

INCREASING WOMEN'S VISIBILITY IN THE BEAN VALUE CHAIN IN CAMEROON

POLICY BRIEF



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Policy brief: Increasing women visibility in the bean value chain.

The Alliance focuses on the nexus of agriculture, nutrition, and environment. We work with local, national, and multinational partners across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, and with the public and private sectors and civil society. With novel partnerships, the Alliance generates evidence and mainstreams innovations to transform food systems and landscapes so that they sustain the planet, drive prosperity, and nourish people in a climate crisis. The Alliance is part of CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis.

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Introduction

Beans are important food legumes and contribute to food and nutritional security, income generation and enhanced production systems across Africa. In smallholder farming households in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), beans are a high-value source of protein, minerals and micronutrients. About 60% of smallholder farmers are women involved in the day-to-day running of bean production and retail markets, and men more in regional and international markets. Thirty-seven million African farmers grow beans on 6.3 million hectares of land yearly.

In SSA Africa, Cameroon is the sixth largest bean production country after Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia and Rwanda, as shown in Fig 1. Cameroon is the highest bean production in West and Central Africa as shown in Fig 2.

The increased production of beans in the country can be attributed to the rapidly growing population and urbanization of major towns like Doula and Yaounde. Increased consumption of beans in boarding schools, military camps, prison yards, orphanage homes and hospitals and exported to neighbouring countries like Central Africa Republic, Nigeria, Gabon and Congo (Fig 3).

As a result, this has provoked a further rise of 22.6 % in haricot bean production between 2015 and 2020. With increasing urbanization and changing demography in Cameroon, beans are becoming an even more critical food and nutrition crop, creating investment and business opportunities for farmers and traders in the value chain, especially women and youths. However, production, post-harvest, trade and consumption are constrained by pests and diseases, drought, poor soils, unstructured markets and inequalities.

