Title:

Invisible Partners: Strengthening Gender Equality in Agricultural Contracting through the UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide

Abstract:

Contract farming has become central to global agricultural systems, promising market stability, economic inclusion, and poverty alleviation. For over a decade, the UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide on Contract Farming ("the Guide") has provided crucial international legal guidance on agricultural production contracts. However, despite recognising women farmers' substantial contributions, the Guide lacks enforceable gender-informed provisions critical for real-world empowerment. This essay critically evaluates the Guide's approach to gender equality, highlighting gaps between recognition and meaningful implementation. Drawing upon international human rights obligations, comparative national frameworks, and practical sector-specific examples, the essay proposes targeted recommendations to strengthen future editions of the Guide, specifically advocating measures to ensure women's equal participation in negotiation processes, equitable access to resources, and gender-responsive dispute resolution mechanisms.

Gender Equality in the Guide: Existing Strengths and Opportunities

Contract farming, as framed by the UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide on Contract Farming ("Guide"), has significant potential to positively impact gender equality by acknowledging women's essential contributions to agricultural production, rural livelihoods, and food security.[1] Notably, the Guide recognises women's pivotal role in agriculture

[1] International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide on Contract Farming (Guide, 2015) https://www.unidroit.org/english/guides/2015contractfarming/cf-guide-2015-e.pdf.