

WOMEN'S POSITION IN ON-FARM TREE PLANTING ACTIVITIES: A CASE OF KACHUMBALA SUB-COUNTY KUMI DISTRICT, EASTERN UGANDA

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Abstract

This study explored women's position in on-farm tree planting activities in Kachumbala sub-county of Kumi District, eastern Uganda. It assessed the nature of women's participation in tree planting activities, the nature of the farm plots they manage, determined main sources of farm labour and planting stocks used by these women and documented the challenges faced by these farmers. Data were collected using the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methodology based on random questionnaire administration, key informant interviews and informal observations. 120 women farmers involved in farming activities for at least the past 5 years were given semi-structured questionnaires and their farms surveyed. Data were subjected to content analysis and later summarized into descriptive statistics using Excel spread sheets. The results indicated that 92% women farmers were working on their husband's farms, 3% owned individual woodlots, 18% were involved in tree planting campaigns while 16% were involved in tree planting activities in school compounds and church yards. 69% of the farming households owned a small piece of land (< 1 ha) which was reported to be under the control of men. 50% women had established farms with some trees and shrubs deliberately planted, 45% had farms with some tolerated or trained trees and shrubs species while 5% neither tolerated nor planted trees on their farms. 81% women farmers purchased tree seedlings from the local nursery, 43% raised their own seedlings while 38% collected wildlings. Family (55%) and reciprocal (*aleya*) (48%) labour were the two main sources of on-farm labour. The major challenges faced by women farmers were lack of investment capital and credit opportunities (79%), lack of land (men control land) (74%), post-harvest losses especially

during bumpy fruit seasons (68%), limited ready market for tree products (65%), poor market access roads especially in rainy seasons (63%), pests and diseases (61%) and little knowledge of tree crop management (52%). There is a need to encourage women farmers to re-organize themselves into viable tree-farmer groups so that they have a better exchange of labour as well as access to credit from micro-finance institutions. Efforts should also be made to encourage the formation of appropriate small-scale village based processing plants to add value to some marketable tree products.

Introduction

Throughout Africa, women are actively involved in a wide range of forest-related activities, both those of a spontaneous nature and those fostered through development projects and programmes. In fact, with the exclusion of industrial timber and charcoal production, African women are the protagonists in activities related to the management and use of forest resources. Particularly important is the gathering of fuel wood for domestic energy as well as fruits, leaves, gums and medicinal products both for household use and for sale in local markets. Women's participation in the production and dissemination of fuel-efficient stoves, in agroforestry, tree nurseries and horticulture are also well-documented (FAO, 1985a; FAO, 1985b; FAO, 1988; Gumbo *et al.*, 1989). There are a number of obstacles that impede the fuller participation of women in forestry and tree growing activities in Africa. Key constraints, evidenced by numerous studies (FAO, 1989a) and confirmed by the participants in the Women and Forestry Project discussions, include: restricted access to productive resources, particularly tenure

rights to land and trees; lack of mobility because of household responsibilities and social customs; lack of time because of other responsibilities; limited access to information, training, education, credit, marketing channels and other inputs.

Of all these constraints, problems of access and tenure are by far the most important. In many countries in Africa, recent titling programmes have allocated land that was traditionally managed by women to male heads of household, effectively removing women from the decision-making process. In Burkina Faso, for example, women lost a valuable source of *shea* nuts, traditionally collected for food and as a source of income, when village lands were cleared of shrubs in order to establish fast-growing pole plantations (Williams, 1992). In some regions of Kenya, women were discouraged from raising trees because tree-planting traditionally establishes rights of tenure to land and the men were afraid of losing control (Mathai, 1988). In the same note, despite a serious shortage of fuel wood, yet women responsible for fuel procurement are traditionally prevented from planting trees as this activity conveys land tenure (Chavangi, 1988).

In many African societies, women are closely tied to the home, both by custom and by family responsibilities. Forestry and tree growing activities that require travel away from the home therefore tend to exclude women (Williams, 1992). Closely related to lack of mobility is lack of time. In Africa as a whole, men have primary responsibility for land clearing and preparation of the soil for planting; responsibility for all other activities - care and feeding of the family, the processing, storing and marketing of agricultural products, the management of domestic livestock, etc. - falls at least equally, and in many cases almost entirely, on women (Williams, 1992). Forestry activities that increase women's workloads without providing benefits that enable them to reduce their efforts in other areas are not likely to be acceptable.

