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**THE PARTICIPATION OF CAMEROONIAN WOMEN IN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Par Amin Rebecca M. Ntongho

ORSTOM

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Observatoire du Changement et de l'Innovation Sociale au Cameroun
Observatory of Change and Innovation in the Societies of Cameroon

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Observatory of Change and Innovation in the Societies of Cameroon

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Rebecca Amin is a Graduate Student in the Sociology Department of Yaounde I, working on gender issues and rural development. She is writing her doctorate dissertation on the Nweh women. This paper is a contribution to the Beijing World Summit in Women Issues.

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Abstract

More than half of the Cameroonian population is made up of hard working women who are taking care of their home and their communities. They have to ensure the daily household chores and are involved in the education of children. They raise food crops while participating in the cash crop farm of their husbands. In a time of economic crisis they complement or supplement their husbands revenues by working in the formal and the informal sector. And besides this they participate in different women groups to change cultural habits, to save money or to speed up the implementation of community projects. However they encounter a lot of difficulties that limit their capacity. These are due to the traditional constraints based on gender discrimination and to the lack of facilities and social infrastructures at the national level. It is therefore necessary at the national level to tackle each of these specific issues in order to find the appropriate policies that will help the women to bring out their full potential. The whole society will benefit from this.

Keywords : Cameroon, Women, Gender Issues, Community Participation.

Résumé

Les femmes représentent plus de la moitié de la population camerounaise. Elles consacrent la plus grande part de leur énergie aux activités familiales et communautaires. Elles doivent assurer les tâches ménagères quotidiennes tout en s'occupant de l'éducation des enfants. Elles cultivent des produits vivriers tout en accordant du temps aux cultures de rente sur les plantations de leurs maris. Dans le contexte actuel de crise économique elles complètent, ou même remplacent, les revenus de leurs maris par leur travail dans les secteurs formel ou informel. Pourtant elles rencontrent nombre de difficultés qui limitent leurs capacités d'action. Ceci est du autant aux pratiques discriminatoires des habitudes traditionnelles qu'à l'insuffisance, au niveau national, des infrastructures sociales ou économiques collectives. Il est donc maintenant nécessaire d'aborder de façon précise chacun des problèmes qui les concernent de façon à mettre en place, au niveau national, des politiques appropriées qui leur permettent de réaliser leur plein potentiel. La société dans son ensemble bénéficiera de telles actions.

Mots-clés : Cameroun, Femmes, Problèmes de genre, Participation communautaire.

Préface

The Cahiers of Ocisca is a regular series of working papers which presents the results of the surveys and studies undertaken by the Ocisca Program (Observatory of Change and Innovation in the Societies of Cameroon). All topics are related to the reaction and behavior of the various economic actors in the current context of economic crisis and structural adjustment. The research work on various issues of development such as the household standards of living, poverty and vulnerability, social innovation, the social impact of adjustment measures, the devaluation, the design of socioeconomic policies will be discussed in this series.

The Cahiers are designed to provide a medium for those who want to disseminate the informations collected in the various observatories and analyzed in the laboratories. They include the results of rapid surveys, the scientific analysis of survey data and also individual research work. The objective is to inform the policy-makers, and the main economic actors, of the on-going research work and, when feasible, to propose appropriate solutions for some of the issues that they have to solve.

It is within this framework that this issue of the Cahiers focusses on the problem of women's participation in community development. It is an important topic especially at a time when at the Beijing World Summit on Women Issues the international community will debate on the role of women in the building of a more equitable world.

This paper provides a general overview of the current situation of the women in Cameroon. As in nearly all countries women represent more than half of the people and are devoted to a wide range of activities which are essential to keep the families, the communities and the societies moving forward. Working hard with seriousness, they have to ensure the daily households chores, such as the fetching of the water and the fuelwood, the preparation of the food and are involved in the education of the children. They usually raise food crops to provide the basis for food security to the family, while, in the meantime, they contribute to the production of the cash crops traditionally cultivated by their husbands. In a context of economic crisis where men often have cut in salaries or loose their jobs, they try to increase the household income by working in the formal or the informal sector. And besides this, despite their usual constraints in time, they participate in different womens' groups with economic, social, political or cultural objectives. In that way they are at the frontline for the change of traditional habits often based on gender discrimination, for the use of informal financial markets that encourage household saving and for the efficiency in the implementation of community projects,.

