Women and Periurban Agriculture in the Niayes Zone of Senegal

Any project has to identify its stakeholders, their roles, the dynamics in decision making at different levels, and include the needs, priorities, role and importance of women and men. This gender analysis will show that there are varying levels of access to resources and power. Little research has been conducted on gender and urban agriculture in Senegal. In the following text the role of women in periurban agriculture in the Niayes zone is described based on case studies, and constraints and needs for further research are outlined.

The periurban zone of the Niayes has a long tradition of market gardening and fruit and flower production in combination with small-scale animal husbandry, both for self-consumption and sale on urban markets. The first important migrations of shepherds towards the Niayes zone date from around 1915, while horticultural activities started in 1903 with the garden of Hann (Bellot and Denis, 1989). Nowadays several modern horticultural and animal industries attract development projects.

WOMEN IN PERIURBAN AGRICULTURE

Unlike the other West African countries, where the majority of women work in periurban and urban agriculture, in the Niayes zone, few women own farms. Women are involved in horticultural activities where they account for 20% of small farm holders, but the area cultivated seldom exceeds one hectare.

Women have only recently started to be counted in the modern crop export systems. The problem of their limited access to production factors (particularly water and land) is often the reason why women tend to specialise in horticulture or less water- and fertiliser-demanding crops, like leafy vegetables (the bissap Hibiscus sabdariffa, Amarantha Amaranth ssp, etc., see box).

Women actively work as part of the family or employed work force in urban and periurban market gardening. Harvesting, sorting and packaging of food groundnuts, tomatoes, or green beans (export products) are highly labour intensive. Exporters appreciate particularly the women in the labour force. Women and young girls represent 68% of the labour force involved in harvesting activities and 100% of those in sorting and packaging operations (Ba et al., 2002). These agricultural activities are an important source of revenue for the poorest families living in the production areas. During harvest periods for market

### Participation of the family members in the management of family livestock in the periurban zone of Dakar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>No. of households</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribution in equipment</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building of shelters</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for the chickens</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watering of the chickens</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning of shelters</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of the chickens</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of chickens</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing of chickens</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of eggs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing of eggs</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference: Mandiamy, 2002

Participation of the family members in the management of family livestock in the periurban zone of Dakar.
Production and marketing of bissap (Hibiscus sabdariffa) in Senegal's horticultural region of Senegal. Situated 150 kilometres from the capital city, it has 944 inhabitants (489 men and 455 women). They are very active in market gardening and the main crops cultivated are tomato, bissap, eggplant and pimento. Bissap is a leafy vegetable exclusively cultivated by women, on or next to their husbands' farms. Women run very small plots of land (180 - 750 m2) when under monoculture. During the rainy season, women take advantage of lands abandoned by their husbands and the availability of water and cultivate larger areas.

Depending on both the season and harvest frequency, the yield in leaves is between 100 and 200 kg for each 100 m2. Because of the scarce nature of the product, dry season prices are more interesting and can be up to double that of rainy season prices. The marketing does not require long travel. The leaves harvested the day before are sold in the local market of (Mboro) or in the surrounding towns’ markets. For more remote destinations, businessmen (called bana-banas) come to buy the leaves at the farms.

The average annual income earned by each woman from the cultivation of bissap is 340,000 CFA F (i.e. 520 euro). Their income from bissap cultivation represents 4% of the total agricultural revenues of women in the dry season and 48% in the rainy season. The importance of bissap in the economic life of the village is obvious. This crop, thanks to the revenues it yields, allows women to complement the financial contributions of their husbands and even in some cases to exceed them. Because of the low production costs and the revenues generated within a short time frame, the bissap is considered by women to be a crop that can help fight against poverty. It allows them to buy or pay for articles other than food: cloth, jewels, schools fees and medicines for their children. Women participate also financially in the different activities of the village. But despite these advantages, women are still confronted with constraints such as access to land and inputs. 

Based on Dief et al., 2002, gardening products (December–April), each labourer may earn between 1000 and 1500 CFA per day (656 CFA to 1 Euro) on average, and two or three members per family may be employed in this way.

Women are also given more responsibilities in the management of small ruminants and poultry in family husbandry (see table).

PROCESSING AND MARKETING

Processing and marketing of fresh vegetables are exclusively the tasks of women. Traditionally, the head of the family cultivated the land and led the cattle and his wives sold the surplus production at the market. Nowadays, however, the distribution of labour in periurban zones seems to be changing. The emergence of new realities may provide women with new economic environments (if the family tradition does not confine the women). Processing and marketing of agricultural products have become full-time activities. Many women have low but steady revenues on a daily basis to satisfy both their needs and the needs of their families.

And women constitute an important economic force in the Niayes zone: 73% of them have revenues drawn from the marketing of miscellaneous agricultural products and 12% of them have revenues higher than 200,000 CFA F a month (305 euros, Kane, 1998).

The income generated by the different farming and marketing activities gives women a certain autonomy for action not only within the households but also within the community. They organise tontines (see UA Magazine no. 9) and participate in the running of women’s organisations, even if these are informal.

CONSTRANTS

The sustainable integration of women in the economic system faces several obstacles (Ba and Guèye, 2000 ; Badiane et al., 2002).

In general women have little access to information, training and advice on agriculture. A limited number of women have received agricultural technical training in the zone, but most of them are illiterate, despite literacy campaigns. This limits the efficiency of any learning process of technical and financial management.

Moreover, women lack time, but this is often put forward by their husbands to justify the non-attendance of their wives at training sessions on farming techniques. But, indeed women lack time because of the burden of family tasks and their multiple functions. Their work days are long, between 12 to 15 hours a day.

Women have little access and control, particularly over production factors such as land, water, credit, farming equipment, quality seed, fertilisers, and pesticides. Women have no control over the land property. The plots they farm are lent to them by their husbands, leased or borrowed. Most of this land has a limited surface area and is of poor quality. Moreover, the lack of access to fertilisers and funds is a hindrance for the development of important agricultural activities. Women also lack decision-making power in the household and in several local decentralised bodies. Women are not well represented in decision-making bodies.

PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUSION

Technical innovation is crucial to allow women to save time, increase their production potential and improve the quality of their lives and those of their families.

Women should have access to production means, services, and fertilisers in order to get out of poverty and participate in sustainable development. They must be trained, informed and advised at the same level as men. Functional literacy seems to be an extremely useful means to master new production techniques and processing using a language they know.

Supporting measures such as the purchase of equipment that can alleviate women’s workload must be promoted. These small achievements should be included in the requirements for the success of agricultural programmes in which women are involved. The alleviation of domestic work would allow them more time participate in training and animation sessions.

Understanding the role of women in periurban agriculture and supporting them in achieving this is one of the requirements for the success of any development programme or project. Gender analysis should not be considered as a separate component when elaborating the programmes. It must be taken into account in all stages, from proposal design and implementation all the way through to the collection, interpretation, analysis, monitoring and evaluation of the data.

Tools are available to assist in the integration of women, but this process must be guided by an orientation towards and greater inclusion of the concerns of both men and women. Further thinking and discussion on the approaches, research and planning tools and methods on gender and urban agriculture, like those initiated by RUAF, will allow us to fill this information gap on the gender dimension of urban agriculture in West and Central Africa.

REFERENCES