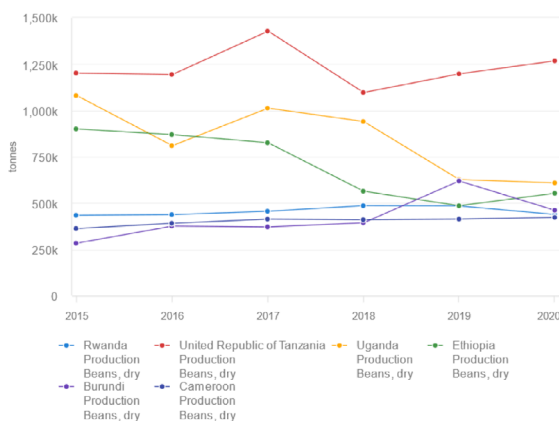


Figure 1: Cameroon is the sixth largest bean production country in SSA

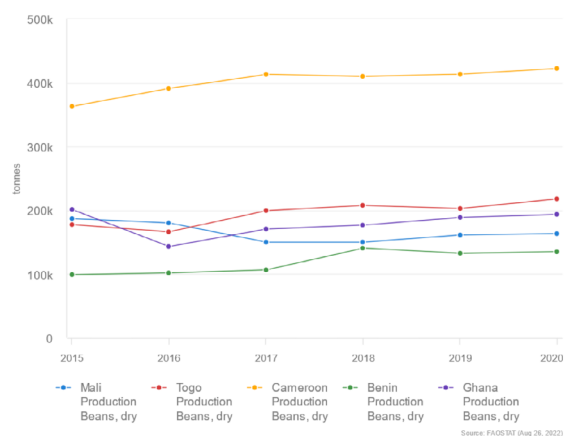


Figure 2: Bean production in selected countries in West and Central Africa

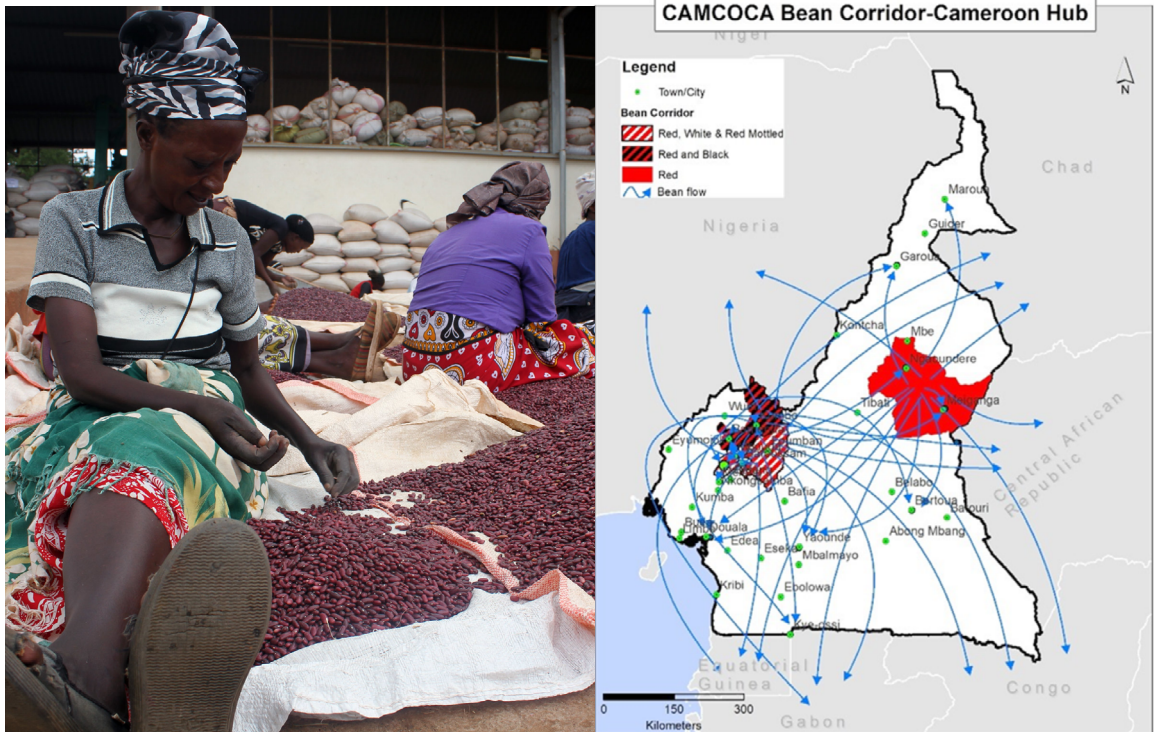


Figure 3: Beans flow in Cameroon and neighbouring countries

Gender inequality in the bean value chain

Given that gender inequality in the agricultural sector hampers growth and development, removing gender-based barriers can substantially contribute to the bean value chain and subsequently address Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 5. Women often have limited access to resources, technology, skills, credit and information affecting their participation and decision-making in the value chain (FAO, 2010). The Pan Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA) with the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development (IRAD) and other partners have, through the dissemination of socio-technical bundles. Hanging sentence

Key messages

- Women have limited access to technologies
- Women are more in the retail trade than in regional and international trade
- The bean business corridor approach has increased farmers' access to markets and other agricultural services
- Increased farmer field days and farm demonstrations have increased farmer's access to climate-smart, micronutrient-rich and market-driven varieties
- Mechanized technologies that reduce labour-intensive activities and drudgery

Raising awareness of improved bean seeds to farmers

Despite the growing demand for beans in domestic, regional and export markets, a lack of knowledge and information on improved varieties is having an adverse effect on adoption and productivity. Awareness and knowledge of technology are prerequisites for its uptake. Awareness can be created through training programs, extension visits, stakeholder meetings, agricultural shows and field days. Overall, the awareness of improved bean varieties by farmers in the West and North West Regions is low, with males having a relatively higher awareness than female farmers. Hence, it was observed that awareness of these varieties increased with how closely the farmers were to the research institutions due to its proximity to IRAD Fombot. To raise value chain partners' awareness of improved varieties and their characteristics, participatory varietal selection and stakeholder meetings with farmers, processors, and traders are carried out across geographies in the country. We are intentional about having 50% of women participate in activities and that it is done when and where they can attend shown in Fig 4.

Through collaborative research between the Pan Africa Bean Research Alliance and the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development, twelve stress-tolerant, micronutrient-rich and market-driven varieties have been released. These varieties are also high yielding, tasty, fast-cooking and early maturing. Innovative methods like animations and motorbikes are used to reach last-mile farmers with seeds and information shown in Fig 5. Tested in Kenya, it will be scaled out to other countries.