The tradition has always given different roles for men and women in the society on areas such as the production, the family life and the management of social issues. As shown by the author, while men focus on their productive role and play their multiple role sequentially, women have to play them simultaneously which generates serious time constraints and less flexibility for action. Therefore women are usually not involved in the decision-making process at the community and national level and cannot express there view on issues that are related to their daily life.

But the modern urban life resulting from the development of the past decades, the present need for a quick economic recovery, and the new aspirations of the women themselves are imposing a change. Womens' capacity and energy is requested for the

improvement of the households standards of living and the development of communities. This is the necessary step to generate a new path of growth and development towards a more equitable society. Appropriate policies need to be designed to include a systematic participation of women in all the steps of the decision-making process, the education of girls and adults illiterate women, the development of the means of communication and information and easier access to social and economic infrastructures.

The raise of the world consciousness concerning these issues is on the agenda of the Beijing World Summit. This paper as well as the one describing the survival strategies of Yaounde women (Guimapi, Cahiers d'Ocisca n° 16) represent part of our contribution to the improvement of the women situation. This will be complemented by further studies on the women smoking the fish in Limbe (Njifonjou, Cahiers d'Ocisca n° 20) and the "buyam-sellam" women of the Muea market (Faustina, Cahiers d'Ocisca n° 25).

Jean-Luc Dubois
Ocisca Manager

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Introduction

Cameroon has a population of about eleven million. It is largely more rural than urban. About 7,542,000 of its inhabitants live in rural areas, about 4,000,000 of whom are women. On the whole women make up roughly 52% of the population. (National Census, 1987). Therefore women constitute a greater proportion of the Cameroon population.

Women are always at the forefront of their community's development although they face so many constraints. This is more serious in the rural areas where community development depends on the efforts of each person. Therefore no community, can afford to ignore one part of its population. Gary (1976) defines community development as a deliberate attempt by the community to work together towards altering the future of the community. He stresses the importance of both community initiative and leadership as well as participation by as large a portion of the community as possible. Although women have been ignored in so many respects, they been struggling to develop their communities in many ways.

For them community development starts in their homes. Women spend most of their time in performing household duties such as cleaning, taking care of children, fetching water and firewood and cooking. This household chores take most of their time because of the unequal division of labour between the men and the women and the lack of basic utilities and facilities. Women also play a major role in the education of children both formally and informally. This is a permanent struggle since their own level of education is quite low.

Women also are involved in agriculture. They produce food crops and sometimes cash crops. The food crop production is mostly at subsistence level. Since the responsibility for feeding the family lies with the woman, very little surplus is sold to raise a little income for the other family needs. The production of cash crop is a man's prerogative, so women hardly venture into it. They also lack the time for this since they also often take care of their husbands farms.

The need for money has pushed women into the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Some women work as civil servant, others in private companies and others carry out informal business activities. They are more often in the informal sector because of the ease of entry into this sector. Many of them enter in this sector during this period of economic hardship to support their husbands whose salaries have been reduced or who have lost their jobs. Despite these productive efforts, women are faced with a lot of problems. Among these is the lack of capital and credit to start good business ventures. This reduces their participation in economic activities and consequently community development.

This lack of credit and business capital as well as other problems has led to the formation of women's groups of different types such as economic, cultural, political and social groups. The objective is to help the women to put their efforts together and work for their benefit and that of the community at large.

However their efforts are often thwarted since they are not always involved in the decision making process within the family, in their community and in the country as a whole. Cultural and traditional barriers forbid the women to give their own views to any community problems and projects. And at the national level there are few women in the decision-making positions.

Despite this invisibility of women in the decision-making process, women continue to have a high rate of participation in community projects, usually providing labour and raw materials.

