

CASE STUDY: Gender Division of Labor in Cameroon

In Cameroon, the traditional division of labor situates women in roles based on providing emotional support and household maintenance, while men are primarily responsible for economic support and contact with the world outside the home (community politics role). Women participate in reproductive activities such as cooking and child care, community managing activities such as fetching water, and subsistence farming, all of which are outside the cash economy and concentrated around the household. Men are primarily involved in cash crop production of commodities such as cocoa, coffee, and cotton on small land holdings also owned by men.

However, since the economic crisis of the 1980s when world commodity prices collapsed, women have begun to focus on productive activities such as food crop farming for sale in the market in order to supplement declining household income. Women's participation in paid productive work has increased their economic power, and consequently, their ability to participate in decision-making in the home. While this is an example of empowerment, it is not yet an example of gender equality, since women continue to work much longer hours than men (double and triple burden), and men have yet to assume a more equal share of the reproductive work within the household.

Source: Sikod, Fondo. 2007. Gender Division of Labour and Women's Decision-Making Power in Rural Households in Cameroon. *Africa Development*, Vol. XXXII, No. 3, 2007, pp. 58–71. <http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/3-Sikod-b.pdf>

For reflection:

In what ways are traditional gender roles changing in Cameroon?

What factors have contributed to these changes?

What has remained the same in terms of the gender division of labor?