

## ARTICLES ORIGINAUX

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## Access to Arable Land by Rural Women in Cameroon

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### Summary

*This study examines rural women access to and control of agricultural production resources in arable small-scale sustainable agricultural production in a developing country setting. Specifically, the study addresses the women's level of accessibility and control of arable land in agricultural production in the North West Region of Cameroon. The objectives of the study were: (a) to determine the extent to which rural women in the study area gain access to and control small-scale arable land; and (b) to assess the degree of association between access to small-scale arable land by rural women and their level of control of the arable land. The study relied on a one-shot case study design. The method of data collection consisted surveying a randomly selected sample of 1,120 rural women involved in small-scale agricultural production in the study area. The data obtained from the survey were analyzed using the following statistical procedures: (1) frequency distribution, (2) correlation analysis, and (3) one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results revealed that rural women farmers do have access to arable land through their families, but do not control arable land, and there is no association between access to and control of arable land. The study recommends that developing countries involved in arable small-scale agricultural production, should consider adopting agricultural policies that include rural women in decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of agricultural production inputs and outcomes.*

### Résumé

#### L'accès des terres agricoles arables par les femmes rurales au Cameroun

*Cette étude examine l'accès et le contrôle des ressources de production agricole dans les petites exploitations arables et durables par les femmes rurales dans un cas de pays en développement. L'étude met l'accent sur les niveaux d'accessibilité et de contrôle des terres agricoles arables par les femmes de la Région du Nord-Ouest au Cameroun. Les objectifs de cette étude sont: (a) déterminer le niveau auquel les femmes rurales dans la zone d'étude obtiennent l'accès et le contrôle des terres arables dans les petites exploitations agricoles; (b) déterminer le degré d'association entre l'accès à des terres arables des petites exploitations agricoles et le niveau de contrôle de ces terres arables par les femmes rurales. L'étude a été conduite avec une seule descente sur le terrain. Les données ont été collectées à travers une enquête effectuée sur un échantillon de 1.120 femmes rurales tirées au hasard et engagées dans les petites exploitations agricoles dans la zone d'étude. Les données obtenues de l'enquête ont été analysées en utilisant les méthodes suivantes: (1) la distribution des fréquences, (2) l'analyse de corrélation, et (3) l'analyse de variance à un facteur. Les résultats ont montré que les femmes rurales ont accès à des terres arables à travers leurs familles, mais ne contrôlent pas ces terres. Il n'existe pas de corrélation entre l'accès et le contrôle des terres arables. Cette étude recommande que les pays en voie de développement impliqués dans la production agricole à petite échelle doivent adopter des politiques agricoles qui intégreraient les femmes rurales dans la prise de décision, la réalisation, et l'évaluation des intrants et produit des productions agricoles.*

### 1. Introduction

In Cameroon like in most African countries, women constitute about 52% of the population and their contribution to the country's agricultural and economic development is unavoidable (6, 7, 10). Because farming was initially presented as a male occupation for some speculations such as cash crops, many societies could not easily understand and accept that women could also own and manage large parcels of cash crop

lands or create their own plantations. Most societies attributed only the food crop management roles to women while devoting the speculation in cash crop production to men. This could be because, before 1990s cash crops were sold at high prices yielding high incomes to men who controlled them. However, with the recent decline in the price trends of cash crops, the fight for food security and the evolution of

