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An Intersectional Reading of Women's Access to Rural Land Ownership in Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract: Women's access to land ownership in Côte d'Ivoire remains a challenge despite a multitude of legal and institutional arsenal favouring their access to land ownership. Moreover, Article 12 of the Ivorian Constitution reaffirms equal access to property for women and men. However, it is clear that the above-mentioned difficulties persist. What are the explanatory elements of land insecurity in rural areas for women? The legal and institutional elements alone are not sufficient to understand this work. Beyond the usual explanatory factors, a reading based on intersectionality allows for an in-depth analysis. In fact, this work first highlights the modes of land tenure and their recompositions, the modes of access and their recompositions, and the organisation of society structures access to land and agrarian practices. Since these elements alone are not sufficient to explain the existence of structural gaps and inequalities of access between women, the theory of intersectionality through the concepts of ethnicity, gender and class (social position and social capital that engenders mobilisable economic, social and political resources). The content analysis enabled the categorisation of women and highlighted the positionalities that facilitate or hinder their access to land ownership. In the end, this study showed that there are inequalities between women in access to land ownership insofar as those with low social capital cannot benefit from full access to their land rights, which confirms our central hypothesis that women's access to land ownership is a function of patrilineal and matrilineal societies and modes of land tenure and their recomposition, associated with the intersection of women's economic, social and political resources in Côte d'Ivoire.

Keywords: Land ownership, women, intersectionality, patrilineal societies, matrilineal societies, land insecurity.

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INTRODUCTION

Côte d'Ivoire is a highly agricultural country. Indeed, the slogan of its leaders, which was broadcast on Ivorian television until the end of the 1990s, was 'the development of this country is based on agriculture'. Indeed, in a country where the formation of society and the state is closely linked to insertion in the global networks of agrarian capitalism, it is often to the countryside that people turn when they want to create a clientele of affluents, but also more prosaically to ensure a more comfortable retirement, to make their savings grow or to supplement their salary income (Grajales, 2018). This makes the issue of land in rural areas crucial for the population and for the state of Côte d'Ivoire. It is associated with productive issues, as a support for agricultural, pastoral, forestry or extractive

activities (Tarrouth, 2016; Toukpo, 2016; Colin, 2014). It is also associated with economic and social issues.

Access to land is achieved through several modes: market and non-market access from an economic perspective, and intra-family and extra-family access from a social perspective (Kouamé *et al.*, 2007). Access is also sustainable (secure) or precarious. This access to land, whether it is sustainable or not, intra-family or extra-family, has always been regulated differently by the customs and cultures involved, depending on the actors and their rank and importance in society (Koné 2005; Chauveau, 2000).

Indeed, Côte d'Ivoire, a land of migration (Beauchemin, 2000), combines on its soil several socio-cultural practices linked to ethno-linguistic areas that

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make access unequal for certain sensitive categories such as women and social cadets (young people). As key players in agricultural development, women have difficulty accessing land because of their place and role in agricultural development. The same applies to social cadets whose social rank puts them at a disadvantage.

In addition, the depletion of arable land in connection with the galloping demography, land grabbing (Grajales, 2018) etc. further accentuate inequalities in access to land, especially for women (Tarrouth, 2016).

The adoption of the land law in 1998, in addition to other related legal frameworks (developed in the process of emerging from violence) in force, notably the land policy declaration and the agricultural orientation law, and the creation of AFOR, raised a lot of hope for equal and equitable access to land for this social category of women. Indeed, officially, the law on rural land tenure offers equal opportunities to men and women with Ivorian nationality, as well as to vulnerable people, to have their customary rights recognised in order to obtain land certificates that will lead to definitive and theoretically unassailable land titles.

Moreover, Article 12 of the Ivorian Constitution reaffirms this equal access to property for women and men. However, it is clear that the above-mentioned difficulties persist. What are the reasons for women's land insecurity in rural areas?

