

EDIBLE WILD FRUITS BUSINESS IN SONGEA DISTRICT, TANZANIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTING GENDER RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Wild fruits constitute an important natural resource which lays underexploited in most of the communities of Tanzania, hence deserves attention. As wild fruit business involves both women and men, the analysis of existing gender relations need to carried out for ascertaining relations. The prominent engagement of people of one sex category in the sector would partly signify gender bias; hence demanding for detailed explanation. Under circumstances of gender bias, diverse socio-economic roles in wild fruits sector could be liable to dictating the gender patterns. Existing vast literatures have failed to depict and document the reasons for the observed gender bias; thus this study was to be undertaken. A qualitative study was conducted in four localities of Songea District aimed at digging down the origin of the differential gender roles in wild fruits business sector, thus unveiling the causes of the lopsided gender relations, In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted using interview guides. Women were found to be the main actors in wild fruits business mainly due to socio-economic and cultural reasons which places women at the centre of small scale, “unrecognized,” business activities, characterized by low but dependable household incomes. Since women are traditionally denied from land ownership, they are forced to plunge into “free” small scale businesses requiring no capital except labour power, i.e. their ability to walk to the forest to collect wild fruits. Therefore, no wonder, that wild fruits business remains to persistently be localized and concretely placed under women’s domain mainly due to the interplay of the above socio-cultural and economic factors. Raising gender awareness among people of the area concerning importance and the potential of wild fruits business is critical for people of both sexes to actively engage in the sector. Active engagement culminates into improved production, standardized processing and expanded market from local to national and international levels.

KEY WORDS: Wild Fruits Business, Gender, Women, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Edible wild fruits are documented to be a source of income, bulk micro nutrients and provider of safety net during periods of food shortage (Akinnifesi, Jordaan & Ham, 2005; Kwesiga, Akinnifesi, Ramadhani, Kadzere & Sako, 2000). Among the nutrients contained in wild fruits include sugars, essential vitamins, mineral proteins, oils and fibres (Saka & Msonthi, 1994; Saka, Mwendo-Phiri, & Akinnifesi, 2002); they are critical for human health.

Wild fruits are all those types of fruits which grow naturally in the wilderness of the forest. These are fruits which grow outside the support of human artificialities called agriculture; or to be specific, crop

farming (Ruffo, Birnie & Tengnas, 2002; Fukushima, Morimoto, Maundu, Kahindi, & Fondo, 2010). Literature observes the presence of a broad variety of edible and non-edible wild fruits in the miombo woodlands of Africa, Southern Tanzania in particular (Abdallah and Monela, 2007; Ruffo *et al.*, 2002, Fukushima *et al.*, 2010).

Since some of wild fruits of Songea District, located in Southern Tanzania are consumed by the rural communities while others are not, it deems important identifying edible those types. This is an important step in identifying the pattern of their use and the engagement of people of different sex categories in specific activities and enable rationalization of the pertinent gender relations. Documenting wild fruits types provides for a better understanding of the existing biodiversity in the area, a critical aspect for the planning of sustainable conservation efforts (Maduka, 2004).

Observations in the Songea Municipality portrayed burgeoning wild fruits business over years. However, involvement of people of both sex categories in wild fruits business remained largely unknown, therefore demanding for some scientific explanations. Investigating on how such socially constructed relations are related to the wild fruits business; and the rationale behind it are considered indispensable among household members, who are actually involved in the business; and to whom the benefits from the same business is considered a significant aspect for determining the economic well-being of rural households. At this point, it is important mentioning that little is known about gender relations pertinent to edible wild fruits business in Songea District and elsewhere in Tanzania.

The intention of this paper is to uncover the gender dimension of edible wild fruits business, while exploring the engagement of people of both sexes, at all levels of the business, i.e. wild fruits gathering, selling and the distribution of the generated income among household members by respective sex categories. Furthermore, the paper strives to rationalize the observed gender relations in wild fruits business sub-sector. The findings of this paper are considered important for the expansion and internationalization of wild fruits sector which exposes the key actors to the sector, how they are involved; and the reasons behind their involvement. Furthermore, scientific planning of forest conservation efforts may be improved only if informed by the identification of appropriate target group of beneficiaries, disentangled by the existing gender relations. These are the ones to be taken on board towards effective location-specific environmental conservation and related activities.

The working definition adopted in this context generalizes gender as not being matters about women but the organizing principle that governs practices and processes that take into account differences between male and female in the socio-economic, political and cultural life (Kiptot, E., Franzel, S. & Degrande, A., 2014). The utmost aim is to unveil the deep rooted factors that may be used to address the observed gender inequalities that tend to support if not hamper development initiatives in rural Africa and elsewhere.