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the international food policies, women now do a large proportion of the agricultural work on food crop farms. The undisputable place of women in the agricultural production system is further reinforced by the rapid social and economic changes which have affected the traditional pattern of gender roles. For instance, the devastation caused by the HIV/AIDS, the fall in world prices of cash crops, the increasing male rural exodus which has significantly reduced their labour force, and the rise in women literacy rate are some major factors which have stimulated further debates on the share of roles in agricultural production between men and women (8, 9). In Cameroon for instance, there is increasing awareness of women's role in increasing and sustaining food production, and in spite of their increased role in food production, little has been done to eliminate the constraints they experience as food producers and providers. These constraints include the access and control of arable land and are due to traditions and customs and the inexistence of appropriate legislations to protect women. Policy makers have paid little attention to women and the roles they play in rural society, despite their predominance in agricultural production (4). By discounting their contributions, many agricultural development policies and programs designed to alleviate impoverishment actually are making the problem even worse. Although most women are willing to create their own plantations, they are frustrated because they do not have equal rights as men to land access and control. In this study access to land denotes either the right or opportunity for someone to loan and use a piece of farmland for diverse agricultural purposes, and return it later to the owner, either after harvest or at the conclusion of contractual obligations. On the other hand land control connotes the management of a piece of farmland in respect to diverse decisions on its use, such as the type of crop to plant or the mixed cropping system to be used on it. It is therefore evident that the current state of the rural women's access to and control of arable land in Cameroon in particular, is one of the constraints in efficient food production. Sustained food sufficiency could therefore be obtained in Cameroon through the allocation of better land ownership status to rural women, the recognition of their involvement in the agricultural production process, and the reflection of the value of their role in policy formulation. It is therefore important to resolve this problem of women's access to and control of arable land (4). This would enhance women's status in agriculture and rural society, and significantly reduce population and food production problems, and thereby help in boosting economic growth and development (1). This is particularly important as the growing scarcity of resources within subsistence economies increases women's burden and erodes their agricultural productivity. Unfortunately, little is being done to reverse this trend (1). This study was therefore aimed mainly at determining the extent of rural women's access and control of arable small-

scale land. The study hypothesis was that: "There is no association between access to arable small scale land and control of arable small scale land".

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Study population, unit of analysis and sampling technique

The study population composed of rural women involved in arable agriculture in the North West Region of Cameroon. A multistage stratified random sampling was used for the study. A total sample size of 1,120 respondents was identified with 1,118 completely filled and returned questionnaires representing 99.82%. The unit of analysis was the individual rural woman of the North West Region who participated in this study.

### 2.2. Data collection and analysis

Data for the study were obtained from primary sources. The primary data were collected using a set of structured and pre-tested questionnaires, which were administered to the rural women farmers of the study area. Combinations of both open and close-ended questions were used. The technique of data collection was reactive. In administering the questionnaire, the researcher was assisted by well-trained indigenous females from the study area to avoid the problem of language barrier and unforeseeable cultural norms of a male trainee being close to the females. The enumerators were females from the study area because the rural women of the North West Region of Cameroon are more fluent in their dialects. This was to ensure that the women would feel more comfortable answering the questions sincerely to someone who is their gender. This study used the following statistical techniques and procedures: (i) frequency distribution, (ii) correlation analysis, and (iii) one way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Rural women farmers' access to arable small scale land

Table 1 displays the frequency distribution of rural women farmers according to their source of land. The sources of land are family, renting, as a gift, soliciting and communal land. The table indicates that a large majority (68-74%) of the respondent rural women were of the opinion that their access to arable small-scale land was mostly from family and from soliciting, while a majority (53%) of the surveyed rural women were of the opinion that their primary source of land for arable small-scale agriculture was as a gift. Only a few of the surveyed rural women were of the opinion that they accessed arable small-scale land from renting (38.5%) and communal (22%) land.

Table 2 presents the result of the analysis of variance for the extent of rural women's access to arable small-scale land. It also displays the Bonferroni multiple comparison test of rural women's extent of access

**Table 1**  
**Sources of Rural Women's Access to Arable Small-scale Land**

	Not a Source of Land Access		Source of Land Access		
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	N
Family	288	25.80	830	74.20	1118
Renting	688	61.50	430	38.50	1118
Gift	530	47.50	587	52.50	1117
Soliciting	362	32.30	756	67.70	1118
Communal	871	78.00	245	22.00	1116

Where N= Number of respondents.

to arable small-scale land from various sources (that is, family, renting, gift, soliciting, and communal). The mean score for the extent of access from family was found to be the highest (3.47). This was followed by soliciting with a mean score of 3.25; gift with a mean score of 2.76; renting with a mean score of 2.42; and communal with a mean score of 1.98. The difference between the Bonferroni multiple comparison test showed that the score of the mean difference between the various sources of access to arable small-scale land was found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha levels. Hence, it can be concluded that sources of arable small-scale land access emanate from family, soliciting and gift giving, but that the rural women surveyed accessed arable small-scale land mostly from family.