The government's activities and policies had not always had a positive influence on the rate of participation of women in community development. Poor infrastructures and facilities in most parts of the country, the role of the bureaucrats and the laws that disfavour women make it difficult for women to participate in community development.

This paper will elaborate on the above aspects of women's activities and the constraints they face economically, culturally, politically as well as socially. It will also bring out some recommendations as to how women's situation can be improved so that they can contribute effectivity in community development.

1. The Role of Women at Home

Women are in the forefront of social development of their communities and this begins at home with the role they play in the household chores, and other related activities, as well as for the education of children

a) The daily household chores

Women have a specific role to play at home daily to keep the family and household going. Their day begins with the fetching of water which takes a lot of time especially in the North of Cameroon and in most rural areas in the South. In these areas a shortage of water and poor water supply systems oblige them to spend much time in doing this activity, while in areas with good water supply it is not considered as work. Much time is also spent on looking for fuel especially in the semi-arid areas where wood is becoming more and more scarce. They also take care of food processing and preparation. To add to all this, women naturally perform their reproductive roles naturally. To them, child bearing is their natural duty, thus producing food to feed the children is also a natural duty. For men, getting involved in food crop production and helping in some household chores is not appropriate because it is considered a woman's job. As Ndongko (1976) points out, a "man performing a duty which is looked upon as that of a female is ridiculed, as is a woman who performs labour assigned to males".

This division of labour between sexes, is mostly due to cultural and social norms of the different communities. Men in various communities have what they can and cannot do in the home no matter how busy their wives are. In the absence of their wives, the girl child in the household will be expected to take their place. This perpetuates the system and the boys grow up to know that their duties in the household are different from that of the girls.

The woman's role at home remains basically the same irrespective of the social class she belongs to in the community. Each society/community in Cameroon has its own social structure. This differs from one part of the country to the other. For example in the Western and North West Provinces with strong chieftaincy systems women are titled. These are mostly women from the royal family who have been honoured in some specific way by their parents. These women are given special respect by both men and women in their community especially during cultural activities. Another class of women such as the chiefs children and the chiefs wives also receive special respect by both men and women. However, at the individual level at home, they do not receive any special treatment from their husbands. They carry on their household duties like any other women in their community.

The time spent on each activity differs from one part of the country to another, so the average time spent at work cannot be estimated for the whole country. However, a study done in

the Central South forest zone estimates that women work about 64.6 hours a week, excluding child care, of which 47% is spent on household work, 43% on agriculture and 10% on other productive activities. While men work on average 32.3 hours a week, of which 9% is spent on household chores and 42% on other productive activities (World Bank, 1990).

This work done by women within the family has a direct effect on the community development since it helps in the development of human capital. However, women face a lot of constraints in their work in the family, such as poor water supply, the lack of time saving devices and the continuous reduction of wood used for fuel. In some areas women move far away to get wood. If some of these problems were seriously looked into, women will have more time for other productive community developmental activities.

b) The education of children

Women are also involved in the education of their children. In most parts of Cameroon, especially in the rural areas and also in polygamous homes, women take a great responsibility in the education of their children. Thus the level of education of these children depends on their personal efforts. This is difficult because their income levels are low and they cannot perform economically productive activities. They are largely illiterate and cannot fully determine the importance of education.

The literacy rate of women has been on the increase since independent, but it is still below the national average. In 1976, the literacy rate of women was 33% as oppose to men which was 55% and in 1987, the women's literacy rate increased to 50% as opposed to 70% for men (UNDP, 1991).

There still exist some cultural constraints against educating girls. In many developing countries, there is a fear that educating girls will make them forget their traditional roles. It is more important in some cultures for girls to marry early than keeping them in school. There are also socio-economic constraints which helps reduce the number of girls in school. Girls are needed at home to help with child care, agricultural activities, water and fuel fetching and other household chores. Opportunity cost seems to be higher for schooling girls than boys. Girls are often accused of lacking interest in school because their involvement in household and other activities cause poor results (USAID, 1991). So there is a higher drop out rate among girls than boys.