WILD FRUITS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Wild fruits, sometimes referred to as indigenous fruits are a products obtained in Miombo woodlands which are also the major sources of fuel wood, construction materials for habitats and other socio-economic activities (Ngulube, Hall, & Maghembe, 1995; Luoga, Wilkowski & Balkwill, 2002;

Chidumayo & Kwibisa, 2003). Miombo woodlands cover 44.6 million hectares of land. The regions of Tanzania with Miombo woodlands are Tabora and Rukwa to the South West, Ruvuma, Iringa, Lindi and Mtwara to the South of which 54% constitute general lands (Abdallah & Monela, 2007). These are the prime areas of wild fruits production.

Wild fruits growing in Tabora region, Tanzania, used for making juice and wine, include Zambarau (*Syzygium guineense*); others are Mtonga (*Strychnos cocculoides*), Mkwaju (*Tamarindus indica*), Mtalali (*Vitex mombassae*) Mbula (*Parinari curatelifolia*) and Fufu (*Vitex doniana*) mainly used for making juice (Magigi & Majani, 2006; Obeng & Ogboro, 2008). The same fruits are found in Miombo woodlands of forests in Southern Tanzania, Songea District, Ruvuma region inclusive (Abdallah & Monela, 2007).

Empirical evidence on the relationship between household population and forests in food security and nutrition remains scarce. Most of the communities located besides the forests obtain micro nutrient supplies, such as vitamin A and iron, from wild fruits (Ruffo *et al.*, 2002; FAO, 2013). Wild fruits provide safety nets during food shortage (Colfer, Sheil, Kaimowitz & Kishi, 2006; Harris & Mohamed, 2003; URT, 2000), hence significant for livelihoods. (Chikamai, Eyog-Matig & Mbogga, 2006; Maduka, 2004; Mapulo, 2002).

Baseline study conducted in Tabora region, Tanzania indicated that 50% of the respondents dealt with wild fruits processing (Nyoni, Kazyoba, & Simon, 2003), signifying the importance of the wild fruits sector despite its being undermined by men, with little, if any rationalization of the lacunae. This paper is, therefore, devoted to generate detailed explanations to this effect.

Wild fruits survey conducted by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) in Tanzania, covering Arusha, Dar es Salaam and Morogoro regions indicated that much as *Adansonia digitata*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Uapaca kirkiana* and *Sclerocarya birrea* are widely traded, whereby only about 22% of rural households were engaged in value addition and packaging (Akinnifesi *et al.*, 2005). The questions of “who was engaged in this task” broken the actors into gender groups and “why” constitutes a missing piece of information but critical for improvement of the state of affairs.

Gender and Wild Fruits Business

Wild fruits commercialization is well advanced in Zimbabwe as compared to Malawi and Zambia, where processing, marketing and exporting of products such as jam, juices, edible and cosmetic oils, soaps and wine are produced (Akinnifesi *et al.*, 2005). This hinges on how local people perceive utility of their natural resources. In case of a positive perception, vast resources may be turned productive and contributive to household and natural economy. Establishing the level of commercialization of wild fruits in Tanzania, Songea District in particular is of great significance towards understanding the characteristics of the sector; thus raising the possibility for improving the sector’s contribution to the national economy.

A study by the Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources and Environment conducted in Sikonge District, Tanzania, observed women’s dominance in wild fruits collecting, processing and selling of

wild fruits products (Buyecheki, 2008). However, Gladwin, Thomson, Peterson & Anderson (2001) noted that women require only labour to collect off farm products while they have scarce time, supplies and the chore caused by long distance from their farms. This assertion, however, does not suffice to rationalize the existing state of affairs.

Analysis of 36 long term studies in 25 countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America involving more than 8000 households indicate that men and women tend to collect different products from the forest (Sunderland, 2011). It implies that there are different reasons for which men and women interact with the forest. This socio-economic and cultural paradox needs to be disentangled. Kiptot and Franzel (2011) observes that while the profitable sectors such as timber are considered men's domain, while women are limited to little or low commercial value such as wild fruits and vegetables. In marketing, women tended to concentrate in lower end of the value chain, i.e. retailing, which limits their control over returns from the productive process. The gist of the observed unequal gender relations; however, lacks detailed explanations.

In Malawi, the prominent role of women in forest products is partly attributed to “rural urban migration”, whereby mostly men moved to urban centres, resulting into increasing female headed households in which women have responsibilities to obtain food, fuel wood, fodder and other forest products (Skapa, 1988; Wangila, Rommelse & de Wolf, 1999). This demonstrates that patriarchy is basic to explaining the observed skewed gender relations. In this way, women become disadvantaged due to cultural, sociological and economic factors. The paper views the aforementioned factors as being too general, hence demanding for more specific detailed practical explanations. The same factors were mentioned to limit women's access to resources and decision making. Though some activities are labeled “taboos” to women, studies have proven remarkable women's potential and actual capacities in them. Underscoring challenges faced by key wild fruits dealers (women) in the wild fruits business is significant in understanding of the phenomenon that enables to trace both change and continuity of socio-cultural and economic relations within the sector.

