

## EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EQUAL LAND RIGHTS: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM RURAL UGANDA

Authors: Ludovica Cherchi, Markus Goldstein, James Habyarimana, Joao Montalvao, Michael O'Sullivan, Chris Udry, and Ariel Gruver

### KEY MESSAGES

- **Traditional customary land tenure systems often limit women's land rights in Sub-Saharan Africa.** At a time when many African governments are implementing land formalization reforms, it is important to understand what works to strengthen women's land tenure security.
- **In an ongoing experiment in rural Uganda, we offered households fully-subsidized land titles and basic information about the benefits of land titling.** We find that about 91% of the households accepted the titles, and 62% decided to co-title.
- **Providing additional gender information and making the offer conditional on female co-tilting raised the take-up of joint titles** to about 76% and 89%, respectively, without dampening overall demand for titling.

### GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 70 impact evaluations in more than 25 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations and the private sector in order to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.

Land is a key productive asset that serves as the primary source of household income and significantly contributes to economic development across Sub-Saharan Africa. However, most customary tenure systems in Africa tend to favor men, granting rights to women primarily through a husband or male relative. These imbalances lead to substantial gaps in land ownership between men and women—a disparity which becomes even more striking when considering formal types of ownership. As governments across Africa look to adopt land tenure reforms, there are warranted concerns that such efforts could disempower women by potentially hardening or even exacerbating existing gender gaps. It is therefore important to identify policy instruments that encourage female land ownership when implementing land formalization programs. This land titling intervention, which experimented with a set of novel policy instruments in the context of rural Uganda, aims to build the evidence of what works to strengthen women's inclusion in formal land ownership.

## HERE'S WHAT WE DID

The World Bank's Africa Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) is conducting a randomized controlled trial to test ways to strengthen women's formal property rights. The experiment takes place in the context of a land titling intervention offering fully-subsidized freehold

land titles to over 1,000 untitled rural households in Western Uganda. The first policy instrument makes the subsidy conditional on including the wife's name on the land title. The second instrument provides households with additional information about the benefits of joint titling using an educational video. This randomized experiment provides the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of these two policy instruments, implemented both independently and jointly, in improving women's access to formal land titles. The overall cost of the intervention amounted to less than \$270 per household.

The GIL study is a collaboration with the Government of Uganda's Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Urban Development (MLHUD), the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP), and researchers from Associates Research Trust Uganda, Northwestern University, and Georgetown University.

## HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND

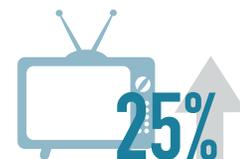
- **Overall demand for titles was very high.** Among households assigned to the core intervention, 91% accepted the offers during the first visit and 62% decided to co-title. The rate of joint titling is consistent with average shares of joint de facto ownership reported by households.



When we offer fully-subsidized freehold land titles, **91% of households decide to title, and 62% decide to co-title.**

