

**GENDER AND URBAN AGRICULTURE:  
EXPERIENCES FROM A PREVIOUS  
PROJECT IN THE BAMENDA HIGHLAND PLANTEAU OF CAMEROON**

Moki Princewill Ogen.

**1. INTRODUCTION:**

Since the beginning of the year 2000, The Bugh–suh organic farmers CIG (BUSOFARM), started introducing the concept of urban agriculture in the city of Bamenda through discussions, contacts, and micro studies with some farmers, government officials and university authorities. Research surveys have shown that several actors including women, children and youths are important in ensuring food security at household and family levels. These actors have been grossly neglected in the formulation of policies and development programmes in urban agriculture.

My experiences, coupled with the results achieved by PAFSAT (Promotion of Adopted Farming Systems and Animal Traction), a previous project in Bamenda and North West Province, sponsored by G.T.Z. and the Cameroon Ministry of Agriculture, folded-up in the mid 90s. BUSOFARM decided to carry out a survey of what aspects of the PAFSAT farming system are still being implemented and by whom. This was to integrate the technologies and the trained farmers of this project into its proposed urban agriculture programme. PAFSAT Trained Farm Families on ecologically, socially and economically adopted farming methods which enable the farmers to use the same area of land permanently including the use of oxen to cultivate field and garden crops. The recommended farming system comprised elements of soil conservation and improvement, emphasizing on agro-forestry, crop rotation and mixed-cropping. Furthermore, the system was introduced with gender consideration, permitting husband and wife to work together on the same piece of land, which traditionally had been separated.

The purpose of the survey was to identify farmers who are experienced and knowledgeable in the PFS (Permanent Farming System), to be included as pilot farmers to start the urban agriculture programme in Bamenda. The short-term objective was to make an inventory list of existing PFS farmers in the area of study and investigate their current practices and gender roles.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AREA OF STUDY:** The study was planned and carried out as a field survey in Mendankwe, one of the Fondoms that make up the Bamenda Municipality, and provide one of the gateways into the city, from the Western Province. It is the administrative head quarters of the Province and Mezam Division. Mendankwe is found on the Bamenda high land plateau in the North West Province of Cameroon. Though in the tropical region, Mendankwe has a cool temperate-like climate, influenced mainly by topography with altitude ranging from 1500-2500m above sea level. Average rainfall is about 2400mm. Temperature average 23°C, ranging from 15°-32°C. Mendankwe has a high land Savanna vegetation with relics of Montane forest, and forms the main water shade of Mezam Division.

**THREE MAIN AGRICULTURAL LAND USE SYSTEMS:** Crop based farming, pure pastoralism and mixed crop-livestock systems prevail in the area. The crop based production system is the dominant activity of the area employing over 70% of the population (MINAGRI, 1987, Agricultural Census 1986). Major farms in the system are home gardens usually found around homesteads, and grassland farms. Farmers grow coffee, maize, cocoyams, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, tomatoes fruit trees etc. They also keep pigs, goats and poultry. This system provide food and income to the farm families.

The socio-cultural background of the Mendankwe people is very rich in tradition and customs. Like all other people of the Tikari tribe, have profound respect for seniority and hierarchy, and a high regard for their ancestors. They

remain in communion with their ancestors, annually respecting through sacrifices and prayer/libations, the intercessions of the ancestors for the well being of living progenitors. They have a well-organized social structure. The Fon rules the village in collaboration with traditional regulatory institutions, which formulate the general policy within which the Fon operates, but remains accountable to the institutions for the purpose of governance. The Fon is the epitome of all secret institutions of Mendankwe; the highest of which is the “Kwifor”. The traditional council assists the Fon and serves as the channel of communication between traditional institutions and the administration.

Mendankwe has a population of about 1800 people (Fon of Mendankwe, Fongwa II), with a high literacy level. They have a strong Christian background but their traditional religious practices are also respected.

**METHODOLOGY:** The participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) approach was used with particular attention given to gender roles in food production and marketing within the PAFSAT System. Data was collected from farm families trained in the PAFSAT System. Some farmers who were not trained but have transferred the technology to their traditional farms were also interviewed. This enabled data to be collected directly with those who have the knowledge and information needed.