Even though men and women farmers both grow climbing and bush beans. More men are involved in the production of climbing beans because it is high yielding. At the same time, women prefer bush beans because they are less labour intensive, require less input, and are early maturing. Farmer's preferences are related to their role in bean management, labour provision and gender norms in the community.

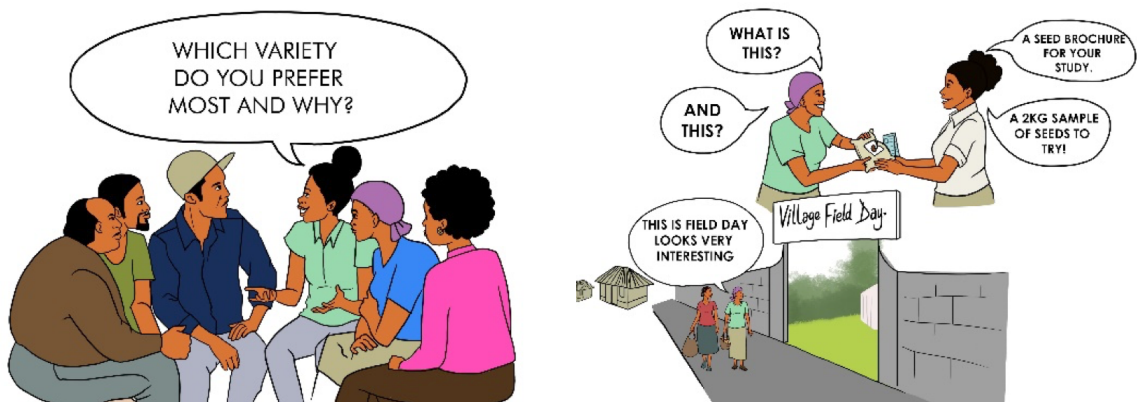


Figure 4: Intentionally involving women in stakeholder meetings and field days

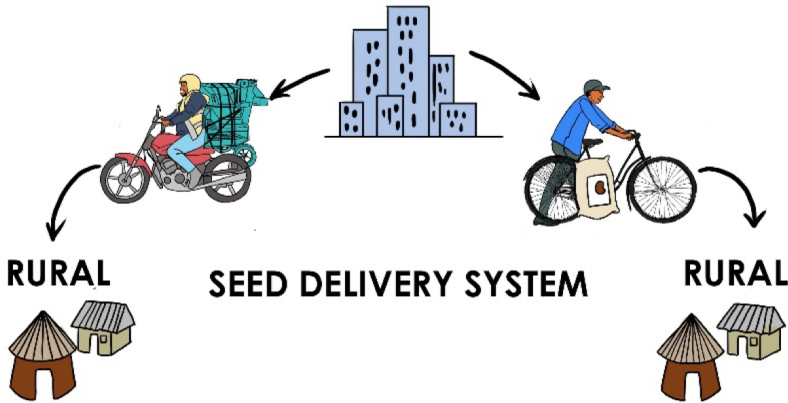


Figure 5: Using motorbikes and bicycles to deliver seed to last mile farmers

Demand-led breeding and gender-responsive breeding

Different pathways and tools have been adopted to ensure we gather enough information on the trait and varietal preferences of varying value chain partners to guide breeding priorities. Data collected in the West Region of Cameroon in 2019 showed that men and women were equally interested in high-yielding, drought-tolerant, tasteful varieties with the right grain size. Women preferred the following traits: early maturing and storability, while men, on their part, preferred varieties with high market price, good quality seed and less input (Fig 6). The choice of traits is linked to gendered roles on-farm and in households. Women said they preferred early maturing varieties such as:



which they can grow thrice a year, having enough to eat and sell. In addition, it helps them mitigate the effects of extreme climate; the shorter the growing period, the smaller the risk will be for the crop. Sales incurred from sales help them meet family obligations like paying school fees and loans.

