

# Fact sheet: Cameroon - Women, agriculture and rural development

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Population: 12.3 million

Growth rate: 3.0 %

Fertility rate: 5.8

IMR: 61/1000 births

GNP/head: US\$ 200

Source: World Bank Atlas, 1992.

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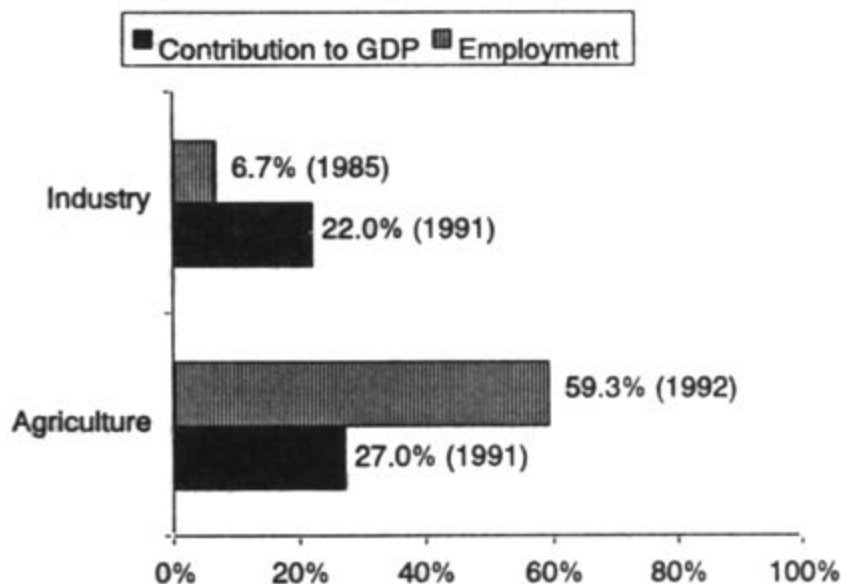
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## Importance of agriculture to the economy

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of the country, accounting for 27% of the GDP in 1991 and employing 59.3% of the labour force in 1992. The principal cash crops are cotton, coffee, which accounted for 16.7% of exports in 1987, and cacao. The main subsistence crops are roots, tubers, plantain, millet and sorghum. Livestock is also important to the food supply. The country is generally self-sufficient in food.

Until recently, research and financial assistance have been directed to the export cash crop sector at the expense of subsistence food production. The fall in the price of raw materials on the world market has negatively affected the economy and the agricultural sector in particular. Consequently, the country's current agricultural policy includes increased food production, revitalization and protection of markets, and the development of improved food processing and storage.

Sectoral Contributions to GDP and Employment



Source: Europa World Yearbook, 1994

## Role of women in agriculture

Although it is difficult to give an accurate assessment of women's contributions to agriculture, due to the lack of statistics, it is estimated that rural women supply about 90% of the food needed for the subsistence of the population. Women also participate in the cash crop sector. During the

high growing season, women devote 6 to 8 hours a day to agriculture in addition to their household work. More than 20% of rural households were headed by women in 1989/90.

**Division of Labour by Gender.** Men work mainly in the cash crop sector, while women bear the entire responsibility for food production and also help men with land preparation, harvesting and other work in the cash crops. While men are primarily responsible for fishing and livestock, women are in charge of fish processing and marketing, raising poultry and small livestock, and share in the processing of milk products, both for home consumption and for sale. Women are also responsible for all domestic tasks, including food processing and the collection of fuelwood and water. In general, rural women work 1.5 to 3 times longer than men.