The economic crisis has forced the government into reducing public spending. But health and education which help to meet basic human needs now and to invest in human capacity for the future, have been cut back disproportionately. However, the government mostly through multilateral organization, such as WHO and UNICEF, have tried to provide training for women in the area of health. They provide information on malnutrition, maternal-child health, immunization and family planning. Another area of training is home economics : cooking, sewing, child care and handicrafts. All these training are needed for the development of their families and communities. But these training rely mainly on literacy which is more needed for some areas than for others. For instance the women who have gone to school take more advantage of family planning facilities than those who never went (UNFPA, 1992). In fact, there is a link between family sizes, smaller families and education in many developing countries, Cameroon included.

Investment in women means more returns not only to women but also to their families and their communities, since educated women raise healthier, better nourished families. For instance, each added year of schooling for a mother results in a 5 to 10% decrease in mortality among

children (USAID 1991). Therefore the education of women is very important for their families and for the development of their community.

2. Women in Agriculture

The main occupation of the women is agriculture. They are mainly involved in food crop production including distribution. Women produce about 90% of all food crops in Cameroon. 88.6% of the female labour force is active in the food crop sector and 89% of this labour force derives its income from the food crop production (World Bank, 1990). Women also are involved in the cash crop production but at a very low scale since this had been reserved for the men. In fact women cannot produce cash crops because of the land tenure system which works in favour of men against women. However, women have dominated the food crop sector, producing different types of crops.

a) Food Crop Production

Most of the food produced in Cameroon is at the subsistence level. Food production is considered by women as a way to give them a status in the family, and it is one of the few areas where they have freedom to do what they decide. They own their harvest and can do what they like with it. Even the income derived from the sale of surpluses is theirs to use the way they want. Food crop production in Cameroon still uses traditional farming methods, the most common method is that of shifting cultivation which has many problems.

Women lack training or knowledge of better farming methods. Various government department and international organizations have been training them to improve on their agricultural activities and thus increase yield. For instance Heifer International is an international organization which has been working with women farmers. One of the areas that has greatly benefitted from these organizations' services is the the North West Province. In the 1980s this area was marred by hunger, and low incomes well below the country's national average. Today however, with the help of IFAD many parts of the North West Province are approaching self-sufficiency in food production. Food output have increased to the extent that women can now sell their surpluses for income (Madeley, 1989).

The main problem women face in food crop production is that of transportation from farm to home or market, processing, storage and marketing. Very little emphasis had been placed in this area unlike cash crop production which are exported. For this reason, much of what is produced gets spoilt before it can be consumed or sold. If the issue of transportation was solved, it will help increasing the income level of the women and thus improve on the welfare of their family and the development of the community as a whole.

b) Cash Crop Production

Women also take an active role in the production of cash crops although indirectly. The main cash crops produced by peasants are coffee, cocoa and cotton. Very few women in most parts of the country own cash-crop farms. The production of cash crops is mostly left for men which act as their main source of income especially in the rural areas. However the women do most of the work in their husbands cash crop farms such as weeding and harvesting.

Women are not involve in cash crop production for a lot of reasons among which the problem of land is essential. Since women in most of the Cameroonian societies has not the right

to own land they cannot grow perennial crops, thus the traditional land tenure system works in favour of men.

Traditionally also, women have been involve mainly in food crop production and it is difficult to break this tradition. Men will feel threatened by women, or in competition with them, if women also get involved in cash crop production. Moreover men will lose the labour force provided by women in their cash crop farms if women become too busy on their own farms.

Although food crop production can be as equally rewarding as cash crop production, the fact that women can not freely choose which activity they like, reduces their earnings and limits their participation in the community development.

c) Livestock

Women are also involve in livestock production, but in a small scale. They mostly help their husbands to provide food and to feed the animals. However, women own small amounts of domestic animals such as pigs, goats and chicken. In recent years, women have been taking an active role in fishery especially in the Central and South Provinces where they have been given training in this area.