Secondly, the data was collected through the application of PRA tools and techniques such as direct observation, discussions, and field visits, semi-structured key informant interviews using a checklist. The interview was used to inventory the farmers and farm practices with the help of the project’s database.

**GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR:** The survey identified and interviewed 30 farm families. 22 (73.3%) were trained, and 8 (26.6%) were not trained in the PFS but observed from neighbours and succeeded in transferring the technology to their fields.

At the time of this study none of the farmers still had oxen. They lost their oxen either due to theft or over-aged and no more suitable for traction. However, the main elements of the PFS were maintained. It is important to note here that, when a farm family is trained in the PFS, they still continue with their traditional farms. In this area, and the North West Province in general, the traditional food crops fields normally belong to the wife. On these farms the male farmer is responsible only for clearing, by tradition. The wife and children mainly work out the other activities. A comparison of the various farming activities is shown on table 1.

**Division of Labour for regular farming activities by Gender: (% of farmers)**

	Land Preparation	Ploughing	Weeding	Manure Application	Harvesting	Transportation from farm	Marketing	Processing	Grazing
Man Alone	63.3	-	-	-	6.6	-	-	-	90
Woman Alone	6.6	70	60	60	50	56.6	90	90	-
Married Couple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Whole Family	-	-	-	-	6.6	10	-	-	-
Wife & Children	-	20	30	40	36.6	33.3	10	10	-
Man & Children	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Hired Labour	30	10	10	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Source:** *Field Survey*

Women alone are responsible for more than 50% of labour force for almost all the farming activities in the 30 households studied, except for land preparation (63%) and grazing 90% where men are responsible. To ensure food securing, by making the produce available, women alone are responsible for transportation of food crops from the farm, in 57% of the households studied, 90% for marketing and 90% for processing. Women are not regularly

found in grazing cattle, but usually assist children to tether goats, sheep and pigs. The woman is involved in all the farming related activities in the households studied.

**RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING OTHER INCOME EARNING OPPORTUNITIES:**

In the area of study, many farm households have opportunities to earn additional income from none agricultural source. In the households studied women dominate in the exploitation of these opportunities. Table 2 compares the main activities that provide additional income other than farming and the gender distribution of responsibilities in the 30 households studied.

Activity	N° of Households	Male involved	Female involved	None	% of household
Petit trading	19	3	16	11	63
Local Liquor Sales	10	0	10	20	33
Crafts	16	4	12	14	53
Beer	8	2	6	22	26
Labour Hired	14	10	4	16	46
Office	9	7	2	21	30

**Source:** *Field Survey*

All the households visited had one or more other sources of earning additional income. 19 households are involved in petit trading (household provisions), and 84% of these are women. The highest source from the study is from crafts (bags, mats, and baskets) and the sale of beer. 75% of women in each case are occupied in this business. Not many of them do office work since they are full time farmers.

**RESPONSIBILITIES FOR REPRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES:** The scope of our study did not cover this aspect. However it was generally observed and

naturally too, that women are responsible for about 90% of the reproductive activities of the household. From bearing to delivery and childhood and infancy up-keep are done almost entirely by women.

**GENDER DIVISION OF ACCESSES TO AND CONTROL OVER RESOURCES:** This too did not fall within the scope of our study. The simple question asked to the respondents was, who owns land on which you are farming. The responses from the 30 households were in the affirmative that the land is owned by the man (husband). Cultural rights attributes property especially lands, to the man who is head of the family and has the power to manage and control landed property.

These other aspects were not investigated adequately. They however will be covered in October this year when the Urban Agriculture team in Bamenda will be conducting an exploratory research in the Bamenda City. More and better qualitative information will be collected then. From historical evidence however, it is difficult traditionally for a woman to have access to land in this area. It is supposed in the family that a woman should be married to a man somewhere, so can not inherit property.