### 3.2. Rural Women's Control of Arable Small-scale Land

In order to assess the extent to which rural women have control over arable small-scale land, a frequency analysis was performed from all the 1,118 rural women who completely filled and returned the questionnaires. The results of the analysis showed that a percentage of 2.9%, 21.7%, and 51.1% of the respondents have no control at all, have no control, and were undecided, respectively. By adding those three percentages, this shows in total that, a majority (75.7%) of the rural women believe that they do not control arable small-scale land. Hence, it can be concluded that rural women in the study area do not have control over arable small-scale land. However, the survey showed that only 8.9% have control and 15.4% definitely have control over arable small-scale land.

### 3.3. Association between Rural Women's Access to Arable Small-scale Land and Control of Arable Small-scale Land

Access to arable small-scale land and control of arable small-scale land, especially for rural women farmers, is central to poverty reduction in rural areas. This is because where access to arable small-scale land and control of arable small-scale land are limited, the result

**Table 2**  
**One Way Analysis of Variance on the Extent of Access to Arable Small-scale Land from Various Sources**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Family	1118	3.47	1.408	.042
Renting	1118	2.42	1.405	.042
Gift	1117	2.76	1.149	.034
Soliciting	1118	3.25	1.264	.038
Communal	1116	1.98	1.132	.034
Total	5587	2.78	1.387	.019

**Bonferroni Multiple Comparisons Test for the Extent of Rural Women's Access to Arable Small-scale Land**

(I) Source of Land Access	(J) Source of Land Access	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Family	Renting	1.047(*)	.054	.000
	Gift	.702(*)	.054	.000
	Soliciting	.220(*)	.054	.000
	Communal	1.491(*)	.054	.000
Renting	Family	-1.047(*)	.054	.000
	Gift	-.344(*)	.054	.000
	Soliciting	-.826(*)	.054	.000
	Communal	.445(*)	.054	.000
Gift	Family	-.702(*)	.054	.000
	Renting	.344(*)	.054	.000
	Soliciting	-.482(*)	.054	.000
	Communal	.789(*)	.054	.000
Soliciting	Family	-.220(*)	.054	.000
	Renting	.826(*)	.054	.000
	Gift	.482(*)	.054	.000
	Communal	1.271(*)	.054	.000
Communal	Family	-1.491(*)	.054	.000
	Renting	-.445(*)	.054	.000
	Gift	-.789(*)	.054	.000
	Soliciting	-1.271(*)	.054	.000

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Mean: Average of rural women's score on arable small-scale land access from the various sources.

I-J: Difference between the scores of sources of land access

is translated to reduced food productivity, consequent lowered returns, and a decline in the overall welfare of the farm families.

The test of the hypothesis regarding the association between rural women's access to arable small-scale land and control of arable small-scale land was performed. The results in table 3 show the correlation analysis of the association between rural women's access to arable small-scale land and control of arable small-scale land. This table indicates that the mean score of access to arable small-scale land is 42.75 with a corresponding standard deviation of 5.364, while the mean score for the rural women's control of arable small-scale sustainable land is 6.56 with the corresponding standard deviation of 1.872. This means that a good proportion of rural women were of the opinion that they had access to arable small-scale land but very few of them were of the opinion that they had control over arable small-scale land. The corresponding correlation between the two variables shows a Pearson correlation of 0.040 and a corresponding p-value of 0.181 (two tailed test at 0.01 significance level), suggesting a statistically weak correlation between the two variables. Hence, the null

hypothesis is rejected allowing us to conclude that there is no association between access to arable small-scale land and control of the arable small-scale land by rural women farmers in the North West Region of Cameroon.

