
## Support for women's rights in general

On a variety of indicators related to gender, most Burundians express support for women's equality and say that women are "never" or "rarely" treated unequally.

Eight of 10 respondents (81%) say that women should have the same rights as men, rather than be subject to traditional laws and customs, while three-quarters (75%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office (Figure 1). Moreover, nine of 10 (91%) say that if families with limited financial resources have to choose which children to send to school, that choice should be based on the children's abilities rather than their gender.

As Figure 2 shows, large majorities say that women and men are generally treated equally by Burundian institutions. More than seven of 10 respondents say that women are "never" or "rarely" treated unequally by traditional leaders, police and courts, and employers.

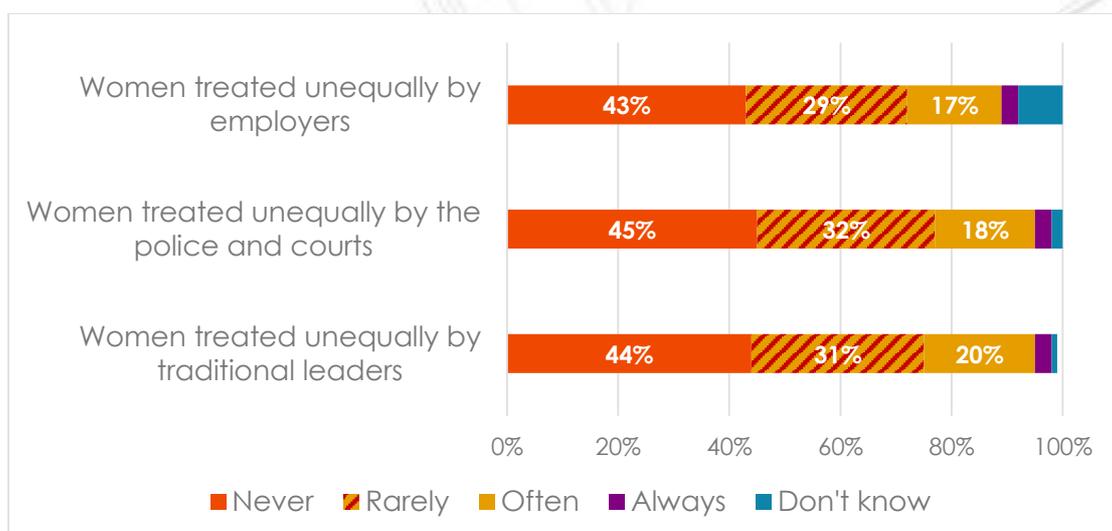
**Figure 1: Support for women's equality** | Burundi | 2012



**Respondents were asked:** (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: In our country, women should have equal rights and receive the same treatment as men do.  
 Statement 2: Women have always been subject to traditional laws and customs, and should remain so.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.  
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: If funds for schooling are limited, a boy should always receive an education in school before a girl.  
 Statement 2: If funds for schooling are limited, a family should send the child with the greatest ability to learn.

