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## **Title: Land Ownership, and Women in the Agribusiness Sector in Mali: The Agricultural Orientation Law and its Implications for Women**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Agriculture plays a vital role in the economic development as well as food security in Mali. Women farmers constitute one vital human resource in the country's agriculture. However, inequalities between men and women persist. Thus, women control over their resource and access to land is challenging. Women are often excluded from the distribution of property rights, which are crucial for human security and development. The critical importance of closing gender gaps which are not only contrary to the realization of women's rights, but also an obstacle to poverty reduction is widely recognized. It was in this context that Mali's government has embarked upon policy initiatives. One of them was the Agricultural Orientation Law (AOL). It aimed to address problems in agriculture to ensure that the sector makes its relevant contribution to the country's development agenda. More importantly, AOL also promotes women empowerment in many of its articles, the most crucial of which is article 83 which grants special attention to women, young people and vulnerable groups land ownership in state managed areas. Hence this article reiterates the importance of women in agriculture and then analyses the AOL and its implication for women in the area of land ownership. Moreover, this study examines the socioeconomic challenges that women in the agribusiness sector have faced. This paper also analyzes what approaches are needed to pave the ground for the implementation of the AOL by, focusing on how this law has framed the conditions of women's access to agricultural resources, particularly about their land ownership in Mali. Qualitative and quantitative research methods, questionnaires and in-depth interviews were carried out in Mali with national and local authorities to achieve that goal.

**Keyword:** Agribusiness, AOL, Entrepreneurs, Mali, Women.

### **Introduction**

In recent years agriculture has changed into agribusiness. It has become a large and complex system that reaches far beyond the farm to include all those involved in bringing food and fiber to consumers (Davis and Goldberg, 1957). Thus, it includes all the actors in the agricultural value chain from producers (farmers), to processors, distributors, and marketers (entrepreneurs). Therefore, women in Mali are engaged not only in food production but also in its processing and marketing in both rural and urban areas. For this reason, women in the agricultural sector can be called agribusiness women.

According to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and (Albu et al. 2005), smallholder farmers' livelihoods depend on much more than food production. Consequently, Mali's government has recently focused on not only working with farmers to improve agricultural productivity but also broadening their activities to include processing and marketing, which all covered the agribusiness sector. (GRET, 2005)

With 80 percent of its population engaged in agricultural activities, the majority (78%) of Malian women work in that sector, which is considered as the cornerstone of the country's economy and holds great potential for driving economic growth. Hence, women, farmers make essential contributions to agricultural production and rural enterprises across Mali.

However, even though they are a crucial resource in the sector, they face constraints that reduce their productivity. Among the various challenges that women in the agribusiness sector face, land ownership is one of the most important.

Moreover, in Mali, agribusiness women often overlap with women entrepreneurs. Since women entrepreneurs are those women who perform any agricultural activities outside the household, which allow them to make sufficient profits to sustain their agricultural enterprises. These activities are different from subsistence agriculture, but generally involve small-scale activities, through little capital and technology in developing countries.

Therefore, women make up the majority 51.7 % of the Malian population. It is to be noted that most of them live in rural areas as mentioned previously. Active employed women make up 43.8% of the total female population, of which the majority work in the agricultural sector, which includes crop production, its processing, and marketing as well. Thus, women are present in all socio-economic and cultural activities in both rural and urban areas. (World Bank 2018)