Beyond the usual explanatory factors, a reading based on intersectionality allows for an in-depth analysis. Indeed, this work first highlights the modes of land tenure and their recompositions (Colin, 2004; Chauveau and Colin 2014; Tarrouth and Colin, 2016). The modes of access and their recompositions and the organisation of society structure access to land and agrarian practices. Since these elements alone are not sufficient to explain the existence of structural gaps and inequalities of access between women, the theory of intersectionality (Crashaw, 1989; West & Fenstermaker, 1995) through the concepts of ethnicity (here it will be the concepts of allochthonous, autochthonous), gender and class (social position and social capital that generate economic, social and political resources that can be used). It should be recalled that the term intersectionality was coined by the African-American feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in an investigation published in 1991 into the violence suffered by women of colour in the underprivileged classes in the United States^{13,14}. Crenshaw had begun to reflect on the intersections of discrimination in an article published in 1989, which was in line with the "black feminism" movement. This term has since been taken up by many other studies, although other terms, such as 'interconnectedness' or 'multiplicative identities', have also been used to describe the same approach. It

addresses a difficult issue for feminism: the differences between women. The old ideal of a feminism where all women are together is difficult to hold, and this theory provides a platform that can be common to all currents. It makes visible the differences of race, gender and class while deconstructing these categories. In an academic setting, it provides food for thought for both generalists and specialists, while bridging the gap between the two; in this setting, intersectionality forms a buzzword, capable of attracting attention if present in the title of a scholarly article. Finally, its very incompleteness makes the theory attractive, and gives everyone the opportunity to add to it; it opens up new discussions and discoveries. This theory, which highlights the complexity of the world, gives sociologists and feminists the means to address it. For example, the notion helps to understand how black or poor women do not experience the same violence or discrimination as women from privileged and white social classes. In the context of this work, it helps to show that indigenous and migrant (allochthonous and allogeneous) women are not affected in the same way by problems related to the exploitation of land and access to the right to exploit and own land.

Indeed, West and Fenstermaker (1995) propose to think of social relations as "situated realizations", i.e. matrices in which the categories of race, class and gender are actualized and stabilize their meanings in interaction situations (West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

Thus, it should be noted that there are three different methods for studying intersectionality. First, anti-categorical complexity, which is based on the deconstruction of categorical divisions: it is based on the premise that social categories are arbitrary constructions of history and language and contribute little to understanding how people interact with society. Secondly, cross-category complexity: it makes the existence of inequalities in society the basis for intersectionality. Thirdly, intra-category complexity, which can be seen as the middle ground between anti- and inter-category complexities: this approach recognises the shortcomings of existing social categories and questions the way in which these categories create boundaries and distinctions, while acknowledging their importance in understanding the social world.

These different approaches are mobilised in this work, taking into account the specificities of the localities visited during the field study.

Taking into account the different aspects of intersectionality, the central hypothesis of this work is that women's access to land ownership is a function of patrilineal and matrilineal societies and modes of land tenure and their recompositions, associated with the

intersection of women's economic, social and political resources in Côte d'Ivoire.

This article is organised in two main parts. The first part presents the conditions of data production. The second part presents and discusses the results of the study. The first sub-section deals with the explanatory factors of land insecurity among women in rural areas and the second sub-section with the dynamics of land access practices as a hope for women.

1. METHODOLOGY

The fundamental question guided the content analyses in this work. It was necessary to proceed by categorisation. The categorisation operation consists in the elaboration or application of a grid of categories, i.e. headings gathering elements having common characteristics under a generic title, and in the classification of the corpus data in these. It is therefore a question of classifying the constituent elements of a whole by differentiation and then grouping them by genre (analogy) according to defined criteria in order to provide, by condensation, a simplified representation of the raw data (Bardin, 1986).

These analyses are based on fieldwork carried out by two NGOs from 2016 to 2019 in western Côte d'Ivoire (Guiglo, Bloléquin, Duekoué) and in northern Côte d'Ivoire (Korhogo, Ferké, Sinématiali) in the context of clarifying land rights and women's access to land in rural areas and their empowerment. In addition, 20 interviews were conducted with village chiefs, youth associations, state administrators and political elites, and numerous observations were collected on these occasions in the above-mentioned localities.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Explanatory factors of land insecurity in rural areas among women

Access to land by these social groups is influenced by historical factors of land conquest, customary and cultural practices and the situation of economic domination suffered by women. All these factors are reinforced by the status quo of the land law (Mariatou 2005, Soro, 2008).

2.1.1. The historical factors of land conquest

The history of land ownership lies in the primary mode of access to land. The initial occupation of land in rural localities is based on the principle of the first arrivals who will consolidate ancestral practices. This is the theory of the first to clear the land, applicable in Gur, Krou and Akan countries (Toukpo, 2016; Mlan, 2014, Chauveau, 2000).

