

Supporting Gender Equality in Rural Cameroon

In present day Cameroon, women are still regarded as subordinate to men in almost all aspects of daily life, especially in the rural villages. National law in Cameroon is not particularly unfair to women, but traditional law is still practiced in most areas which favours men. We have found land rights to be a major issue in numerous villages and we have chosen to address this issue in the beginning stages, but we will also address others as we expand and develop the project. In fact, despite women being responsible for the majority of food security, household management and agricultural production in Cameroon, they control very little of the land. The current legislation guarantees equal rights for both women and men to buy, own, use, inherit and dispose of land. However, traditional law in rural areas is still biased against women – as wives, widows, sisters, daughters, divorced and separated women – limiting their ability to have secure access to land. In most rural areas, where customary practices prevail, land is owned and controlled by the men; even when they migrate into the city or die, control is given to a relative/friend or inherited by the heir. In both situations, the land is entrusted to a male. Although such lands may be at the disposal of the female for small-scale agriculture, its management cannot entirely be in her hands. Most women are able to rent land, but the uncertainty of their access limit their choice of crop to seasonal ones that grow quickly which lessens yields and revenue. This lack of control means that they do not have access or control to the proceeds of agricultural production. If women controlled their land they would have the power to make decisions on the type of investments and its proceeds which can lead to overall poverty reduction and ensure community livelihood.

Methodology

We adapted the Rural Participatory Appraisal method to the specific

context to gather information from rural communities around Buea. We have held focus groups to gather community specific information from vulnerable women (i.e. widows, single mothers) as well as community leaders. We also did a mapping activity to identify key locations in the community and their relationship between each other (mutually beneficial, one-way relationship). We have also held in depth interviews with individuals who had a special case or specific knowledge in land rights issues. Finally we engaged in participatory observation to analyze the relationships of diverse community members and the position women hold as well as their role in their community.



Single mothers making their community map of Tole

Objectives

Enhancing women's rights and supporting their access to land in rural villages of Fako District.

Strategy

We are starting with 3 villages - Tole, Ekona and Bwatingi - to set up the project and ensure our strategies are appropriate and effective in the context. We will determine what practices work best and then use a network approach to expand to other villages. We will bring women from villages where the project is established to new villages to share their experiences and knowledge with the new community.

Goals

1. Rural women are organized in networks and are aware on their rights and entitlements.
2. Community members understand and comply with legal framework regarding women access to the land.



Collective farming in Ekona

3. Women land titling registration property increased.

Activities

1. Conducting research to identify gaps that prevent women from claiming their rights
This activity will be carried out during the projects entire duration. Each month a report will be written, and articles will be upload to the HIR website.
2. Liaise with other organizations and institutions that work with gender issues in Buea
The aim of this activity is to refer the most significant cases (GBV, legal assistance) to the institution that can give proper assistance. We have met with leaders from many different institutions and organizations such as Delegation of Women Affairs, Women in Action, CHAMEG, Royalty and the National Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms.
3. Training of 4 Communitarian Promoters in each village
These promoters will be trained to became focal points in their community so they can support other women, advising them and giving them information. We plan to have two days of training on subjects such as self-confidence building, land law & procedure, gender equality, gender based violence, and obtaining formal documentation (marriage certificate, land certificate).
4. Workshops on land rights, capacity building, self-confidence, gender issues
We will hold workshops that will be approximately 2 hours in duration each. With the help of a facilitator, women will express the problems they face in their community and ways to change or solve them will be discussed.
5. Inter-village assembly between women
Each month 3 women from Ekona will visit Tole, sharing their experience of collective farming.
6. Celebration of the Women's Day
7. Communitarian assemblies
These assemblies will take place once a month and their main objective will be the discussion of different topics related to gender equality, GBV and land rights according to the national law.

8. Legal advising for Land Certificate, Birth Certificate, Marriage Certificate

We will identify women who do not have proper documentation to the right institution so that they can obtain these documents.

9. Advocating to bring about policy and practice changes with regards to land management and allocation, gender based violence and women's access to justice

Advocate for statutory law as opposed to customary/traditional law which is often biased towards men and unfair to women

Progress

Since the projects inception in November 2013, we have successfully made contacts in Tole that allowed us to apply our methodology and we are in the process of writing a report on our findings. We have returned to Tole to conduct a simple workshop on gender roles in order to discover their opinion on what men and women are supposed to be and do and to begin the process of them understanding that almost all of the roles each sex currently does is culturally prescribed and not biological. In the coming weeks we are going to have some women from Ekona come to Tole to share their experiences and knowledge about agriculture and their collective farming organization.

We hope to keep this initiative running for at least 3 years.



Gathering information in Tole