Therefore, they are two types of agribusiness women entrepreneurs, depending on whether they work in the formal or informal sector. The latter includes the majority of women: a survey conducted by USAID in the district of Bamako estimated that agribusiness women entrepreneurs nearly make up 70 % of the population. In contrast, agribusiness women in the formal sector are, therefore few in number and pioneers of recent times. They are found mostly among former public servants, young graduates, and professionals. They generally practice liberal professions (doctors, pharmacists, accountants, notaries, lawyers), provide services, or have sales outlets. Therefore, the author uses the term "women in agribusiness," as it is hard to differentiate them from women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, Africa's developing economies are heavily reliant on agricultural production for the sake of employment, foreign trade as well as food security (Moyo, 1999 et al). Efforts to eradicate poverty and mitigate food insecurity have centered on improving the lives of the marginalized rural peasant farmers. Such efforts require the availability of land, labor, and capital to transform agriculture that is necessary for rural development. In this regard, Mali is not an exception since agriculture is one of the most important sectors in Mali with 80% of its population engaged in that sector (USAID 2018). Thus, how to increase agricultural production is one of the most vital development agendas for Mali.

Hence, Women farmers in Mali constitute one vital human resource in the country's agriculture. They make essential contributions to agriculture and rural enterprises across Mali. However, the sector is still underperforming because women face constraints that reduce their productivity (Djire, et al. 2012). Women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies that men do not. Their activities typically include producing crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agriculture or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members, and maintaining their homes. However, many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" (Beaugard 2009) in national accounts, but they are essential to the well-being of rural households.

While men in Mali are engaged in more lucrative sectors of the economy, such as state employment, private enterprises and long trade distance, productive employment such as commerce, office works), and proving for the family as well. They are also the key decision-makers within the household. Thus, men make the rules, control, and manage household wealth, decide how to use family land, and make decisions about their families' subsistence. In this context, Mali's government has embarked upon a policy and institutional initiatives. One of them is the Agricultural Orientation Law (AOL), which aims to reform the agricultural domain to ensure that the sector makes more contribution to the country's development agenda.

Therefore, this article examines what social and economic preconditions are needed for Mali's society to implement the AOL fully. Based on the author's fieldwork, this study surveys the socioeconomic challenges women in the agribusiness sector in rural areas have faced.

Accordingly, the study first overviews women in agriculture and then analyzes the content of the Agricultural Orientation Law and its implication for women in the area of land ownership. Furthermore, this article delineates what policies are needed to pave the ground for the implementation of the AOL.

Therefore, some scholars have documented productivity differentials between male and female farmers, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Tinker and Summerfiels (1999b), as well as Razavi (2003), argued that women are often discriminated against in owning property rights, though these rights are crucial for their human security and development. In theory, women have the right to land, but in practice, they are often deprived of them.

In the same perspective, Boserup (2007) argued that inequitable gender relations and women's insecure rights to land exclude them from participation in decision making over land and natural resource use. Furthermore, she said that in many parts of the world, these productivity differentials stem from women's insecure property rights to land, which exacerbate inefficiencies created by imperfect land markets. To support this argument, Jane and Summerfield also claimed that tenure laws are not clear about women's rights. They are often disadvantaged in both statutory and customary land tenure systems resulting in less property and less access to the rights to land and other natural resources. Even where existing legislation protects women's property rights, lack of legal knowledge of their rights and poor implementation may limit women's ability to exercise these rights (Djire, et al.2012).

Accordingly, in Mali the principle of state ownership of land and other vital natural resources continues to this day as one of the fundamental legal foundations of Malian land law. However, as the USAID (2010) found, women cannot traditionally own land in Mali. They are permitted to cultivate or use land temporarily. But land can be taken away from them at any time, thus discouraging women in rural areas from investing in land improvements such as irrigation, fencing, or tree planting.

Furthermore, according to (Djire et al. 2012) the principle of state ownership of land and other vital natural resources continues to this day as one of the fundamental legal foundations of Malian land law. Hence post-independence Mali governments continued the colonial legacy by reinforcing statutory legal principles to build national unity. Moreover, the government attempted to bring land policy and laws into conformity with the concept of Western legal principles of land tenure or land reform, which exclude women.

