

World Bank Land and Poverty Conference: Stand For Her Land

An interview with Rosa Luz Duran

2 Apr 2019



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At this week's 20th Annual World Bank Land and Poverty Conference in Washington DC, a new campaign called Stand For Her Land has been launched. "Land rights are a major factor in women's entrepreneurship, their strength, for their families, their communities, and their countries", said Kristalina Georgieva, interim president of the World Bank at the opening session.

This makes Rosa Luz Duran's paper presented here particularly salient.

Her study, Gender Gaps in forest tenure reforms in Peru: the impact of expectations on the household incomes of native communities, looked at the differences in perceptions of benefits from Peru's 1978 legal reforms to land tenure in indigenous areas, and their effect on household income.

Forest News spoke to Duran, associate professor in the Economics Department at the University of Lima, in Washington.

Q: The study is partly based on perceptions. Why is it important to look at that aspect of land tenure and titling?

A: It's complicated to rigorously assess the effects of a reform because you would need a before and an after, which would imply following the same households through time and checking what changes have occurred. Another way to get at that is to ask the beneficiaries, 'how do you feel about the reform?'

I think perceptions are important because they allow to look into whether or not people actually find something good about what has been done.

Titling is being given a lot of emphasis in policies but it might not necessarily be what people see, or what women see, as most critical to feel sure about their rights. Maybe it's something that does not have to do with formal records, so asking people how they feel gives us information about what matters to them. And if the state's purpose is to help people and improve their living conditions and the way they feel about their lives, then I think that has to be taken into account.

Q: The study looked at 350 households in 20 different indigenous communities in Peru's Madre de Dios and Loreto regions. For you, what was the most interesting finding in your study?

A: For me what was most interesting is that women's perceptions matter and have a measurable effect on their household's wellbeing. In fact, a growing body of empirical research worldwide does find that strengthening women's tenure indeed leads to improved household outcomes through more investment in the farm and in the education of children, for example. Adding more hard evidence, in particular highlighting the importance of including women in the titling of communal land, can help in making the argument more compelling that equal rights and opportunities for women are beneficial for everyone. I am hopeful that the results I presented will contribute to increasing awareness about gender equality among government officials, NGO representatives and native communities' members.

I looked at several types of disagreements (between spouses) and the degree of disagreement about the effect of titling on the strengthening of land rights. The disagreement in which wives declare that they did not benefit and husbands declare they did was found to be statistically significant. Households in which she feels that she has not benefitted and he declares 'yes, I have' are worse off than households in which there is a perception of equality.

Q: How much difference was there?

A: Households with the described disagreement are 15 percentage points more likely to declare that they are poor. This result takes into consideration the influence of the age and schooling of each spouse, the wealth and geographic location of the household, among other factors.

Q: What is the message that comes out of your study?

A: I think the main message is that households have to be looked at as a group of individuals with different power and interests, rather than as a unit in which there is always agreement. It has to be a break from the conventional view that the head represents all the household members. This has been the approach implemented in policies for decades in Peru and in many other countries, where you choose a household and just deal with its head, and what he says is what matters. Particularly in the case of assets, such as land and houses, with such large implications for the empowerment of both men and women, it is key to hear from both husband and wife. This paper gives some information on how much this matters.

Q: We have just heard about similar cases of women's titling in places like Bangladesh and rural Vietnam. Can what you learned be applied to not only Peru and other parts of Latin America, but in other regions of the world as well?

A: Absolutely. I think the intra-household perspective is a very useful one as it allows the identification of bargaining and power dynamics among household members. Men and women are usually analyzed separately, as separate groups, but what happens when they interact? That needs to be looked into.

Duran's analysis is based on research that was part of Center for International Forestry of Research's Global Comparative Study on Forests Tenure reforms, which was carried out from 2014 to 2018 in Peru, Colombia, Nepal, Indonesia and Uganda.