Many of the established mechanisms for the dissemination of information and technology make it difficult for women to derive full benefits. Meetings or extension sessions scheduled during the day may conflict with women's household responsibilities (Williams, 1992). Extension agents and trainers are

usually men; they may not be sensitized to women's priorities and needs and may not even be permitted by social custom to meet with women. Moreover, extension agents are often unable to communicate in local languages; for women, with a generally lower formal education than men, this is an additional constraint. Lack of access to credit is another important constraint faced by women in Africa. Because of their limited mobility and access to information, women may not be adequately informed about credit. Even when they are aware of the existence of credit programmes, these schemes often require titles to land or other collateral, thus effectively excluding women (Williams, 1992).

In Uganda, typically men are more interested in trees as sources of construction materials or cash income, while women's interests are more in the supply of firewood and the contribution of forestry to food production (Government of Uganda, 2001). Women are disadvantaged in security of tenure; in many cases they cannot inherit land and are rarely involved in decision-making over natural resource management or the management of household income. All these factors are disincentives for women to invest in tree growing, yet Forestry Policy, 2001 (GOU, 2001) and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act, 2003 (GOU, 2003) promotes tree planting and the management of forest resources. This paper explores women's position in on-farm tree planting activities in Kachumbala sub-county of Kumi District, eastern Uganda. It highlights the nature of women's participation in tree planting activities and the nature of the farm plots they manage, determines the main sources of farm labour and planting stocks used by these women, and documents the challenges they faced.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Kachumbala sub-county in Bukedea county, Kumi district, Eastern Uganda. Kumi district lies at an altitude of 1153 m above sea level and at latitude 1°12'20 N and longitude 34°6'24 E. The area is generally flat with isolated inselbergs in a few areas. It has a bi-modal rainfall regime with clearly marked wet and dry seasons (Oule, 1999). The temperature in the area is generally high with a minimum of about 23°C and a maximum of about 35°C (Okurut, 2002). The soils are sandy to loam in nature with high erosive potential. The savannah

woodland vegetation covers much of the land with scattered indigenous trees like *Tamarindus indica*, *Ficus spp.*, *Combretum collinum* and *Albizia coraria* (Oule, 1999). The sub-county has a total population of 36,767 people with 17,575 males and 19,192 females (UBOS, 2002). Group settlements are common among individuals belonging to the same clan (Okurut, 2002). Traditionally, the economy in the area has been centred on cattle rearing and crop production.

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) was carried out in 4 randomly selected parishes out of a total of 7 parishes in the sub-county. RRA is a 'fairly-quick and-fairly-clean' appraisal as opposed to fast and careless studies ('quick-and-dirty' studies) and slow and excessively accurate approaches ('long-and-dirty') (Chambers, 1980). It is a process of learning about rural conditions and gathering desirable information in a fairly clean, iterative, and expeditious manner characteristically using small teams and a range of methodological tools and techniques (Grandstaff and Grandstaff, 1985). Within each parish, 2 villages were selected at random. 8 villages comprising Airogo and Kachumbala (Kachumbala parish), Kongoidi and Kongunga (Kongunga parish), Amus and Kachuru (Amus

parish), Kabwalin and Nyakoi (Akwarikwar parish) were selected. In each village, 15 women farmers were given semi-structured questionnaires in a face-to-face interactive approach. However, only women who had been involved in farming for at least 5 years were included. Key informant interviews and informal observations were also made. 120 women farmers were interviewed and their farms surveyed in characteristic farm walks. Data were subjected to content analysis and later summarized into descriptive statistics in form of percentages using Excel spreadsheet.

Results

61% of the women were aged between 31 and 45 years (Table 1). The absence of respondents above 60 years probably implies that women become weak after spending their youthful and active periods on farming and procreation. 92% of these rural women were not educated beyond primary school level. 75% were married. An interview of a key informant indicated that marital status was crucial in determining a woman's level of participation in tree planting largely due to the fact that in this study community (Teso community) a woman has no right over land and it is only by marriage that she can be entitled, if at all, to a piece of land for farming purposes only.