In this respect, Beauregard (2009) said that access to land and natural resources are governed by several different pieces of legislation, of which many are still influenced by French colonial laws (conferring ownership of the land to the state). On the other hand, recent political and economic changes in Mali have shaped other reforms (2006,2012,2016) by placing more emphasis on decentralization and private property. However, customary land tenure practices that date back to pre-colonial times are still applied. Under these, traditional leaders allocate usufruct rights over land and its resources in a common approach to land ownership and use (Jane, et al 2006).

## **1- Methodology**

To analyze the impacts of the Agricultural Orientation Law on women's land ownership, this study presents findings from data obtained from the author's survey in two districts in Mali from January 31st, 2018 to February 28th, 2018. The first district is Samanko in Koulikoro region, at 53 km from Bamako. This district was selected because of its modern infrastructure, it also has many women in the agribusiness sector who provide Bamako markets and surrounding areas with quality agricultural products.

The second district is Baguineda, which is a town and municipality in Mali, a sub-prefecture of the Cercle of Kati in Koulikoro region as well, located at 30 km from Bamako on the Niger River. Agriculture is the dominant economic activity in this district as well. The inhabitants also practice market gardening, livestock farming, and trade are widely practiced. These two districts are Mali's agro-ecological zones making it ideal for crop production. They were selected based on this reason, and for the fact that they are closer to Bamako, this reduced monetary and time costs for the research.

In terms of numbers nationwide, most of the households obtained small-to-medium scale farms, where this study focuses. The study utilized a random sampling process to select two women cooperatives, mainly engaged in the production, processing, and marketing of agricultural products and conduct interviews and questionnaires with them.

Additionally, the survey also interviewed key informants, including ministry officials and leaders at the national and local level involved in agriculture. Therefore, the percentage of people surveyed varies according to the type of activity. The respondents were from various categories ranging from the following: Self-employed in agribusiness 43%, Scholars on agricultural studies 17%, civil servants from different ministries and NGOs 14% and Farmers 7%. The survey asked questions related to women's land ownership, the AOL, and its empowerment aspects regarding women's property ownership as well as gender issues in agriculture in Mali.

### **1.1 Overview of women in the Agricultural Sector in Mali**

In Mali, the agricultural sector, the livestock sector, the fisheries sector, the environment, and the forest sector, are all designated by the sector of agriculture or primary sector. Hence, the potential and strengths of the agricultural sector are enormous. Approximately 43.7 million ha of land is suitable for agriculture and livestock. Among this huge amount of cultivable land only 5.2 million ha (11.9%) are cultivated annually (FAO 2012). Thus, the economy of Mali is based to a large extent upon agriculture, with a mostly rural population engaged in subsistence agriculture. Agricultural activities occupy 80% of Mali's labor force and provide 42% of the GDP. Small-scale traditional farming dominates the agricultural sector, with subsistence farming of cereals, primarily sorghum, pearl millet, and maize (FAO 2012).

Therefore, as explained earlier, agriculture in the mid-20th century has drastically changed into agribusiness and has become a vast and complex system that reaches far beyond the farm to include all the stakeholders involved in providing food to consumers. Thus, in Mali as well, the concept of agriculture has become part of the agribusiness sector, which includes all the actors in the agricultural value chain from farmers to processors, distributors, and marketers. Therefore, Mali women are active in all agricultural value chain, even though they play an essential role in the sector, they still face various barriers which decrease their productivity. Among the various challenges, they face land ownership is one of the most crucial. Therefore, in what follows, the article will assess how effectively the AOL has been implemented in enhancing agribusiness women's land ownership in Mali.

### **1.2 The Agricultural Orientation Law and Its Implication for Women**

On August 16, 2006, the Agricultural Orientation Law (AOL) was adopted by the National Assembly of Mali, with the purpose to "determine and conduct long-term policy of agricultural development in Mali" (GRET, 2005) and to promote "sustainable, diverse, modern and competitive agriculture, placing farmers at the center of the process ".The law also covers all economic activities of the agricultural sector, rural and suburban, aiming to make it the engine of the national economy. Additionally, Article 83 of the law grants special attention to women land ownership in state managed areas. Thus, the law aims to empower women along the agricultural value chains by paying specific attention to their needs, particularly their land ownership.