A study undertaken in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in 2014 indicated that local wild fruits markets were 78% dominated by women, and almost 91% of retailers were illiterate. Young men, under that age of 30 years were rarely seen retail selling local fruits. The study mentioned nothing about the reasons for such a bias (Yacouba, Zerbo& Millongo-Rosodimby, 2014); hence there is need for detailed explanation on this important observation.

The National Research Council (NRC) observes wild fruits as being among the priciest food stuff, obtained from long-lived trees that protect land 1 raised, 2 harvested and 3 sold by women (NRC, 2008). IFAD (2008) observes that despite prominent role played by women in forestry value chains, their roles are generally perceived being less supported by policy makers and service providers. Persistent lack of gender-disaggregated data compounds the problem further. One observes the overt need of addressing the ailing situation.

Typical Areas in Wild Fruits Business Which Exhibit Gender Gap

Gender gaps were observed in literatures basing on differential engagements in specific activities that characterize wild fruits business and the associated gender based division of labour. A study conducted by the Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources and Environment in Sikonge District of Tanzania observed that 80% of children and elderly men, aged over 55 years were involved in collecting and selling of wild fruits (Buyecheki, 2008). But to one's surprise, no reasons were given for such a state of affairs, which is considered important for development planning of the wild fruits sector in Tanzania.

In Zimbabwe wild fruit trees represent about 20% of total woodland reserve used by rural households (Campbell, Lukert, & Scoones, 1997). With growing human population and the consequent increased pressure on the natural resources, the current situation is likely to augment and differ. In utilizing this resource, women and children were noted to be the main beneficiaries. However, the source does not explain why women dominated the sector. The observed four specific areas of their involvement were collecting, consuming, selling and using the proceeds to buy food and other household goods (Ramathani, 2002). Furthermore, literature is quiet on how was the accrued income was distributed among male and female community members.

In Tabora region, Tanzania, wild fruits were observed being consumed in large quantities with at least 44% obtained from natural forests, while 36% were bought from the market (Oduol, Nyadzi, Swai, Schueller, Gama, Matata, Mwageni & Mbaruk, 2006). In the same area women participated in Collaborative Project managed by Tumbi and the Agricultural Research Institute (ICRAF), Tanzania Women Leaders in Agriculture and Environment (TAWLAE) and Small Industries Development organization (SIDO). The women were engaged in two activities, i.e. processing and selling of jam, wine and juice (*ibid*).

Implications of Gender Gaps to Wild Fruits Business Development

Among several consequences women faced out of the imbalances in gender relations was lack of access to extension information due to their poor educational background, hence women could not access technical information (Saito and Wildermann, 1990). Whether men had access to such similar information is another area of study. However, the paper recognizes the fact that for the past years several changes have occurred which might have altered the gender imbalance. Despite the observed women's broad participation in farming and dealing with wild fruits business, women remained economically disadvantaged in the sector (Kiptot & Franzel, 2011). The factors that limit women from benefitting from wild fruits sector are not clearly explained; hence need to be uncovered for the brighter future planning and development of the industry.

The emphasized significance of wild fruits in raising income, providing safety net during food shortage and as a source of bulk of nutrients (NRC, 2008; Fukushima *et al.*, 2010) have left wild fruits to remain highly underestimated (Kiptot & Franzel, 2011). Such important plant species have for millions of years remained without scientific or development attention, hence augmenting burden to women and children who depend on them (NRC, 2008). This calls for the quantification of the contribution of wild fruits to household income and poverty alleviation so as to make its role

appreciated; an important component for sustainable comprehensive development planning which takes into account gender issues.

Studies conducted in Guatemala, as evidenced in Denigellis (2003) and in North east Thailand (Ressuraccion & Elmhirst, 2008) acknowledge significance of women's income on food, health and education expenditures. The same view is held by Engle (1993), Haddinot and Haddad (1991) and Kabeer, (2003). Such income becomes more critical as it is available in periods with no earning alternatives (Schreckenber, 2004; Wynberg, Laird, Shackleton, Mander, Shackleton, & O'Regan, 2003).

Furthermore, the NRC reiterates that high level of domestication of the introduced fruits made local fruits experience downward spiral, characterized by lack of respect and neglect, hence lack of awareness and knowledge on the same (NRC, 2008). The recede of African fruits to the background culminated into fading of traditional eating habits thus rising dependence on exotic fruits. As wild fruits of Africa are unique, raising awareness about them, coupled with processing for broader market realization is necessary for revamping them into new giant products, call them "champion products". These represent unique assets that could be developed, domesticated and owned by farmers themselves.