The production of livestock and other related activity is very important for the generation of emergency funds. Women mostly sell their animals or birds when they are in immediate need of cash to solve some family problems.

4) Women in the Formal and Informal Sector

The Cameroonian women, as well as most African women, had been contented with staying at home and taking care of their homes and families. The production of food to feed them was all what was expected of them. But with the increase rate of scholarization and the economic hardship, women have found it necessary to work out side of their homes. Consequently they are present in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy, but more visible in the informal sector.

a) The formal sector

The formal sector can be divided into the public and the private sector. The number of women working in the public sector is very low. Since most public sector jobs request certificates, few women are employed because of their low level of education. They are mainly involved in labour intensive low wage jobs such as typists and secretaries. In the private sector women are mostly working in agriculture related areas. Most of them seeking employment outside their homes end up in this sector. They work in agricultural packaging and processing companies which are labour intensive. There is low self-employment in this sector because of the heavy procedure requested to start a business and also because they lack the capital needed.

b) The informal sector

Women have a high rate of participation in the informal sector. The economical difficulties which have caused cut in salaries and loss in jobs, has forced women who were full time house wives to look for alternative sources of income. Women's dual position of reproduction and production give them little time to carry out income generating activities. In order to use this

limited time, women engage in activities that could be tied or linked to their subsistence activity (Dixon, 1979). Women predominate in the food preparation sector because they also prepare food at home. They are also engaged in food stuff retail markets, what is generally called "buyam-sellam". Because of their time constraints and need to stay close to their homes, women do more of the retail trade in short distance than the long distance wholesale trade that men are used to do.

Women are continuously looking for work in the informal sector because opportunities are low in the formal sector. There is also more ease of entry into the informal sector since all the documents required in the formal sector are not requested there. The capital required to enter the informal sector is also lower and there is also a good use of local raw materials.

The informal sector is predominant in the towns. For instance in Yaounde there are more than 89,000 production units, employing almost 125,000 people (Kemgo, 1993). These activities are providing women with some income to use in their homes even if the returns are low as well as the wages. In fact the informal sector is what is keeping many families going in this period of economic difficulties.

Besides this the development of informal financial markets, is trying to cater for the financial needs of the women. It acts as a source of capital and credit for their business ventures.

4. The Women's Groups

The women in order to solve the common problems they face in their individual efforts have tended to form groups. With collective efforts, they can achieve much more than fighting individually. Various women groups exist at present in Cameroon in the economic, cultural, political and social areas. Some are made up of people living in the same area or performing the same activities.

a) Economic Groups

Economic groups include the savings and loans associations, the rotating funds and work groups, the common initiative groups and the women's cooperatives. The formation of economic groups is a way to empower women by improving the standard of living of their family and their contribution to the development of their communities.

The *savings and loans associations* and the *rotating funds* groups almost work in the same way. They are commonly known as *tontines* or *njangis*. These tontines have been increasing and developing partly because of the failure of the banking system in Cameroon to satisfy women's needs. Women need small amounts of loans to finance their small business ventures and these cannot be provided by the commercial banks. So the tontines act as an alternative source of financing (Amin and Amin 1992, Sikod 1990). The long procedures required to open and operate accounts in commercial banks, discourage women from saving there and the lack of collateral usually excludes them from obtaining credit. Therefore women use tontines, where they can save and borrow any amount of money. In the savings and loans associations, women save their money from the beginning till the end of the year; then their savings are disbursed together with the yearly interest accrued from the loans made by other members. These savings are used for different purposes. They can start some business ventures or buy things for themselves and their family, or pay for the children's schooling. Of recent, a new form of savings account has been introduced in many groups which is called the *School bank*. It disburses money to its members in August to help them prepare the children's return to school.

Another form of tontine which played an important role as a source of credit for economic activities, is the *rotating fund groups*. Their members meet on a specific day, and contribute a state amount of money which is given to one of the members following the criteria they jointly accept to use in receiving positions. This type of tontine helped many women to start small and medium size businesses ventures.