Consequently, women and youth are, in theory, are one of the main recipients of the benefits of the AOL when it is fully implemented. The Law has seven (7) titles with 33 chapters and a total of 200 articles. The followings are some of the articles in the AOL which favor women empowerment. Article 8 of the LOA states that agricultural development policy is aimed at promoting equity between women and men in the agricultural sector, particularly in rural areas.

Article 24 states that the State particularly favors the settlement of young people, women, and vulnerable groups as farmers, by promoting their access to factors of production and by developing unique technical or financial support mechanisms.

Article 45 declares that the state promotes equity between women and men in rural areas, particularly on farm exploitation.

Article 83 states that the State shall ensure equitable access to agricultural land resources for the different categories of farmers and promoters of agricultural holdings. To this end, the State facilitates the access of the greatest number of farmers, particularly women, young people and vulnerable groups to state managed areas.

In addition to the AOL Mali constitution guarantees equality among all its citizens, Mali has also ratified several international conventions that have a direct or indirect impact on the status of women.

### **1.3 Land Acquisition Process in Mali**

Land is a property of paramount importance whose exploitation is a factor of unity and social cohesion in Mali. Moreover, land is also one of the societal foundations for production and social cohesion among individuals of the family and the community. The family land is also an economic and symbolic patrimony to the peasants.

Therefore, land acquisition happens in two ways, depending on whether one is in a managed area (Office du Niger, ODRS in Selingue and OPIB in Baguineda) or in a non-managed area, which is not improved by any organism. Managed areas are generally areas where intensive farming is practiced (mainly rice and extensive market gardening) while the non-managed areas are utilized for dry farming (millet, sorghum, peanut, and so on).

The delivery of the land acquisition act is the responsibility of the area. Thus, the managed zone is under the authority of the State through technical services and managerial organizations such as (Office du Niger, ODRS, and OPIB). On the other hand, in a non-organized area, the prefect, the mayor, and customary chief may issue plots.

Accordingly, in Mali, all lands belong to the state. However, in practice and with traditional practices, land use is managed by village chiefs and customary chiefs within the boundaries of their collective territories. They can enjoy it by cultivating it and taking advantage of the fruits of their production or attributing them to villagers without the new purchaser having a definite title of ownership. The final allocation of the land is reserved to the State. If the final allocation of land belongs to the State, how many women have become landowners since 2006?

## **2- Results and discussions**

### **2.1 Women Land Ownership in Mali**

With regard to women's land ownership, 50% out of 62 of the respondents argue that women don't have equal land ownership as their male counter-patterns. Women farmers are generally conferred the right to cultivate land under their husbands guarantee." According to one of the interviewees, every married woman in Mali in rural areas has a double fertility role. The first being to ensure the reproduction of the family by giving birth to children, and the second is cultivating the plot of land to increase the production level of the family. Thus, they are directly conferred an agricultural plot upon marriage in addition to their reproductive roles" (Interview conducted at the Ministry of Agriculture on February 1/ 2018).

In the same line, another woman farmer said that " We are never denied access to land, but our challenge is land ownership and the type of land we are given. I changed plot every three years. Our husbands give us land but once they become fertile, they are taken from us" (interview conducted with Samanko women's cooperatives on February 7/2018).

Furthermore, 80% of the respondents also argue that women farmers can primarily access unfertile land for sometimes. Moreover, when it comes to titling these plots, men are the ones involved in those processes. They also said that the procedure of land ownership is expensive and takes lengthy procedures (public surveys, authorizations) consequently, this fact excludes women farmers from this approach. Accordingly, they said that they do not necessarily have the financial means to implement this procedure, which are costly, time-consuming, and not known by many of them. In this line one of the interviewees said:

“Our agricultural yields do not allow us to apply for land title, we are merely living day by day from our incomes” (interview conducted with Samanko women's cooperatives on February 7/2018).