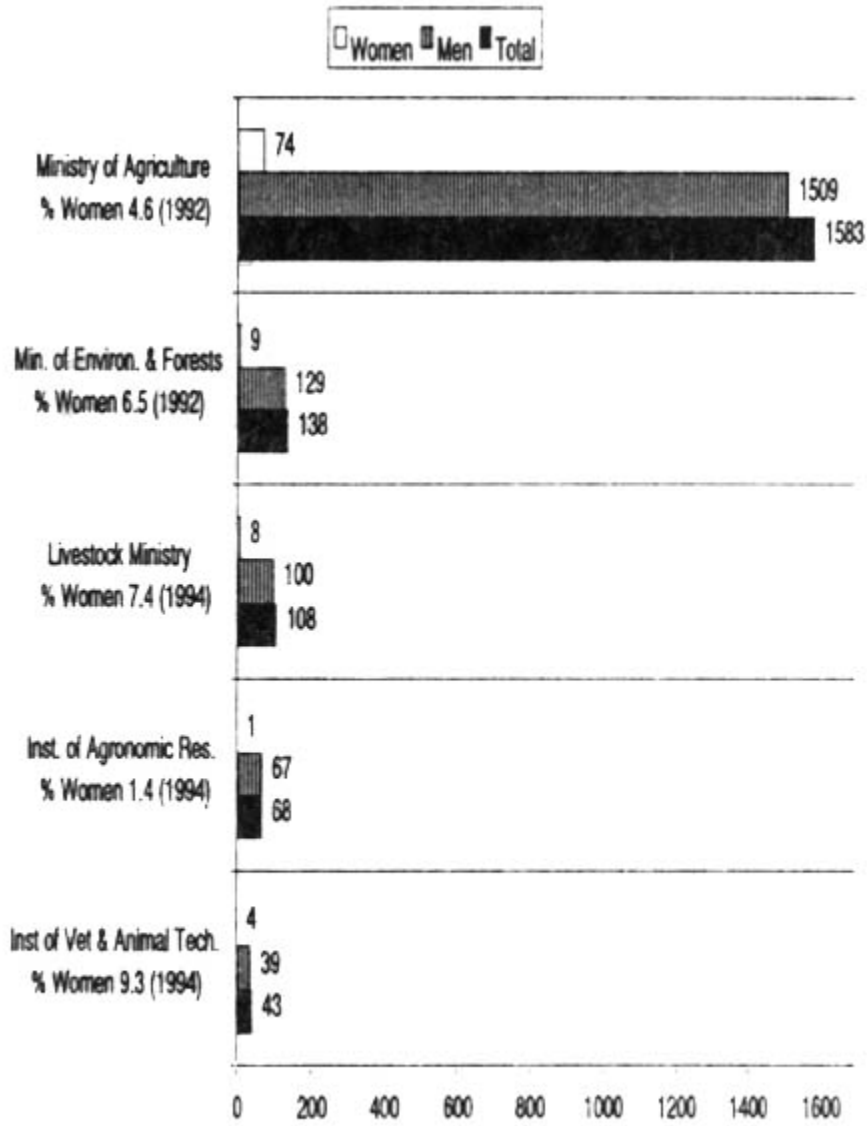
**Gender Relations in Decision-making in Farming Activities.** Although data collection is needed, women decide on the use of income from the sale of milk and milk products.

## **Sharing of power and decision-making**

**Members and Officers of Agricultural/Rural Organizations.** Although gender-disaggregated data collection is needed, few women are found in decision-making positions of mixed cooperatives and mutual aid associations.

**Women in Decision-making Positions in Ministries and Government Bodies.** Few women hold decision-making positions in ministries and other government bodies.

Women in Decision-making Positions in Ministries and Government Bodies



Source: Ministries and Institutes

## Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women

**National Machinery.** The Ministry of Social Affairs and Women (MINASCOF) works with women at the village level through women extensionists who promote the organization of women in the areas of food security, family health and education, income-generating activities, and savings and credit.

**WID Units or Focal Points in Technical Ministries.** A women's unit in the Department of Community Development in the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI) promotes the organization

of women in cooperatives and farmers associations. To meet the needs of rural women, the unit would need more than its current 3.6% share of the budget of the Ministry.

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).** Following legislation of 1990 and 1992 that facilitated the formation of NGOs, a large number of women's groups have been formed, including 1,000 organized by the Development Cooperation Department and almost 2,000 by the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs. A large number of other NGOs have also been established.

## Women's rights

Cameroon signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1983 and acceded to it in 1994. The Constitution guarantees equality between men and women, and civil law provides equal rights in the areas of inheritance, credit and employment. However, the weight of tradition often discriminates against women. Only male heads of household have land rights.