**Figure 2: Perceptions of whether women are treated equally** | Burundi | 2012

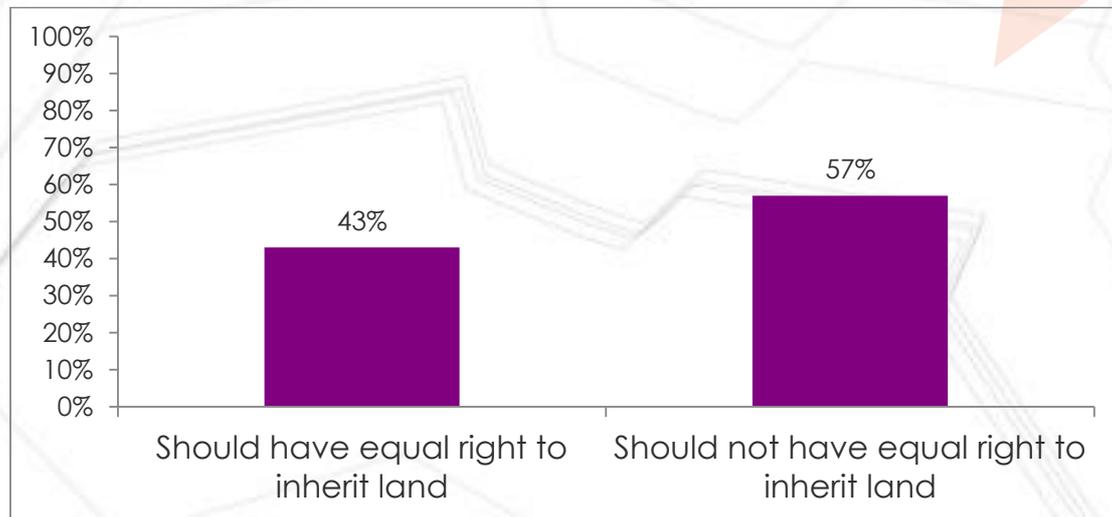


**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often, in this country: Are women treated unequally by employers? Are women treated unequally by the police and courts? Are women treated unequally by traditional leaders?

## Support for women's right to inherit land

Despite support for women's equality in general, a majority (57%) of Burundians say girls and women should not have the same right as their brothers to inherit their family's land (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Perceptions of women's right to inherit land | Burundi | 2012**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: Girls and women should have the same right as their brothers to inherit their family's land.

Statement 2: In our country, girls and women should not have the same right as their brothers to inherit their family's land.

(% who "agree" or "agree strongly")

## Socio-demographic characteristics of opponents to women's land inheritance

In order to better understand opposition to women's right to inherit land, a descriptive analysis highlights associations between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and views on women's land inheritance. Variables examined are:

- Lived poverty: The Lived Poverty Index is calculated as the average of responses to five questions: In the past year, how often, if ever, did you or anyone in your family go without: (1) enough food to eat? (2) enough clean water for home use? (3) medicine or medical treatment? (4) enough fuel to cook food? (5) cash income? Averages were scaled as "No or very low lived poverty," "Moderate lived poverty," and "Severe lived poverty" ( $\alpha=0.649$ , Eigen value=2.166, % of variance=43.32).
- Education level
- Age
- Area of residence (urban vs. rural)
- Gender
- Access to information via radio
- Access to information via other methods, which combines responses to three questions: How often do you get news from the following sources: (1) TV? (2) Newspapers? (4) the Internet? ( $\alpha=0.679$ , Eigen value=2.142, % of variance explained =53.54).

The analysis shows a small but statistically significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) between opposition to women's right to inherit land and all variables except access to information via radio (Table 1). Compared to the 57% in the general population, those who reject women's right to inherit land are slightly more likely to be found amongst those who live in severe poverty (62%), have attended only primary school (62%), are more than 50 years old (59%), live in rural areas (59%), are male (67%) and "never" or "rarely" have access to information via TV, newspapers, and the Internet (58%).

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics and opposition to women's right to inherit land | Burundi | 2012**

		<b>Opposed to women's land inheritance (%)</b>
Lived Poverty Index*	No or very low poverty	53
	Moderate poverty	52
	Severe poverty	62
Education*	No formal education	54
	Primary school	62
	Secondary school	47
	Post-secondary	37
Age*	Youth (18-35)	54
	Adult (36-50)	58
	Elder (51+)	59
Residence*	Urban	45
	Rural	59
Gender*	Male	67
	Female	47
Access to information via radio	Never	53
	Rarely	61
	Often	53
	Always	59
Access to information via other methods*	Never or rarely	58
	Often	44
	Always	35
Total		57

## Determinants of opposition to women's right to inherit land

In order to highlight possible determinants of opposition to women's right to inherit land, a logistic regression allows us to examine whether the independent variables of poverty, education level, age, area of residence, gender, access to information via radio, and access to information via other methods predict the probability that a person will support or oppose this right.

As shown in Table 2, Model 1 has little predictive power due to correlations among some of the variables. When strongly correlated variables are removed (Model 2), as shown in Table 3, findings indicate that poverty, gender, and urban vs. rural residence predict the probability of support or opposition to women's right to inherit land.

Poverty has a small negative effect on the probability of supporting women's right: The poor are 17% more likely than the wealthy to reject women's right to inherit land. Gender has a stronger negative effect: Men are 57% less likely than women to support women's right to inherit land. Urban residence has the strongest influence: Urban residents are 1.6 times as likely as rural residents to support women's right to inherit land.