Moreover, given the household structures in Mali societies, women are supposed to do the household chores, which enable them to follow up with the long procedures. When their husbands must do it on their behalf, they usually put their names instead of their wives' names. Additionally, when involved in the process, women would also prefer writing their son's name when their husbands passed away. Accordingly, one of the interviewees said: “Family land/ farm always belong to men. It is such a common practice that even when women have the opportunity to do so, they prefer choosing their son's name. Thus, girls are considered as temporary family members since they are supposed to be married and leave their parents' house upon marriage.” (interview conducted with Baguineda women's cooperatives on February 5/2018).

From these responses above we can argue that women land ownership in Mali is still challenges. It involves patriarchal practices with oppress and discriminate against women. Thus, In Mali there are important differences between men and women in owning land. Women mostly obtain private plot after marriage. In addition, women's responsibilities and rights to land change over their lifetime as determined by their status as girls, married women, grandmothers and widows. For example, in many southern parts of Mali, traditionally women do not have individual access to land, rather they work as laborers on their husbands or father's land.

Therefore, in the traditional tenure land system, land belongs to the head of the family or the husband who can pass the right to cultivate to other family members while keeping property rights. Thus, household derives land use rights from the household head. Due to the increasing pressure on land, these rights are more and more passed on from father to son when the son becomes the head of the household. Most of the farmland is commonly cultivated by the farm household whose heads manages its production and oversees the spending of the income. However, women can cultivate some private plot and earn some private income. These private plots are allocated by the head of the household or obtained from the land holding family through mediation of the head of the household.

## **2.2 Women's Views about the Agricultural Orientation Law and Their Land Ownership**

Furthermore, respondents were asked to agree or disagree whether the Malian constitution and the Agricultural Orientation Law are genders neutral, and the survey found that 43% out of the 62 respondents disagree with that statement. They contend that none of them guarantee equal access to land and property to all its citizens. Accordingly, one of the respondents argued:” Neither the constitution nor the Agricultural Orientation Law of Mali discriminate against women, the problem is the application of these laws and rules in real life. None of them are actually being implemented regarding women's empowerment” (interview conducted at the Ministry of Agriculture on February 2/2018).

More importantly, 58% of them maintain that women still do not receive the same services as their male counter-patterns in owning land and other resources. On one hand, 51% of them also recognize that agribusiness women have certain advantages, such as access to information, training, and other social services. On the other hand, 56% of them claim that land and credit access are the constraints agribusiness women and farmers are still facing.

To support this one of the respondents said” I was denied access to credit in several banks because I don't have a collateral” Another respondents added” Banks usually ask for land titles as guarantee to have a loan, and you know how difficult and expensive it is to have land title in Mali”( Interview conducted at la Femme Rurale in Bamako February 6/2018)

Additionally, when inquired about their knowledge of the agricultural orientation law, 67% of the 62 participants claim to hear about it. However, their knowledge about the content of the law is limited. 44% of the respondents had no idea about the content of the law. In this line two of the respondents said:” I have never heard about the Agricultural Orientation Law and its gender empowerment aspect since I am illiterate”. Another added “how can I know about the Agricultural Orientation Law since I have been denied the right to an education just because I am a woman. I have six brothers all of them went to school except me. I cannot even hold a pen” (interviews conducted with Samanko women's cooperatives on February 7/2018).

Also, very few of them 75% claim not to know any women organization that guarantees land ownership to women farmers.