Men preferred climbing varieties such as MEX 142 , NUV-109-2, MAC 33 and MAC 55 because they are high yielding and have a good market, but



complained that these varieties when grown in the minor season (March) get ready at the peak of the rains, resulting to poor grain quality and post-harvest losses. Men further complained that in some circumstances, these losses not only increase the risk of food insecurity at the household level but also at the level of benefits that accrue from the sales of haricot bean

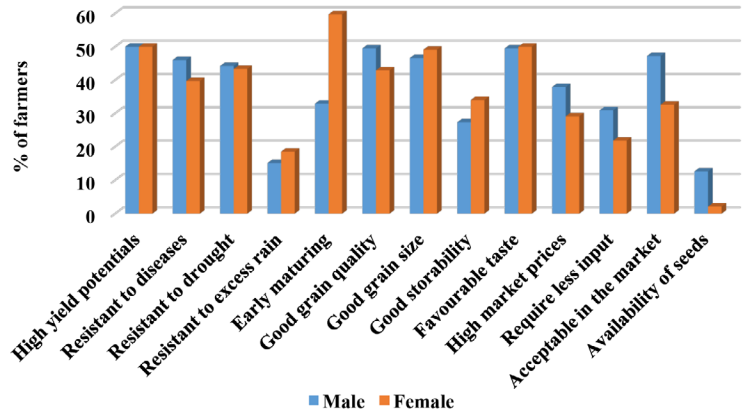


Figure 6: Men and women's trait preferences

Improving access to bean storage facilities

Access to storage facilities remains a key challenge to beans production and marketing in the western highlands in Cameroon. The ability to deliver a good quality product to the market gives the farmer a competitive edge. However, most farmers do not have access to post-harvest facilities to keep their produce in good condition after harvesting for business. Lack of access to post-harvest facilities for beans activity constitutes a barrier to market participation since buyers emphasize more on quality. Data from the western highland revealed that about 55.5% of farmers do not have access to storage facilities, with more men having access than women. Farmers from the Northwest region harvest pods and store them in huts, and only thresh the pods to get the grains as the need arises (Fig 6). This group of farmers reported that storing grain affects the quality, colour, viability of seeds, and market value.

The lack of storage facilities leads to indiscriminate marketing of beans immediately after harvest leading to lower prices, little benefits and lower bargaining power. Farmers with such facilities do not consistently market their produce directly after harvest when prices are low, making a better profit with time. The lack of storage facilities further limits women's decisions on when to sell and to whom. Therefore, the lack of such facilities constitutes a barrier to market participation, especially for women farmers, since they play a more significant role in beans production. Therefore, the state and local councils should commit themselves to develop and improving infrastructure, especially grain stores in bean production areas. Better access to storage facilities will enable farmers to extend sales periods and present more beans of better quality for sale.



Figure 7: Bean stored in a barn on the farm

Bean business platforms

Bean business platforms have been created in the West, Northwest, and Center regions. Bean value chain players created these platforms to structure the market, make information available and develop partnerships for “better beans”. These platforms comprised input dealers, farmers, off-takers, advisory and service providers, seed companies, farmers, and financial institutions. 17 platforms were created, and since its creation, we saw an increase in bean production and export even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and socio-economic and political crisis in the Northwest region. Increase in women selling to profitable markets have been documented, as shown in Figure 7, but men still sell to export markets more than women.

As a result of gender training carried out in bean business platforms across multiple countries, we are seeing an increase of women in leadership positions Fig 8. In Cameroon across the 17 platforms, women in leadership positions are the same as men with similar duties.



Figure 7: Farmers selling to profitable markets



Figure 8: Women in bean leadership governance institutions

Increasing women's visibility in Entrepreneurship and mechanization

We are working with a local artisan to develop a thresher to reduce post-harvest losses on beans and reduce drudgery for women often involved in threshing and winnowing beans. This thresher will also be an employment opportunity for youths and women groups who can buy it and provide services to other smallholder farmers. With time reduced from threshing, women can carry out additional productive or household activities more efficiently.



Figure 9: Threshing beans

Conclusion

Women's role in agri-food system are varied but are often not visible as they are not considered farmers but helpers. This has resulted to women having limited access to productive agricultural resources. Women should be at the centre of activities in the agrifood systems hence involving women at all levels of the value chain. Women are not a homogenous group, so intersectionality categories should guide the process. We are cognizant of the fact that bean businesses are mostly family businesses with different household members playing different roles, therefore our interventions target men, women and youths within the households.