The *rotating work group* is another type of economic tontine which is very common in the rural areas. A group of women join to carry out some farming activity on one member's farm to the other until finally all the members' farms have been visited (Amin & Amin, 1992). These groups force even the laziest women to work. This also helps to reduce hunger in the community.

The formation of *cooperatives* and *common initiative groups* have also been on the increase in Cameroon. Women's cooperatives carry on various activities, from farming, processing and marketing of different food stuffs. Cooperatives give to their members a sense of responsibility and involvement in the community development because it provides built-in controls and internal management. They also organise free elections and public discussion on their programmes. As a group, women can also receive loans and aids from many organizations and institutions. An example is the Lewoh Women's Cooperative which has just received a loan from the FIMAC (a funding agency for small projects), to build their cooperative store. The common initiative group is similar to a cooperative but requires fewer members and funds. Any economic and social activity can be carried out provided it is legal and will help to improve its members' well being as well as providing some benefits to their communities (MINAGRI, 1993).

b) Cultural groups

Women from the same ethnic group or from the same village form cultural groups and associations both in the urban and rural areas. They are made up of people who mostly speak the same dialect, have the same beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and habits. These cultural groups form dance and juju groups and perform certain rituals in their communities as a way of perpetuating their culture and tradition. It is also a way of empowering women.

These cultural groups may also undertake development projects which are funded by the organization of cultural activities involving everybody in the community. This is becoming a common practice in Cameroon since many groups are building cultural halls in the towns and even in rural areas.

Women's cultural groups sometimes act like local political groups. They intervene in areas where women's rights and privileges are threatened by other members of the community. There are many of these type of cultural groups in the North West Province. A popular group of old women called the Takubengs demonstrates naked to make a point on what is not going on rightly in their communities. This causes awareness of a problem even if nothing is done about it. Another group who have found a way of defending their position in the community is the Kom women who perform a demonstration called Anlu when a man, or several men, commit offenses against womanhood. They group themselves in the offender's compound, sing, dance and leave excreta and urine in his compound (Diduk, 1984). In so doing, they are bringing out their views and thus participating in the changing of their community.

c) Political Groups

Women have also been forming political groups. However, they are not, at the national as active as they have been in other areas. They get involve in politics mostly through the women's wing of the political parties. But of all the numerous political parties now in existence, very few have a women's wing. The women's wing of these parties contributes to the development of the party, and the country as a whole, by bringing out issues that affect everybody in the society and women in particular. These political groups also carry out development activities in various communities.

d) Social groups

Social groups existed in Cameroon for long. Some of them started through cultural ties. There are many types, each trying in its own way to improve on the social and sometimes economic status of its members. Some of these groups are made up of women from the same tribe or region, and lately there are many groups that are made up of friends. It is difficult to say which type of groups is better because it depends essentially on the cooperation of their members or on the financial status or educational level of the women.

Social groups are developing both in urban and rural areas. In either case, they create a sense of solidarity and family. This groups carry on various social and sometimes economic activities, in most cases with a non-profit objective. Their main goal is to provide mutual assistance to each other in the event of a misfortune or a happy event, such as birth, marriages, deaths, illness and others. When a member is in need of all available support, they provide moral and material support.

Such groups usually manage social funds which are commonly known as *Sinking fund* in the urban areas and *Trouble bank* in the rural areas. From this fund they take out stipulated amounts as aid for the members who are in need. In some cases, development funds are contributed to when the members identify some community project to be carried out. Some groups also have savings funds from where members can borrow small amounts of money.

In the rural areas, in addition to the above activities, women groups help with farm work and household work when a member is unable to do it because of child birth, illness or any other reason.

Through all these activities women's groups are trying to develop themselves, their families and their communities by encouraging self-help and self-development.

