



The Global Initiative
for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

**PARALLEL REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

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**Submitted by:
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The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR) is an international non-governmental human rights organization which seeks to advance the realization of economic, social and cultural rights throughout the world, tackling the endemic problem of global poverty through a human rights lens. The vision of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is of a world where economic, social and cultural rights are fully respected, protected and fulfilled and on equal footing with civil and political rights, so that all people are able to live in dignity.

I. Women's Land and Property Rights in Eritrea

1. Agriculture and pastoralism are the main source of livelihood for about 80% of Eritrea's population, with women playing a vital role as farmers and producers.¹ Women's land and property rights generally enjoy *de jure* protection in Eritrea. For example, as is highlighted in the State party report, Proclamation No. 58/1994 on Land Tenure aims to abolish the traditional land tenure system and gives equal entitlement and ownership right for women to land. Land has been allotted on a household level with both spouses owning land, and approximately 30% of female headed families have been entitled to land.²
2. However, while women's land and property rights are generally protected under the law, some gaps continue to exist, resulting in *de facto* violations of women's land and property rights. For example, reports indicate that Sharia law does govern inheritance rights in some instances, leaving Muslim women vulnerable to discrimination (up to half of Eritrea's population is Muslim). According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, in these cases, "women may inherit from their father, mother, husband or children and, under certain conditions, from other family members, but their share is generally only half of that to which men are entitled."³
3. In addition, the distribution of land is in most cases handled by land distribution committees at the village level. The National Union of Eritrean Women reports that negative attitudes of local authorities towards women's land rights prevents the principle of gender equality being implemented in practice.⁴
4. Similarly, the Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), a registered sub-regional civil society organization working in eight countries in the Eastern African sub-region, including Eritrea, highlights that: "The land rights of married women are often subsumed under male household heads when land is allocated and registered. The position of women in polygamous marriages is also unclear as husbands can claim land for one wife only. Many women also lack the means of working the land and face specific difficulties, especially in regions in which cultural norms prevent women from clearing land."⁵
5. Reports also indicate that women farmers in Eritrea also face discrimination in terms of access to agricultural programs, services and technologies.⁶ Considering the fact that

¹ Live & Learn Environmental Education, Eritrea Country Profile, <http://www.livelearn.org/locations/eritrea> (last accessed 13 January 2015).

² THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE OF ERITREA, REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995) AND THE OUTCOMES OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000), Country Report, 2014.

³ FAO, Eritrea: Full Country Report. Gender and Land Rights Database, http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights/home/report/en/ (last accessed 13 January 2015).

⁴ African Development Bank, Eritrea Gender Profile, 2009.

⁵ EASSI, Eritrea Profile, http://www.eassi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=59:eritrea&Itemid=53&layout=1 (last accessed 13 January 2015).

⁶ BELAINESH SEYOUM SAARE, WOMEN, GENDER ANALYSIS AND AGRICULTURE IN ERITREA: WOMEN AS EFFECTIVE AGENTS OF CHANGE, 2009.

Eritrea faces significant food security challenges, improving women's productivity as farmers could help to improve overall agricultural yield and access to nutritious food, particularly in poor and rural areas.

6. In light of the above information, the Global Initiative respectfully suggests that the CEDAW Committee urge the State party to take the following measures:

- 1) Take steps to fully implement and enforce Proclamation No. 58/1994 on Land Tenure, including through outreach, training and support of village land committees on women's land rights.
- 2) Ensure that Muslim women and girls enjoy equal inheritance rights in all cases, and are protected by the same legal standards guaranteeing gender equality as non-Muslim women and girls.
- 3) Take positive steps to ensure that women have access to productive land, agricultural training and extension services, seeds, tools and other necessary resources to make their farming practices sustainable and productive.