Table 1 Age, education and marital status of the women farmers (N=120)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>% response</i>
<i>Age groups</i>	
15-30	16
31-45	61
46-60	23
<i>Educational level</i>	
No formal education	32
Primary	60
Secondary	6
Tertiary	2
<i>Marital status</i>	
Married	75
Widow	20
Divorced	2
Single	3

This observation is confirmed by the results in Table 2, which shows that 92% of the women were working on their husbands' farms. Only 3% owned individual woodlots. 18% were involved in tree planting campaigns and 16%

planted trees in school compounds and church yards. 69% of farming households owned a small piece of land (< 1 ha) which was reported to be under the direct control of men (Table 2). 50% of the women had established

farms with some trees and shrubs deliberately planted; 45% had farms with some tolerated or trained trees and shrubs species. Only 5% neither tolerated nor planted trees in their farms (Table 2).

Family (55%) and reciprocative (48%) labour were the two main sources of labour for women farmers in the area (Table 2). Permanent and hired labourers were not common. 81% of the women purchased

seedlings for tree crops from local nurseries. 43% raised their tree seedlings for planting. Others simply collected wildlings or were given free seedlings by the extension agents (Table 2). Interviews with some key informants indicated that most women preferred to plant or retain in their farms fruit-bearing trees, medicinal trees and shrubs, trees and shrubs that are sought for spiritual and ritual needs, firewood species and windbreaks.

Table 2 Participation in tree planting, source of farm labour and seedlings, size of land holding and the nature of farm plots (N=120)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>% response</i>
<i>Nature of participation in tree planting activities</i>	
Working on husband's land	92
Involve in tree planting campaigns	18
Planted trees in the school compounds and church yards	16
Working on own woodlots	3
Involved in government forestry plantation activities	3
<i>Sources of farm labour</i>	
Family	55
Reciprocative	48
Hired	25
Permanent	8
<i>Size of land holding (ha)</i>	
< 1	69
1-2	21
> 2	10
<i>Nature of farm plots</i>	
Established farms with some trees and shrubs retained	45
Farms with trees and shrubs deliberately planted	50
Established farms with no trees and shrubs retained	5
<i>Source of seedlings planted by farmers</i>	
Purchased from local tree nurseries	81
Raised their own	43
Collected the wildlings	38
Given free by extension agents	26

Lack of investment capital and credit opportunities (79%), lack of land (men control land) (74%), post-harvest losses especially during bumpy fruit seasons (68%), limited ready market within the area for tree products (65%), poor market access roads especially in rainy seasons (63%), pests and diseases (61%) and little knowledge of tree crop

management (52%) were the major agro-constraints faced by women farmers. Other challenges included tedious, tiring and often excessively demanding activities when combined with other household duties; lack of inputs (e.g. tree seeds and nursery tools); low and fluctuating prices of tree products and cultural taboos (Table 3).

Table 3 Problems faced by women in tree planting and types of help required by the women (N=120)

<i>Problems faced by women in tree planting</i>	<i>% response</i>
Lack of investment capital and credit opportunities	79
Lack of land (men control land)	74
Post harvest losses especially during bumpy fruit seasons	68
Limited ready market within the area for tree products	65
Poor market access roads especially in rainy seasons	63
Pests and diseases	61
Lack of appropriate tree management skills	52
Tedious, tiring and too demanding activities when combined with other household duties	47
Lack of inputs (e.g. tree seeds and nursery tools)	34
Low and fluctuating prices of tree products	20
Cultural taboos	15

Discussion

Our findings show that women farmers, though mostly uneducated, are concerned about their environment and the need to plant trees. This is clearly demonstrated by the kind of farm plots these women till and their active participation in tree planting campaigns, involvement in tree planting activities at public schools as parents and commitment to individually owned and managed woodlots as well as predominantly planting or caring for the trees or shrubs retained on their husbands' farms. The findings imply that these women, given the opportunity, could be powerful forces in the drive for tree planting in the rural landscape since the nature of farm plots contains the seeds of environmental protection. These findings are not surprising since women by their nature have been reported (Shiva, 1989) to be more sensitive to the issue of ecological sustainability because care for the environment is an inherently feminine principle