**Table 1: Logistic regression Model 1**

	Coefficient (B)	Standard error	Wald statistic	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
						Lower	Upper
Information access via other technologies (TV, newspaper, Internet)	.134	.107	1.550	.213	1.143	.926	1.410
Lived Poverty Index	-.159	.070	5.136	.023	.853	.743	.979
Education level	.068	.095	.509	.476	1.070	.888	1.290
Information access via radio	-.043	.054	.651	.420	.958	.862	1.064
Age	-.087	.083	1.120	.290	.916	.779	1.077
Gender (1)	.861	.127	45.682	.000	2.365	1.842	3.035
Area of residence (1)	-.345	.179	3.738	.053	.708	.499	1.005
Constant	-.429	.502	.729	.393	.651		

**Table 3: Logistic regression Model 2**

	Coefficient (B)	Standard error	Wald statistic	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
						Lower	Upper
Lived Poverty Index	-.190	.087	4.738	.029	.827	.697	.981
Area of residence (1)	.490	.161	9.281	.002	1.633	1.191	2.238
Gender (1)	-.855	.121	49.598	.000	.425	.335	.539
Constant	.502	.226	4.906	.027	1.651		

Note:  $R^2=.056$  (Cox & Snell); .075 (Nagerlkerke); Model (3) Chi-square=68.001;  $p=.000$

Other potential factors worth exploring in future research include where in Burundi respondents live and with which religion they are affiliated. As shown in Table 4, provinces vary widely in the proportions of residents who oppose women's right to inherit land, ranging from a high of 77% in Muramvya to a low of 22% in Cibitoke. Some of Burundi's most populous – and most densely populated – provinces are

among those with the highest degrees of opposition, including Gitega, Kayanza, Ngozi, rural Bujumbura, and Bururi, suggesting a possible link between overpopulation and views on women's inheritance of land.

**Table 4: Opposition to women's right to inherit land | by province | Burundi | 2012**

Province or region	Opposed to women's right to inherit land	% of the population
Muramvya	77%	3.6%
Gitega	75%	9.0%
Cankuzo	74%	3.0%
Kayanza	72%	7.3%
Mwaro	71%	3.2%
Ngozi	64%	8.2%
Karusi	62%	5.4%
Bujumbura (rural)	60%	6.9%
Bururi	58%	7.1%
Rutana	57%	4.1%
Ruyigi	54%	5.0%
Makamba	52%	5.4%
Muyinga	46%	7.9%
Bujumbura Mairie	45%	6.2%
Bubanza	42%	4.2%
Kirundo	42%	7.7%
Cibitoke	22%	5.7%

Table 5 suggests that the religious affiliation of respondents might also influence whether they support the right of women to inherit land. Among Catholics, who make up 58% of Burundi's population, 62% oppose women's right to inherit land, compared to 37% of Muslims and less than 50% of several other Protestant denominations. One possible explanation might be the reinforcement of patriarchal values by some religious leaders (Tunc, 1989; Aynard, 1990; Buuma, 2012).

**Table 5: Opposition to women's right to inherit land | by religion | Burundi | 2012**

Religion of respondent	Opposed to women's land inheritance	% of the population
Roman Catholic	62%	58.4%
Pentecostal	49%	16.2%
Other Christian	45%	5.2%
Methodist	48%	4.1%
Anglican	45%	3.4%
Muslim	37%	3.2%
Evangelical	58%	1.6%
Seventh Day Adventist	43%	1.9%
Church of Christ	58%	1.0%

## Conclusion and recommendations

While Burundians support gender equality in general, only a minority favour women's right to inherit land. Survey data show that opposition to this right is stronger among men, poor people, rural residents, older citizens, less educated people, and those with little or no access to information via TV, newspapers, and the Internet. Further analysis reveals that poverty, rural residence, and male gender have a significant influence on the probability of opposing women's right to inherit land.

Based on these findings, the author recommends:

1. Public awareness campaigns in support of women's right to inherit land, specifically targeting radio messages to men and poor and rural populations.
2. Sensitization of traditional and community leaders on how to implement legal texts related to inheritance rights.
3. Sensitization encouraging religious leaders to speak out in support of equal access to land for women and men.
4. Sensitization of women on how best to exercise their rights.
5. Promotion of birth control in order to reduce demographic pressures in Burundi.

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To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

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