Another critical challenge pointed out by the respondents regarding the AOL is the distribution process. If the Agricultural Orientation Law grant special attention to women, youth, and disabled people in the state irrigated areas, it remains unclear which amount of land has been irrigated by the state from 2006 to 2018 and which amount belong to which categories. Additionally, many articles of the AOL promote gender equity-like article 45, for example. Equity refers to the equal distribution of resources. Therefore, the law contradicts itself in article 83 versus article 45. Additionally, 80% of the respondents also mention corruption to play a major role in their lack of land ownership. Accordingly, one of the interviewees said: "Mali is not a poor country. Our elites are only misusing the budget for their personal purposes. If farmers are given all the skills and tools required, we will combat poverty. Thus, with transparency within our ministry Malian farmers can feed all West Africa" (interview conducted at the Ministry of Agriculture on February 2/2018).

10% of the national budget goes into the agricultural sector, yet less seems to be achieved in alleviating the challenges due to the misuse of the budget.

Based on the evidences above the paper contends that within traditional systems in Mali, several layers of interest in property are recognized to be legitimate, and tenure rules recognize a wide range of overlapping rights over the same land. These are generally categorized as primary rights where a person has ultimate decision-making power over land and secondary rights which generally confer the right to use land. For example, in the context of Mali, a woman may have the right to cultivate a plot of land to meet personal needs, but they do not have primary rights over this resource as this is retained by the family head or customary chief. Consequently, women found themselves excluded and marginalized when applying for bank loans or getting title for their farms.

### **2.3 Gender relations and inequality regarding women's land ownership**

When asked about which region of Mali gender inequality was high, 48% of the respondents' state that all regions are doing bad in promoting gender equality in land ownership. However, 14% maintain that Sikasso one of the leading agricultural regions in Mali to be more gender discriminative, followed by Segou region. Nevertheless, two regions in the north i.e. Gao and Timbuctu were considered as less gender discriminative. Southern regions, including Bamako the capital city was considered more gender discriminative than the Northern regions. One of the reasons is that agriculture is not the primary source of income in the Northern regions. Women can inherit land in the north while they cannot in the south. Women from the North usually rely on manual activities such as handicrafts and livestock to make a living, while Southern women are heavily dependent on agricultural activities.

One of the interviewees declared that: "The Agricultural Orientation law is the best law Mali has ever passed in its history. It covers all aspects of the agricultural domain. However, its implementation on the ground poses a problem because the actors supposed to implement it misused the money for their own purposes. He went on to take examples on two neighboring countries i.e. Burkina Faso and Senegal to copy the Malian Agricultural Orientation Law model to develop their agriculture while Mali is still lagging" (Interview conducted at the Ministry of Agriculture on February 1/2018).

Legislative and regulatory texts promoting gender equality in the AOL are not fully implemented in the rural areas. Additionally, 70% of women entrepreneurs claimed that they did not know much about the legal principles. Thus, the weakness of the AOL and the lack of information, awareness mechanism on applicable measures on land-use is a challenge for both women and the state. In that line one of the respondents said: "I have heard about the AOL, but I don't know much about its contents since I cannot read and write. The agricultural agents who are supposed to informed us about these laws are all in the capital city. They don't want to serve in rural areas" (interviews conducted with Samanko women's cooperatives on February 7/2018).

Lastly, 75% of the respondents highlight the incoherence between the AOL and the customary laws. In this line one of the respondents said” Women in our community have always acquired land via customary tenure practices. Our Husbands are opposed to this new land law, since they considered it as a threat to their land privileges” (interviews conducted with Samanko women's cooperatives on February 7/2018).