Most of the women preferred planting or retaining in their farms fruit-bearing trees, medicinal trees and shrubs; trees and shrubs that are sought for spiritual and ritual needs; firewood species and windbreaks. The preference for such types of trees and shrubs other than timber trees could have been shaped by men who basically own the land and generally control high income generating tree species, especially timber trees. Nevertheless, the women's choices are important given that their households are quite often faced with myriad problems such as firewood and medical problems. In order to

avoid travelling long distances in search of firewood for cooking or to look for a plant material when a family member or a livestock is sick, having these plants in their gardens is a safeguard. Fruit trees planted in the garden increase household food security and well-being (Underwoods, 1995). Fruits can also be sold in the market to buy foods they do not produce in sufficient quantity or to purchase other household necessities such as paraffin, soap, salt and cooking oil.

The issue of planting stock is quite challenging. Most of the women seldom have the option of raising their own planting stocks but have to buy their tree seedlings from local nurseries. Less than forty-five per cent of the women raised their tree plantings and stocks or gathered the wildlings. Highly labour-demanding nursery operations or lack of preferred tree seeds could perhaps be held accountable as some of the forces that drive these women to purchase tree seedlings from local nurseries. This is partly supported by Banks (1993) who felt that tree nursery establishment and management is mainly a man's activity. This is of course contrary to Williams (1989), FAO (1997) and the widely held view that women constitute an important segment of the work-force in forest and forest-related activities such as tree nurseries, plantations, harvesting, processing, and sale of wood. Farm labour is basically family-based and reciprocative labour. The women commonly know reciprocative labour as *aleyá*, whereby a farming association of women work for one another in turns. Bishop-Sambrook

(2005) reports this source and arrangement of farm labour as a form of social capital. Permanent and hired labour is not common in the area.

The main challenges faced by women farmers were lack of investment capital and credit opportunities, men controlling and being the custodians of the land, post-harvest losses especially during bumpy fruit seasons, limited market for tree products, poor market access roads especially in rainy seasons, pests and diseases and little knowledge of tree-crop management. These challenges and many others are not limited only to women farmers in Kachumbala sub-county. Some have been reported elsewhere hindering women's involvement in tree growing ventures (FAO, 1989). Similar obstacles were also declared by Agea *et al.* (2009) to hamper tree planting activities by out-of-school youths in central Uganda. Apparently, the women are being overwhelmed by these challenges, hence the need for external help to support them. Most of them want investment capital and credit facilities, but the major source of credit available to them at the moment is just from family and friends.

The major reasons cited for wanting investment capital and credit facilities were to buy inputs and land and to help set up their own tree nurseries. As in most parts of Ugandan societies and Africa in general, the act of planting a tree establishes ownership of the land on which it is planted. It is generally known here in Kachumbala sub-county that women can plant trees, but the trees they plant belong to their husbands because the land on which they are planted belongs to them. This problem coupled with the limited size of land holdings presents a huge challenge to women. Even though they want to plant trees and manage them, the small size of the fields makes it impossible to plant or spare many trees because the competition with food crops is too great.

Conclusion and recommendation

Although the participation of women in on-farm tree planting activities in Kachumbala sub-county is very commendable in spite of the fact that 92% of them were not educated beyond primary school level, their position and strength in this venture remains a cause for concern. Factors of production are still largely controlled by the men folk, despite their

increasing absenteeism from the countryside in search of employment in urban areas. The findings underscore the need to help the women since there is overwhelming evidence from the nature of farm plots they till and from their endeavours to buy or raise their own seedlings for planting, that they are critical agents in promoting on-farm tree planting activities. These women deserve approval, help and support from local and central governments, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, the private sector and their spouses.

At the moment they do not receive any significant encouragement from the government, either locally or central. Finally, there is a need to support the women to organize themselves into viable farmer groups so that they have a better exchange of labour and access to credits from micro-finance institutions. Efforts should also be made to encourage the formation of appropriate small-scale village-based processing plants as an incentive to add value to some marketable tree products produced by farmers.

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