



Securing land rights for the world's poorest



Raissa is a widow and mother of three young children in Burundi,

a small country ranked as the third poorest in the world. In Burundi, ninety percent of the population depends on agriculture for their subsistence. Unfortunately, now that Raissa is a widow, she has no right to own or use land.

After her husband died, his family forced Raissa off the land they had all farmed together. With nowhere to go, Raissa and her three children now live in a friend's kitchen. They are able to eat only because they receive handouts from other women in the community.

When Raissa sought the help of local authorities to let her return to her land, her husband's family refused to cooperate. She then applied to the customary tribunal, but could not afford the hearing fee (about five dollars). She needs all of what she earns from picking sweet potatoes – 38 cents per day – to buy daily essentials for her family.

Raissa's experience is common in Burundi. Although women are responsible for the majority of the country's agricultural production, they have a difficult time securing food for themselves and their children. Burundian women's rights to use and own land are limited both by customary and national law. In Burundian tradition, widows have temporary rights to their deceased husband's land. That custom is disappearing due to Burundi's increasing population and scarcity. In some cases, a widow may be required to marry a brother-in-law to retain access to her land.

RDI is working to strengthen women's rights to land in Burundi, so that women like Raissa have the rights they need to provide food and security to their families. In partnership with the national government and NGOs, RDI is providing legal input to Burundi's parliament on the formation of new land laws, with the goal of securing equal inheritance rights for women like Raissa.



*Building a Safety Net for
Widows in Burundi . . .
Raissa's Story*