## Dimension and determinants of rural poverty

The drastic decline in the price of raw materials on the world market since 1987, as much as 60% for some products, has plunged the country into an *economic and financial crisis*, resulting in an increase in unemployment and decrease in incomes. *Structural adjustment programmes* have resulted in decreased state spending on health, education, agricultural research, extension and road maintenance. Price liberalization and the devaluation of the currency have raised the prices of basic necessities. *Growing poverty* affects rural women particularly because they bear the main responsibility for providing for the subsistence of their families. *Malnutrition* affects about 24% of rural children. According to a World Bank study, about 71% of rural families were below the poverty line in 1992/93. *Environmental degradation* is most acute in the north of the country, which is subject to drought and floods, locusts, and destruction of fields by elephants, rendering the area increasingly dependent on outside food aid. Moreover, the risk of erosion is very high in the highly populated zone of the high plateau of the Western Province, and of the Central Province where the carrying capacity of the land has been reached or exceeded.

## Access to agricultural resources and services

**Land.** Although only male heads of household have land rights, rural women traditionally have access to land. Problems of lack of access may arise particularly in the case of widows who are not on good terms with their in-laws. The concept of land title is not yet widespread in rural areas, except among an elite.

**Livestock.** In all regions of Cameroon, the family farms raise small livestock (goats, sheep, pigs, and/or chickens), which are tended to by women and children.

**Forestry.** More than 50% of the country is forested. Government plans in the forestry sector include people's participation in managing community forests in the framework of new legislation regarding forests

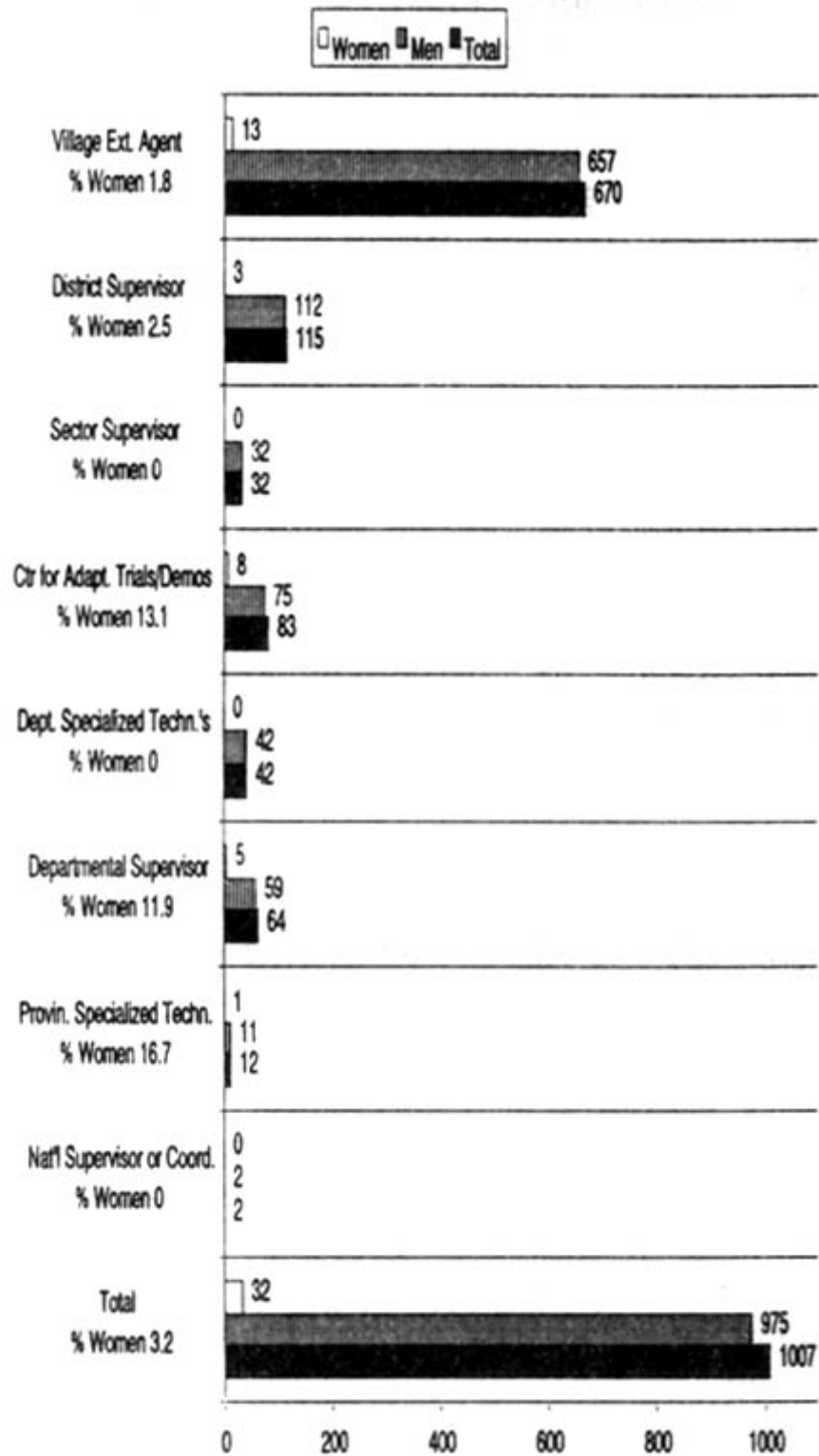
**Water.** According to the Ministry of Mining, Water and Energy, 40% of the rural population has access to safe drinking water. However, as a result of the financial crisis, over 40% of the supply systems are not operational. Moreover, in certain areas of the Extreme Northern Province, women have to travel 10 km or more to obtain water.