This conquest of the land is made by hunters or warriors (mythical account or proven facts) who are mostly men (Ibo *et al.*, 2005). In such a case, the rural land acquired is the property of the family and the lineage. However, in Ivorian societies, men are

generally the heads of the family, even though there are female heads of family, especially in matrilineal societies. And as heads, they are entrusted with the custody and management of family or lineage land. This system excludes from the outset social cadets and women, having a new family, from land ownership. As they have no land, women cannot pass it on. Cadets, not being the head of the family, cannot be entrusted with the management and custody of the family's land.

Moreover, with the demographic growth due in part to polygamy and the fertility rate, which hovered around 5 children per woman in 1998 (RGPH, 1998), families within the same lineage have grown larger. They will also organise splits in order to place the fragmented land under the authority of new heads of family. The land is divided between the new family units. There is now land for communal use, land for lineage and individual land. All these lands are distributed among the male members of the family, especially the first-born, and passed on from father to son in the case of the patrilineal system, or from father to nephews in the case of the matrilineal system. The elders are responsible for management. These male elders have access to most of the land and the most fertile land. Thus, cadets who, according to society, are in initiation remain victims of the practice of the right of eldership or primogeniture which defines their status within the community. These historical factors thus condition cultural practices of access to land (Soro, 2008; Koné, 2005; Montaz, 2020).

2.1.2.1. The place of women in society

The treatment of social cadets and women is expressed in rural areas at several levels. This concerns the place of these groups in decision-making bodies, the distribution of work and access to family productive resources.

The conditions of access to land for rural men and women, whether foreigners, indigenous people or women, are determined by the social systems (lineage system, inheritance system, matrimonial system) and land tenure systems that represent the traditional conceptions of land in rural areas of the communities to which they belong. Within these local communities, a distinction is made between elders, who control land resources, and cadets and women, whose access to land is often difficult.

These types of social organisation in Côte d'Ivoire are highly hierarchical, where the ranks occupied by individuals are of paramount importance in both the matrilineal and patrilineal systems. The status or rank traditionally occupied determines the social roles to which one is assigned, i.e. the woman's primary function is to procreate.

These local customary rules or norms contain factors that favour the exclusion of women.

Whether among the Akan, Mande, Gur or Krou, the observation is that from the point of view of customary principles relating to the devolution of land, women are generally excluded from inheritance.

This exclusion of women is justified in certain contexts (especially among the Senufo) by nuptial practices (in particular the levirate, which consists of the remarriage of a woman to her deceased husband's brother; she is thus associated with the property to be transmitted) or by residence (Soro, forthcoming). In the context of the levirate, the wife is considered as property. She does not inherit, but is inherited by the brothers of the deceased (most often by the deceased's elder brother).

It should be noted that in matrilineal ethnocultural groups, inheritance is passed on to the nephew, whereas in ethnocultural groups with a predominantly patrilineal structure, property is passed on to sons. Daughters are excluded. In both types of societies, women are excluded from land ownership. They only have the right to grow seasonal and non-perennial crops.

In other Krou societies (Kroumen, Bété, Bakwé, Néyo...) women are confined away from men or are not allowed to participate in assemblies. Their role as advisors is discreet.

In the field, women are generally the helpers of men in agricultural activities. Their position is crucial in the transmission of rural land: they do not inherit, but they are inherited in the framework of the levirate.

The fact that women are far from the public spheres of decision making and are confined to reproductive and household tasks makes their access to rural land rights in the traditional system complex.

2.1.2.2. The reinforcement of the exclusion of women by the land law.

How then can the right to land be guaranteed and how can customary rights and land legislation be harmoniously articulated for the sustainable and equitable management of land and resources by all actors in general and women, cadets in particular?

The adoption of the 1998 land law raised hopes among NGOs, donors, governments and vulnerable populations that the imbalance created by the traditional systems of devolution of land rights for vulnerable social categories such as women and social cadets would be redressed. However, difficulties in implementing the law continue to maintain or accentuate inequalities.

Indeed, equitable and legal access to productive resources such as land is provided for in the Ivorian legal framework. The notions related to the

respect and protection of fundamental freedoms, both individual and collective, and the equality of men before the law "All human beings are born free and equal before the law" are proclaimed by the new constitution of 2016. The fundamental standard provides for access and ownership by all Ivorians in Article 12: "Only the State, public communities and Ivorian individuals may have access to rural land ownership. Acquired rights are guaranteed". This is access without any distinction. The Civil Code and the 1998 law on rural land ownership in Côte d'Ivoire are inspired by this law to reaffirm equal access to land for all.