#### 4. Discussion

Land is a critical resource for rural women for food production and income. It is also a key social and economic asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in policy decision making. The results of access to arable small-scale land and control of arable small-scale land indicate that the prevailing pattern of land accessibility could be due to socio-cultural or land tenure practices in the study area. It was recognized from the World Bank policy research report that in many Sub-Sahara Africa countries, married women obtain land rights chiefly through their husbands as long as the marriage endures (10). It would appear the unmarried women are able to access arable small scale land through gifts renting or the community. This study has revealed that rural women farmers in the study area, generally, neither have access to arable small-scale land nor control of arable small-scale land. This finding is consistent with Allison Goebel and Jeanne Koopman's conclusions that divorced women nearly always lose access to their ex-husband's land (5, 10). This may be a reflection of the paternalistic nature of the culture of the study area and most developing countries where women have minimal roles in economic decision making. Among the sampled women who were of the opinion for maintaining the right of control over the arable small-scale land, they claimed that the main factor supporting their decision making role in the control of the land is because they acquired the land themselves through soliciting or as a gift.

**Table 3**

**The Association between Rural Women's Access to Arable Small-scale Sustainable Land and Control of Arable Small-scale Land**

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Average scores for the access to farm – index	42.75	5.364	1118
Average scores to control of farmland – index	6.56	1.872	1118

#### Correlations

		Average scores for the access to farm – index	Average scores to control of farmland – index
Average scores for the access to farm – index	Pearson Correlation	1	.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.181
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	32137.364	449.460
	Covariance	28.771	.402
	N	1118	1118
Average scores to control of farmland – index	Pearson Correlation	.040	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.181	.
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	449.460	3913.485
	Covariance	.402	3.504
	N	1118	1118

Mean: Average of rural women's score on arable small-scale land access and rural women's score on the control of arable small-scale land on the Arable Small-scale Farming survey instrument.

This assertion is supported by Cheryl Doss's research results which show that rural women farmers would lose their rights to arable small-scale land upon divorce (2). However, there is a probability that widows may lose a major portion of their deceased husband's land to the brothers-in-law or other relatives. The result of this study on the control of arable small-scale land is also consistent with the findings of Jacques du Guery and Daphne Topouzis who also reported that rural African women usually lose control of arable small-scale land following the death of their spouses. According to Guery and Topouzis, widowed women have virtually no tenure inheritance rights with which to ensure food security for themselves or their children. It is only through their male children or male relatives from their husband's lineage that women have land tenure rights (3, 10).

In this study, the results revealed that there was no statistically significant positive association between access to arable small-scale land and control of arable small-scale land by rural women farmers in the study area. This therefore indicates that access to arable small-scale land by rural women does not result or lead to rural women farmers gaining control of arable small-scale land in any way.

## 5. Conclusion and policy recommendation

The following conclusions can be made from this study: sources of access to arable small-scale agricultural land include the family, soliciting and as a gift, with as much as 74.2% of the rural women surveyed acquiring arable land from family sources. A majority (75.7%) of rural women in the study area do not control arable small-scale land. There is no association between access to and control of arable small-scale land. There are many areas of the economy in which rural women play vital but officially ignored roles, thus very little data is available to inform policymakers. Collecting gender disaggregated information is a first step toward developing gender responsive policies and programs. The agricultural crop production sector remains the major source of food for most Sub-Saharan African countries. The

bulk of agricultural production processes are carried out by women, but they have the least access and control and/or use of production resources. Access to and control of agricultural production resources and services is essential for poverty reduction among rural poor, especially women. Yet, there is need for policy makers to address the problem of land access and control by men and women on an equitable basis for greater participation in development of both sexes. Agricultural policies, particularly in most developing countries are not always fully attuned to ensure the availability, affordability and appropriateness of agricultural resources. Access to agricultural production resources cannot be addressed in isolation from the rest of the agricultural system. Solutions must begin with an understanding of local agricultural conditions involving the participation of farmers in farm decision-making, policy formulation and implementation. This is critical because of their local knowledge and proximity to the challenges of agricultural production. Local farmers live more closely to the reality of their environment. Most rural African men have no legal obligations to support a wife/wives and children, even while the marriage lasts, and they are free to terminate the marriage at will. Rural women are still subordinated to the men and, thus, are marginalized in their ability to access, and control, agricultural production resources. A professional consultation should begin between policy makers and bureaucrats on the issue of rural women's access to and control of agricultural production resources. A policy enactment, as a consequence of consultation, implies that all parties concerned should be trained on the importance of access and control of agricultural food production resources by rural women and on the facilitative measures to ease the process of acquisition and or control of these resources.

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