



Securing land rights for the world's poorest



Protecting Women's Land Rights in Rwanda . . . Marie's Story

In rural Rwanda, grinding poverty is a way of life for women like Marie. But Marie is one of the lucky ones. She survived the 1994 Rwandan genocide – the 100 days during which more than 800,000 men, women, and children were murdered. Marie's husband was not so lucky.

Since 1994, Marie and her children have been living with relatives, far from where she and her husband once owned land. Marie had little hope of ever returning to her land again – until she learned of Rwanda's new pilot program to title and register land rights in her village.

Marie made a courageous decision: she would return to her village to claim the land that she and her husband had once farmed. As a genocide survivor who had testified in Rwanda's truth and reconciliation trials, Marie's decision to return to her village was significant. Many survivors who testified in such trials have been threatened, attacked, and even murdered. Marie's land was important enough to her to risk her life.

Land is critical to survival in Rwanda. Ninety percent of the population earns their livelihoods from agriculture, and 31 percent of households are headed by women. Without access and rights to land, women have little likelihood of securing food for themselves and their children, and may turn to high-risk behaviors to support their families. Protecting women's rights to land is a powerful contribution to food and nutrition security, and has the potential to reduce high-risk behaviors and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS.

The Rural Development Institute is working to secure and protect women's land rights in an effort to empower women like Marie. RDI is creating a plan for Rwanda's Ministry of Lands to ensure that both men and women understand the significance of, participate in, and benefit from the roll-out of a national land titling and registration program.

With RDI's help, women like Marie will enjoy the secure rights they need to care for their families and provide their children with a brighter future.