5. Women in the Decision-making Process

Women are usually invisible in the decision making process. Very few women are heads of households or in the council of elders, or chiefs (Bryson, 1979). At home, the woman is always ignored when certain decisions concerning the family are to be made. At the community level, women are hardly consulted when community projects are being decided upon. And at the national level, there are very few women in decision making positions so that most of what concerns women is decided upon by men.

a) Decision-making at Home

In most male-headed households, the women's decision making ends at the decision on what to do with the household work. She must ask for permission from her husband before carrying out any economic activity (Howald and Wyckoff-Baired 1989). When she is refused permission there is nothing she can do about it. This is different from what the man does. He can tell the wife maybe to get her opinion or just to inform her. She cannot seek for credit without telling her husband. In many cases, husbands frown at their wives saving money in the formal and informal financial markets without telling them about it; and women avoid discussing this for fear of their husbands knowing they have money.

Concerning the education of children, the husband most of the time decides on whether the child should go to school and what type of education he should get. However, the economic hardship is pushing more decision-making powers to women concerning the education of children. This is a common thing in the polygamous marriages where the husbands are unable to pay for all their children's school expenses and it is to the women to take the responsibility (Ntongho, 1991).

b) Decision-making at the Community Level

Women are also invisible in the decision-making at the community level. The traditional culture in most cases prevents both women and men from sitting and discussing community problems together. Since there are hardly any women in the council of elders or as chiefs, women are associated to the discussion of community issues, even the titled women. Therefore, it is difficult for the women to take a full part in the community development process since their own views and problems are not heard.

However women have high rate of participation in development projects. They do most of the labour that is required such as cleaning the streets, the water supply areas and, in the rural areas, the chiefs compound. They also provide the raw materials and labour for building projects. But still they are not associated to the decision on what projects should be carried out.

On one side the local customs and institutions limit women's participation. On the other side, until recently, most of the sector selection for research and technical assistance excludes areas in which women work. (USAID, 1991). All this may, in the future, discourage women from active participation although, by tradition, they are supposed to obey what the men tell them to do or what the chief says they should do.

c) Decision-making at the National Level

At the national level, there are very few women in decision-making positions and in the public sector. Women's issues are not well catered for since women groups are not consulted when issues that concerns them or their community are to be discussed. Most times the men take their own decisions and impose them on the women who are simply supposed to accept.

The social workers also come to communities to implement programmes and projects decided upon by bureaucrats or elites, and women are often compelled to work with them. This reduces their enthusiasm to participate in certain community projects which has an impact on the community development.

6. The Role of the State

The role that the State plays through its policies and activities such as the provision of social and economic infrastructures, the role of its bureaucrats and the laws, influences the women's rate of participation in community development.

Cameroon is largely rural. These rural areas lack the basic facilities that will make women's workload lighter and their activities more productive. They lack of good roads and other means of communication that could facilitate movement of people and goods from place to place. They lack facilities as good water supply that will reduce the time spent on by women on carrying water, electricity that could allow them to use strong equipment or time saving gadgets. They also lack schools and health facilities. Women on the other hand has few possibilities of getting information on issues related to the market environment and opportunities, the credit, the management and product promotion (Howald and Wyckoff-Baird, 1989).

Many decisions are taken by bureaucrats in the government offices who do not get the women's points of view as it has been discussed above. The State through its agencies also concentrate on certain areas or certain issues in the community and ignore others. For example, the government has always concentrated on the marketing of cash crops, which is the men's domain, and ignored the marketing of food crops. Fortunately the community development department sometimes works with women's groups especially to help them marketing their production in excess. The State is even more reluctant in implementing projects focussing only on women. In some cases the condition requested for women to participate are very unfavourable. For example, when a certain level of education (schooling) is requested so women are easily disfavoured (Stromquest, 1986).

Some laws also work against women in many aspects. For example, wives cannot inherit their husbands property so women lack the land for crop production or other property that could be used as collateral. Married women are liable to their own business debt alone while they are still liable to their husband's debt (Martin & Haslin, 1992).

There is a lot of State activities and policies that disfavours women, and makes them unable to participate effectively in the community development. The State should keep his role being aware of the situation and neutral in its choices, therefore encouraging the overall citizens interest and distribute resources.