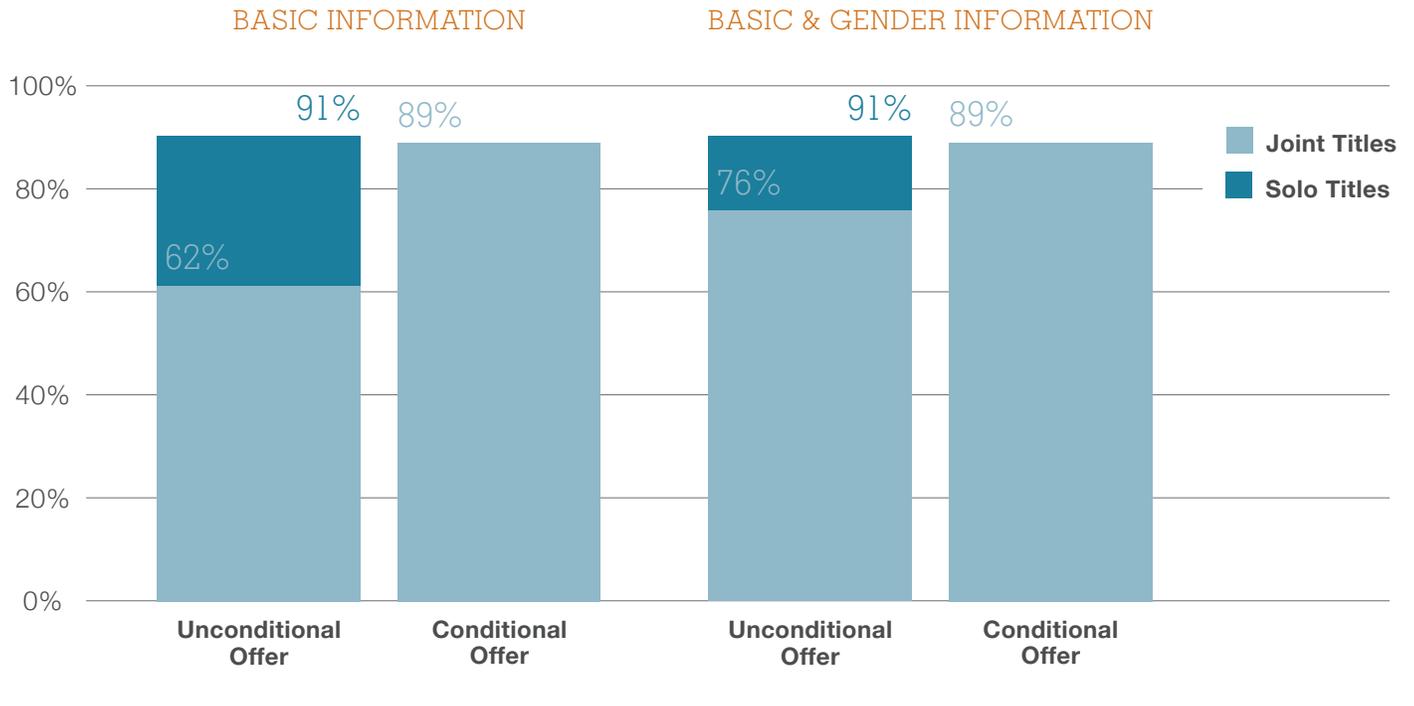


**Gender conditionality increases demand for co-titling by 50% relative to core intervention** without diminishing overall demand for titles.



**Gender information increases demand for co-titling by 25% relative to core intervention** without diminishing overall demand for titles.

## LAND TITLING: OFFER ACCEPTANCE RATES



- When testing the two policy instruments independently, **the conditional offer delivered a larger positive impact on joint titling.** While both the conditional offer and information on the gender benefits of joint titling increased demand for co-titling, imposing the condition was particularly effective: with levels of joint titling increasing by 50% compared to the core intervention, relative to a 25% increase with the gender information.
- **Jointly implementing both policy instruments did not make either more effective in promoting co-titling.** In fact, the impact of the conditional offer appeared to be more powerful in the absence of gender information, and the provision of gender-specific information increased co-titling significantly only among unconditional offers.

- **Neither policy instrument affected overall household demand for titling.** Acceptance of titling offers during the first visit was high (around 90%) across all four experimental treatment arms. This finding challenges the assumption that men would require strong economic and social incentives to agree to formalize their land with their spouse.

For the World Bank's Africa Gender Innovation Lab, the next steps of this project include collecting follow-up data to measure the longer-term impacts of co-titling on agricultural productivity and investment, as well as on women's empowerment. We will also introduce a flexible credit offer for some households to explore the implications of coupling greater land security with improved access to financing for both productive investments and insurance against risk.



## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In the absence of any gender inclusion incentives, many households were willing to register land in the names of both spouses, as demonstrated by acceptance rates during the core intervention. These results indicate that, in the context of Western Uganda, the price subsidy alone offers a cost-effective strategy to further formalize land tenure and improve women's documented land ownership. This finding helps to alleviate some of the concern that land titling programs in customary settings can disempower women.

Still, the evidence from both policy instruments suggests that incentives matter and can be a powerful tool to convince more households to co-title in this setting. Both the conditional offer and the provision of gender-specific information increased household acceptance of co-titling, without negatively impacting overall titling. Such findings invite future research to uncover more practical incentives with the potential to promote gender equality in parallel with land tenure reform.

**To learn more about the underlying constraints of gender gaps in land tenure and effective interventions to improve property rights across Sub-Saharan Africa, see the World Bank Policy Research Working Paper:**

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28911>

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
PLEASE CONTACT

Markus Goldstein  
mgoldstein@worldbank.org

Amy Copley  
acopley@worldbank.org

1818 H St NW  
Washington, DC 20433 USA

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