However, the difficulties in applying the 1998 land law have encouraged a duality between customary practices and the law. This duality benefits in most cases 'or' most of the time local customary practices that continue to exclude vulnerable social categories from access to land. The examples from the north of the country speak for themselves. In Korhogo, access to and customary ownership of land remain strongly influenced by cultural practices. Cultural practices compromise ongoing security programmes. The village of Ganon is located in the sub-prefecture of Tioroniaradougou. As the certification programme (PAFR1) approaches, the population is in a state of anxiety. Indeed, the entire territory of the village of Ganon belongs customarily to the canton chief of Tioroniaradougou, who demands a single land certificate in his name for all these lands. Indeed, the village of Ganon was created with the blessing of the canton chiefdom of Tioroniaradougou. This requirement is blocking the whole process and is a challenge to the land rights not only of the entire population, but also of the vulnerable categories.

The transformation of customary rights into modern law has also favoured unequal practices of access to land. Indeed, Article 3 of the 1998 Land Law states that 'the customary rural land domain is made up of all the land over which customary rights are exercised in accordance with traditions'. What does this imply in terms of equal access to land as contained in the Constitution and the Civil Code?

This provision seems to consolidate the unequal practices contained in local practices and creates a contradiction with Article 5, which also stipulates that 'ownership of land in the rural land domain is transmitted by purchase, succession, inter vivos or testamentary donation or by the effect of an obligation'. At least, it shows the limits of this provision.

The translation of customary provisions into law was accompanied by the import of inequitable measures resulting from village power relations into written law. The law thus came to recognise a de facto state of exclusion of women generated by their place in

the modes of production and the sexual division of labour in agrarian societies. However, customary land management, in most customs, does not recognise women's right of ownership or at least does not recognise the inheritance of land to women.

The positions of the courts seem to be aligned with customary practices that are often unequal. This is the case of the Supreme Court ruling "Supreme Court Judicial Chamber, 125/13 of 7 March 2013". In this case, the judge 'questioned the custom to find out the mode of inheritance devolution in force in the locality in accordance with the provisions of the 1998 land law...' and recognised, 'consecrating lineage property at the same time as admitting their mode of transmission'. This ruling thus reinforced the unequal access contained in the customs.

Despite this, the law has introduced an alternative access to land that does not seem to be exploited by women because of their financially precarious situation.

2.1.3. Women's economic subordination despite changing customs

The 1998 Land Law introduced a new mode of access to land that contrasts with customary practices of non-transferability of land that exclude women and social cadets from access to land. Indeed, Article 5 states that 'ownership of land in the rural land domain is transmitted by purchase, succession, inter vivos or testamentary donation or by the effect of an obligation'. Ownership of land in the rural domain is transmitted by purchase is an opportunity offered to this social category to access land outside the inheritance system. In this way, women can have access to land in the same way as men (MINADER, 2018).

The commodification of land permitted by the 1998 law opens up theoretical possibilities of access to land for women with economic capital. Indeed, the purchase of titled or certified land allows these women to bypass the obstacles of customary law, while gaining some social recognition of their claim to the land. Studies have shown that the market for the purchase and sale of land is increasingly dynamic in Côte d'Ivoire, especially in the forest areas of the plantation economy (Colin, 1990; Colin *et al.*, 2004; Soro and Colin, 2008; Kouamé, 2010; Tarrouth, 2015, Tarrouth and Colin, 2016). The existence of this market is an opportunity for women to buy land outside their village and become landowners. However, they are not very present on these markets because they generally do not have the means. This market remains open, but reserved for a certain elite of women. In general, these women are company managers, women who hold a senior position in the Ivorian public administration, and other women from the diaspora who have a lot of financial capital.

Thus, today, women who have economic, social and political resources have access to land through rental or purchase. It is these wealthy women who have access to the majority of land certificates. This requires women to be financially independent. However, the economic situation of women in rural areas is not good in Côte d'Ivoire. As a result, they are excluded from access to land because of their economic insecurity.

2.1.4. The development of market transactions as a threat to the rights of vulnerable groups

The commodification of land or its monetisation can open up windows of opportunity for the purchase of rural property by women, but it is also a threat, as it is accompanied by the arrival of new entrepreneurial actors in the Ivorian countryside.