Conclusion

Women are active in every community. They are hard working taking care of both their homes and their communities. This is not easy for them because of the many problems encountered in their multiple tasks. It is true that both men and women play different roles in the society on productive, reproductive and community management areas. However men focus on the productive role and play their multiple roles sequentially, while women play their multiple roles simultaneously. Thus women have more constraints on time and less flexibility. Since men and women have historically played different roles in the society, they have different needs and face often different cultural, institutional, physical and economic constraints, many of which create bias and discrimination. Meeting women needs through appropriate policies to promote equity, and equal opportunities, involves the setting of action aiming at eliminating these bias. (World Bank, 1993).

This will mean treating one after the other all issues that affect them seriously. The time spent on household chores could be greatly reduced with time saving devices such as grinding machine, with good water supply, energy saving fire places and, of course, electricity for the use of some facilities. This is possible if women are educated on their basic needs and the importance and use of the facilities around them. Above all, education of girls should be highly encouraged so that the future of women will improve and thus that of their children.

In agriculture women's productivity can be greatly increased by an improvement in the tools used for cultivation, harvesting and processing and by training on methods of cultivation, harvesting, processing, transportation, storage and preservation. This will help increase their income and reduce the food shortages that often occur during certain periods of the year and thus improve nutrition (Bryson, 1979). For example UNDP trained women in all above aspects in addition to the promotion of small-scale group enterprises. Most of this training is usually done by NGO's because the government has ignored issues that concern women to a large extent. This can be seen in the marketing of cash crops, which is men's domain, carefully organized by the government, while the food crop marketing is neglected (Endeley, 1988).

Women's participation in formal and informal sectors of the economy will increase if they had a certain level of education and training. More schools especially primary schools are needed and more girls should be educated. Adult schools are also needed in many areas to help the women increase their level of education in order to better understand their environment and so better participate in any sector of the economy.

Women's groups are becoming common place now in the Cameroonian society in the rural and urban areas developing a great sense of solidarity and family. These groups form a forum through which rural areas get aids from NGO and international bodies generating a new form of cooperation between the rural areas and the exterior. They are also a way by which people discover their own creativity and can be used to provide education. For example, the women of the Pouma district in Cameroon have been trained on the processing of cassava to gari by some technicians from Ghana with the aid of UNIFEM (UNIFEM, 1995). The most common groups are the tontines, providing a large source of capital and savings for the women. They could also be used for the education of women, therefore they should be legalized in order to carry out their role of informal financial market with less problems. This would turn these groups to something similar to the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh (PNUD, 1992).

Women's participation in the decision-making process is too limited. If women constitute more than half of the population, there cannot be less than half of the people deciding things and trying to think for the majority. This is not productive as Julius Nyerere stated expressing his concern that women are left out of planning and decision-making : "a person does not walk very far or very fast on one leg, how can we expect half the people to be able to develop a nation? Yet the reality is that women are usually left aside when development needs are discussed, and also when the method of implementation are being decided upon" (Julius Nyerere, 1985). If women were involved in project planning and implementation, it will increase savings and reduce cost speeding up the community development. As IFAD realized, when the poor participate, productivity is higher (Madeley, 1989). An important way of releasing poor peoples potential, is by letting them participate in the design and implementation of their projects deciding what they need and want to do. If this is allowed then the rate of participation will be high.

The state has been neglecting women's views and imposing its own ideas of what it thinks the women need. This method of development does not encourage women to participate. As Jacobsen, (1980) discusses, community development is a preferable strategy for development

because many goals, strategies and techniques employed are consistent with the way the community is and the resources available. So we women should be allowed to express their needs and use what method they can to solve their problems, with the government and NGOs only acting like guides. This will facilitate their integration in the development process. This integration of women should not be considered as the problem of a specific group but the problem of everybody in the society as a whole. (Aissatou, 1986)

The integration of the woman in all aspects of community development, could fasten the social and economic recovery of Cameroon from the current economic crisis. It will lead to the finding of new paths of growth and innovation. This is because through their participation in the development of the community, they will modify the decision making process, generate new initiatives, improve human capital, develop leadership skills and improve other aspects of the community. Therefore helping women to bring out their full potentials should be one of the main objective of social development policies.

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