#### **4. GENDER RELATED ISSUES IN URBAN AGRICULTURE**

According to Hosna (1998), studies carried out in Africa and particularly in Ghana, Uganda and Zimbabwe have shown that gender issues have been marginalised in all research programmes in urban agriculture. Experience shows that the past three decades has been characterized by a continuous degradation of the natural resource base. One of the cause of this regrettable situation is the fact that authorities in Sub-Saharan countries do not address gender problems and agricultural practices which do not only increase productivity, but also preserves the sustainability of the environment. (Henn, 1983, Hosna, 1998).

Women play an important role in agriculture in Sub-Saharan African countries (Droy, 1990), Tinker, 1988). Not withstanding, social science

researchers and other feminist groups have not yet paid any particular attention to the work of women in urban agriculture. Many agricultural projects have made a poor understanding of actors. Women in particular have been relegated to the second class, even though they are engaged in most of the practical work. This marginalisation of women in project formulation is a principal factor in the poor agricultural performance in sub-Saharan Africa. Much of the work done in Africa, indicate that the role of women in Urban agriculture continues to be analysed in isolation as opposed to other research components. Even though legitimate and true, the relationship between man and woman has not yet seen analysed as it should be (Hovorka, 1998).

### **GENDER CONSTRAINTS IN URBAN AGRICULTURE**

Various constraints have continuously prevented the women from actively participating in urban agriculture. Some of the main constraints centre around the following:

Their poor access to information, training and agricultural advisory services. It is important to note that a greater number of agricultural extension workers, where they exist, are men who are little prepared to talk to women.

Their poor access to factors of production – land, credit, agricultural material, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides etc. Women are marginalised in the management of the environment especially as customary laws empower the control of natural resources to men, in general.

Women are over loaded with work due to the fact that men have made themselves almost permanently absent at certain levels e.g at household level.

Women lack decision-making powers because they are absent at leadership positions.

An important constraint is the general perception that persistently considers women first as belonging to the kitchen and not farmers with the right to take decisions.

**OPPORTUNITIES:** The potentials for women in the promotion of urban agriculture are enormous. In Africa, women are the main producers of food crops and constitute the main pillar of urban and rural life. They are an important human resource representing about 52% (1986 census) of the national population, and provide a greater part of the agricultural labour force of 70% and produce 80% of food needs (FAO, 1994).

Women carry out the transformation of basic agricultural products and they do the commercialization of 60-90% of these products, yet they are deprived.

Women are more organised as far as group work is concerned. Groups are very important institutions for introducing innovations. Women groups for the promotion of women producers are common at all levels which can be used for validating and disseminating urban agriculture technologies.

**RELATED EXTERNAL AND UNDERLYING FACTORS:** The fact that urban agriculture has not been included in the formulation of food security strategies is partly due to the under estimation of labour costs which is often unpaid and unaccounted for in marginalised groups such as women and children. Secondly, researchers have not yet paid attention to the work of women in urban agriculture, even though women play an important role in agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In most African countries, agricultural development policies and programmes have not adequately treated the needs of small farmers especially women farmers. It should be noted that the lack of statistical information or poorly estimated statistics on active women at all levels has been a barrier to the realisation of studies concerning the situation of women engaged in urban agriculture. The absence of collection and dissemination of such information



on various activities by sex is one of the principal causes of the less interest in development of agricultural policies and research into the contribution of women in agricultural production and food security. Another cause is the non-representation of women in decision making organs and policy elaboration at national and international level.

**5. SUGGEST STRATEGIES TO BE APPLIED IN LOCAL POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN ORDER TO ENHANCE EQUITY IN URBAN AGRICULTURE:** It is necessary to take into account the specific needs of women and consider their views in the development process and analysis. The involvement of women will strengthen the chances for a sustainable and successful step in urban agriculture.

Urban planners and decision-makers have to incorporate gender issues in the conception and planing of urban services and infrastructure (Chaipa and King, 1997).

The important roles played by women in production activities have to be taken into account in principal actions related to training and extension (Jazairy et al, 1992).

Designers of agricultural programmes have to re-examine the relationship between knowledge and power which is a strong aspect of gender disparity.

There should be a general orientation strategically to rehabilitate the woman's status and the re-enforcement by putting in place specific measures that will provide her credits and other resources, technology, information, technical assistance and training. Women should fundamentally be considered as partners with equal privileges in all projects or programmes in the management of natural resources and the environment.

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