In general, indigenous women have access to land through family or husband ownership. In this case, it is the head(s) of the family who decide on the use of the land. As a result, they do not have the freedom to dispose freely and fully of the plot of land made available. Thus, when the head(s) decides to hand over the land to agro-industrial companies, or to grow cash crops on it, they suffer the consequences.

It is without their agreement and often without their knowledge that the land is transferred. The work of Grajales (2018) has highlighted the acquisition of large areas of land through bargaining with local elites, generally men, in the Ayenouan area (Aboisso) where the company Dekel-Oil has acquired land for oil palm production and the installation of an oil mill. The women (indigenous and non-indigenous/allochthonous) of this region, as key actors in the production of subsistence food, have seen their exploitable areas diminish visibly without any explanation from their husbands. They are forced to rent land from other neighbouring villages to grow cassava in order to meet their economic needs. These women, who used to produce food in the locality, are now forced to import food from other villages where Dekel-Oil is not yet established.

Women are more adversely affected when men decide to transfer the land without informing them, in order to grow cash crops on the small plots of land they have been given for subsistence farming. These transfers of land are most often made in the context of opportunities: the arrival of an agro-industry or a buyer with financial capital.

Remarkably, the women who have lost cultivable land are not native to the locality. They are mostly non-native, i.e. ECOWAS nationals. This situation creates an inequality between indigenous women who are not affected by the land trading action and non-indigenous women. This indicates an important intersectional aspect. It is plausible here that this social

context, gender discrimination, intersects with the issue of indigenesness. Indeed, the land that was offered to the company is located in the lowlands that were not exploited by the indigenous people, but rather by these non-indigenous women. The indigenous people who grant the land to the agro-industrial firm do not have wives or sisters who cultivate the land. This explains the fact that they grant these lands without much difficulty. As they are not natives of the locality, the fact that they are not associated and that they are the only farmers on these plots has contributed to their marginalisation or discrimination associated with their status as women.

2.2. The dynamics of land access practices as a hope for women and social cadets

As a habit or practice, custom is not set in stone. It evolves over time and space. This evolution of

customs tends to integrate women and other vulnerable groups in the equitable access to land.

2.2.1. Changes in land access practices underway: the commercialisation of land as an equitable and legal possibility of access to land

In Côte d'Ivoire, a dynamic in customary practices in favour of women's access to land can be observed in certain localities.

While it is true that certain practices continue through the unequal intra-family and inter-generational management, which remains prejudicial to the rights of women and social cadets, developments tending to balance their access are observed. The cases observed in the field in Akyé and Bété countries speak for themselves in this respect.

Case 1: The Akyé companies of Affery and Yakassé Attobrou

In traditional Akyé societies, land is considered a very precious asset. In terms of inheritance, when a head of family dies, it is the family of the deceased that takes care of the funeral and entrusts the inheritance to the nephew (son of the older sister of the deceased). The latter, with the deceased's property, takes care of the widow and the orphans. While some of these so-called heirs did not fulfil their duties, others were persecuted by the orphans. Following these events, this custom was abandoned in the 1960s. From now on, the children and the widow are entrusted with the funeral of their deceased father and husband. Whether or not the deceased had an administrative title, the children are also the direct beneficiaries, but the father, mother, brothers and sisters of the deceased are excluded.

The custom that prevails today in the sense of the succession of property in this society is identical to the legislation (the law of succession). This is because 'the property of a deceased person is inherited by his or her children and the widow who helped to create it'. As a result, these people (children: men and women, and widow(er)) constitute direct beneficiaries, the heirs once the funeral is over.

The donation of land to women (daughters and wives) aims at their autonomy and is an invitation to work in the fields. This process of access to land is accelerating today because of unemployment and divorce. The participation of women in funeral expenses is a way for them to reaffirm their status in the family and to claim their rights. In fact, every woman as a child or widow and heir is counted in the inheritance of her deceased husband, father and mother.

In summary, the important participation of children and widows in the organisation of funerals of deceased fathers, has led to the evolution of access to land for women and all children by inheritance without distinction.

Case documented on the basis of interviews conducted in 2018.