Subsequently, lack of new land for agriculture has led to the fragmentation of existing plots as families subdivide the land, they have to provide access to the next generations. This process of farm fragmentation has contributed to a progressive but fundamental change in the traditional management of rights to land leading to the individualization of land ownership. This has a profound effect on women’s use rights. Whereas under traditional systems women were guaranteed use rights to land either for family or personal production, as rights over land become individualized women and young men tend to lose out. Women from the most vulnerable households especially those from young households are mostly likely to be excluded from land and agricultural activities. Thus, the land problem remains serious, even among traditional leaders and the state. Hence, there is a clash between the rule of the law and traditional customs practice. In both cases, women cannot own land easily. Furthermore, the rule of the law which guarantees women land ownership fails to specify the methodological procedures under which they can own land and how they are selected to be inland committees.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the discussion above, we concluded that the issue of land ownership in Mali is subject to much attention and interest; besides the legal questions, it also expands to economic, social, and cultural aspects without forgetting questions related to gender equality and development. This research also found out that women still face constraints in owning land firstly because of the multiplicity of land actors or distributors (mayor, the village chief, clerk, etc.) complicates women's land ownership. Additionally, the research also found the law to be vague and contradictory. Its implementation is then problematic besides the state-managed land. Furthermore, the law does not specify whether they are women of all categories or women heads of exploitation who must benefit the state managed areas as articulated by article 83, nor does it specify the distribution of the managed areas among women, youth, and disables. Thus, the texts advocating the principle of gender equality in the law, remain mostly theoretical in the absence of specific measures to ensure its implementation and to draw the line between the modern law and customary law. None of these laws have made a positive impact on women's land ownership. Thus, if men have the right to land ownership, women benefit only from the right of (exploitation) because they are always at the second level when it comes to implementing either the positive law or the customary law.

Secondly, there is an overlap between the customary law and the positive law the old system is not challenged. Thus, the AOL does not question customary tenure and now recognizes modern land titles that are in the name of the state. It, therefore, proposes a modernization of agriculture without challenging the position of large family landowners that are customary systems. Reason why, 12 years after the enactment of this law, women land ownership and access to other resources such as credit, information, seeds, fertilizers, and equipment in Mali, especially in rural areas, is based mainly on customary rules rather than positive law. Thus, the cultural aspects of people and not the environment determine economic success. In Mali's context, cultural practices do not favor women's land ownership.

Thirdly the research also concluded that women's less representation in land committees led to a lack of skill transfer and resources to them. The texts focus on responsibilities at state structures level, neglecting the current context of decentralization, especially the representation of women in regional and local land committees. More interestingly, women lack of knowledge about the gender empowerment aspects of the AOL, their lack of representation in land committees, as well as their lack of education, keep them in a circle of precariousness, socioeconomic insecurity, and poverty. These factors jeopardize the stability of their farms, and their access to factors of production (credit, seeds, fertilizers, equipment). Hence this article suggests that empowerment is key to women's emancipation in the agribusiness sector. Empowerment could address the inequities in the distribution of resources and experiences that confer power, such as education, income, and financial credit to men and help women make real gains of these resources. If women are empowered, they will be more conscious about their negative situation, discrimination and subordination in male-dominated society, in the present social structures.



More importantly, it will motivate them to change those structures by changing themselves through the means available to them to positively change their conditions to aim for a better life for themselves and their community.

Finally given the significant role played by women in Agriculture which is a fundamental driver of economic growth and poverty reduction in Mali, the paper concludes that past efforts at revitalizing the agriculture sector through the enactment of the AOL have failed in part because of the above-mentioned factors.

Gender gaps in land ownership persist because the institutions mainly the AOL that intend to empower women face gender related barriers. This is so because access to natural resources is governed by three overlapping systems: customary, religious and statutory law. Within this context of legal plurality those with power and influence are able to manipulate and operate their way, using the most favorable systems to secure their interest. This is often achieved to the detriment of the less informed and less powerful women. Therefore, as a contribution to the existing literature on women farmers empowerment in Mali and the AOL, any policy or development program to improve the living conditions of women farmers land ownership in the agribusiness sector in Mali within the household should take into account those specific challenges. The strategies and institutions involved in the implementation of the AOL must be reformed to offer a better fit for men and women farmers. Hence, to reduce gender inequality in land ownership the article then suggests that both men and women farmers need equal access to land, information, skills and tools to improve yield.

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