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Women Lose Out On Land Deals

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The Minister of Gender and Child Welfare Marlene Mungunda has called for the intensification of efforts to ensure land allocation to women in order to empower them through land ownership.

Women in Namibia, as in most other African countries, continue to face enormous obstacles pertaining to land ownership and the growing recognition of their contribution has not translated into significantly improved access to resources.

Despite the country adopting a National Land Policy in 1998, under which a unitary land system was introduced whereby all citizens have equal rights, opportunities and security across a range of tenure and management systems, as well as the introduction of the Communal Land Reform Act of 2002 that provides for equal opportunities for both men and women to apply for and be granted land rights in communal areas, few women own land in Namibia.

Mungunda during a land conference organised by the Namibia Farm Workers Union (NAFWU) recently emphasized that the Land Distribution and Resettlement Programme should ensure that women are given the opportunity to own land in their own right on equal terms with men.

"Mechanisms are needed to ensure that the rights of women to own land are respected, assured and protected," she added.

Women's plight has been worsened by traditional practices such as inheritance and property grabbing. Further, their lack of training and the means to bloom have contributed to their unfavourable position in land ownership.

In view of that, the minister called for the strengthening of women's capacities and skills and expanding the opportunities that would enable them to develop leadership skills.

"Training programmes are needed to help women develop their technical competence to enable them to be better informed, better infiltrate the political and economic structures and help them gain the maximum competence and means," she said.

Member of Parliament Elias Kaiyamo on behalf of the ruling party Swapo says the government in recognition of the importance of providing land to landless Namibians annually sets aside N\$50 million. As a result of this effort, 846 583 hectares of land has since 2002 been acquired and 6 256 families have been resettled. The party intends to increase this

figure to more than 6 436 families in the next five years, he revealed.

"Our overall objective is to redress past imbalances in the distribution of land as resources," he said.

While some experts have argued that Namibia's land reform programme is flawed because poor and landless people are not being empowered to become successful farmers once they have been resettled, Kaiyamo says the resettlement programme has been implemented to train resettled farmers with a view to enhance capacity and promote sustainable land use.

"It is also intended to ensure that those who are resettled thrive economically thereby contributing to agricultural development in our country," he said.

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