Case 2: Bété Society of Gnamadji in Soubré

In this area too, women are excluded from sharing the land. However, the special case of a literate lady and only child has attracted attention and continues to spread. When her father died, she started the process of obtaining a land certificate. Her uncles opposed the procedure on the grounds that the land is family land and did not belong solely to her late father. Negotiations finally allowed the certificate to be acquired. Although she had no customary right to the land, she benefited from the leniency of her uncles, who took an act of mercy. Increasingly, only girls are beginning to benefit from this practice. These developments are spreading to certain families who, while the head of the family is still alive, organise his succession by including women, especially when they are literate, intellectuals with a well-to-do financial situation.

Case documented on the basis of interviews.

It is visible from the above text box that through social, economic and political resources women can claim their land rights. This is not a lenient decision by men, but rather the influence of the intersection of women's social capital as opposed to the traditional attributes assigned to women.

2.2.2. Market access to land as an equitable and legal possibility of access to land

The introduction of the provisions of Article 5 of the 1998 Land Law, which states that 'ownership of land in the rural land domain is transmitted by purchase', appeared to be a massive invitation to women to access land. This mode of land transaction remains the most desired and practised by the various categories disadvantaged by customary land access practices. In

this context, rural land is seen by the Ivorian elites, and in particular by women who could not have access to land, as the best investment factor. They then rush to the land for the more affluent (Mlan, 2015). The case of Toumodi is remarkable, because of the proliferation of market transactions on this rural land (Tarrouth, 2015, Tarrouth and Colin, 2016).

Today, it is through the purchase of land that women have land. It is the easiest way for women to get land (A K (head of an NGO)).

The legal framework related to rural land tenure is essentially composed of the constitution, the 1998 land law and other related texts such as the Civil Code.

The constant in these legal documents is the elimination of discriminatory germs and the restoration of gender equality in access to and securing of rural land rights. Efforts are being made in this direction. Indeed, since 1975, Côte d'Ivoire has acceded to most international and regional conventions promoting equality for all. Numerous legal reforms have been carried out at the domestic level, ensuring the full legal capacity of the population, including women and other marginalised categories. Equality between men and women, as a human right and a development objective, was enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by Côte d'Ivoire in?

Thus, all the new provisions of Law 98-750 of 23 December 1998 on rural land tenure allow customary rights to be established and certificates to be issued to both men and women, elders and cadets. The Civil Code also contains numerous provisions likely to secure the rights of women and social cadets, in particular equal access, use, transmission and security of land.

These various legal provisions, which establish a balance in access to and security of land, should make it possible to effectively eliminate the obstacles observed.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the various elements presented in this study, some lessons and reflections can be drawn.

The existing modes of access are not by nature conducive to exclusion, but they do contain factors of land insecurity for women and other vulnerable groups.

The customary mode is the most widespread mode of access to land and renewable natural resources in rural areas. It protects the rights of rural people in general, but it also has the potential to exclude women and social cadets from customary land ownership. Access to land for these groups is usually achieved

through loans, relatively insecure rights and, more rarely, gifts. As for modern or positive law, by placing customary rights in the private domain of the state, it theoretically has great potential for safeguarding the rights of the weakest; however, its option for land title and the many avatars that accompany the procedure for granting it exclude the overwhelming majority of rural populations, primarily the poorest, from full land ownership. Finally, while market transactions offer wealthy women secure access to land ownership, they also result in the eviction of women and vulnerable people from the land they are loaned or sometimes even given for free.

However, women elites with economic, social and political resources escape the various discriminations in access to land ownership. This state of affairs shows that there is an evolution of traditional practices in time and space. This situation tends to create inequalities between women insofar as those with low social capital cannot benefit from full access to their land rights, thus creating the notion of class (Crenshaw, 1989).

Our analyses here do not claim to have exhausted everything about the land situation of women in Côte d'Ivoire. They do, however, have the advantage of presenting a picture, albeit a partial one, of the land tenure realities faced by rural women as daughters, wives, sisters, widows or divorcees.

Legal mechanisms (customary, administrative and judicial) exist to protect the rights of all citizens. But these mechanisms remain largely inaccessible (not only in terms of geographical distance) to women. They often resign themselves to resorting to them for reasons of impartiality at the level of the customary authorities and for reasons of cost, time and administrative heaviness in the procedure for the state authorities.

The regulatory framework includes various legal texts, the contents of which can be mobilised to defend women's rights and reduce inequalities in access to land. However, these texts also remain inaccessible to rural women, most of whom are illiterate and unaware of their rights and the opportunities that these laws offer them.

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