**Credit.** Lack of access to credit is a problem for both rural men and women, due to high interest rates and collateral requirements. The Agricultural Credit Bank of Cameroon is not yet carrying out activities in the area of rural credit, but measures have been taken to institute credit funds that are accessible to the rural population. The Investment Fund for Agricultural and Community Micro-Enterprises (FIMAC) finances projects presented by both men's and women's groups.

**Extension services and agricultural training.** In the past, extension services were directed almost exclusively to cash crops. In line with the new focus on food production, the National Project for Extension and Agricultural Training (PNVFA) was established in 1988, and became operational in 1990/91 in 6 out of 10 provinces. However, partly due to the economic crisis, the project has yet to give adequate attention to the food production sector. Until the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, little attention was paid to extension in the forestry sector. Subsequently, a Ministry of Environment and Forests was set up and initial efforts begun. The Government has also drawn up a plan for livestock extension.

While women comprise 25% of extension agents in forestry, they comprise only 3.2% of extensionists in agriculture. Very few women have benefitted from extension or agricultural research, and most are carrying out their tasks without the benefit of labour-saving technologies.

Agricultural Extension Staff by Position and Gender, 1992/93



Source: Ministry of Agriculture

# **Selected programmes in support of women in agriculture, forestry and fisheries**

## **Policy Planning and Research**

The National Project for Extension and Agricultural Training (PNVFA) has developed plans to strengthen the links between agricultural research and extension to enable women food producers to benefit from the research results.

## **Access to Agricultural Resources and Services**

- The Investment Fund for Agricultural and Community Micro-Enterprises (FIMAC) has encouraged women to organize themselves in groups to obtain credit.
- The National Project for Extension and Agricultural Training (PNVFA) is the first to be directed to food production and to address the needs of women farmers, although women still comprise only about 12% of those benefiting from the project.
- A manioc processing project has been instrumental in organizing women into production and processing groups and has improved their income.
- MINASCOF is experimenting with pre-cooperatives for the production and marketing of food products.

## **Areas to be strengthened**

### **Policy Planning and Research.**

- A reliable data base and a system for the collection and analysis of data on the activities of rural women should be set up.
- Farming systems research should be strengthened to take into account the needs of women.
- A clear development policy taking into account the role of women in agriculture and the constraints they face should be drawn up.
- MINASCOF should promote activities by technical ministries to implement such a policy and set up a monitoring and evaluation system.

### **Access to Agricultural Resources and Services**

- Measures should be taken to improve women's access to credit, seeds, labour-saving technologies, extension and marketing, including the promotion of micro-enterprises for



processing and marketing, training more women extensionists, and promoting local savings and credit groups

- Better coordination is necessary among the various international and national NGOs to permit a more integrated and effective approach to increasing women's access to agricultural resources and services.

- Rural women's groups and organizations should be encouraged, and meetings between women at different levels promoted for an exchange of experiences and information on successful initiatives.

Source: *National Sectoral Report on Women, Agriculture and Rural Development, 1994.*

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