Scarcity of scientific studies on African wild fruits has relegated them into uncertain management practices with unknown propagation techniques and lack of or limited nutrition information (Fukushima *et al.*, 2010; NRC, 2008). This tends to suppress the wild fruits sector, particularly its key actors (women) in Africa. To the author, wild fruits constitute unique product features that would stand as world class marketing information.

The paper attributes all the "negative traits" associated with wild fruits to lack of detailed explanation on why the wild fruits sector embraces such qualities in their production; and more importantly the basis for associated gender relations observed by previous studies. The theory behind this paper is that of understanding of "cause and effect" as a step towards developing effective solutions to the ailing socio-economic and environmental conditions for sustainable future.

Making women active actors in the entire value chain of wild fruits business, particularly in value addition and product marketing shall be the gist of profit realization in the wild fruits business. This marks transformation of wild fruits from being "local" to becoming "national" and even "international" products.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND MODEL

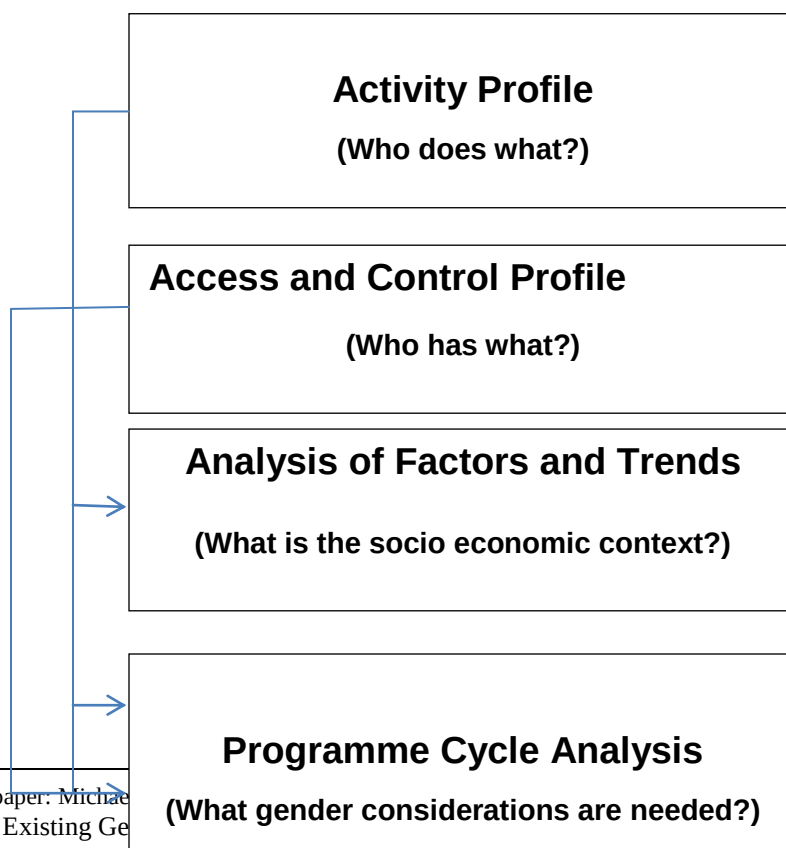
Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualizes gender issues as critical for determining relations that influence the mode of interaction with the forestry through participation in related activities, thus affecting both typologies of utilization of wild fruits including wild fruits business.

The paper underscores the fact that edible and un-edible wild fruits can only be available where natural forests still exist. Furthermore, it is gender relations, defined by “who does what” in the wild fruits business, which tend to be influenced by different factors; and lead into differential impact on the forest cover. The mode of ownership pops in as it determines access to resources. Hence gender relations in the wild fruits sector manifests from differential people’s engagement in wild fruits activities, utilization, ownership of means of production which influences income distribution and social positions among males and females within the household and even at community level. The nature and character of gender relations adopted by the community in question is, as well, likely to influence household members’ involvement in forest conservation initiatives, hence demonstrating causation. In this case gender relations are perceived being an important role in shaping the nature of wild fruits business in terms of types activities in wild fruits sector, products dealt with, consumption patterns of wild fruits, division of the proceeds obtained, intensity and duration of involvement in the wild fruits business; and more importantly the reasons for engagement in specific wild fruits activities among people of different age groups and sex categories.

Taking into account above theory, it may be concluded that putting gender into consideration, while planning rural development projects such as wild fruits business, remains critical for more specific support provision and for achieving equitable development. The same may only be possible after understanding the existing gender relations within the respective sector, to ensure further understanding of its existence, change and continuity. This is the gist of attaining sustainable development as the findings of an enquiry of this nature and character shall be used to enhance sustainable natural resource use.

Conceptual Model



Source: Asian Development Bank Gender Checklist, 2002

METHODOLOGY

The paper was written based on a study that made use of qualitative data collected from respondents living in four localities 4 from areas closer to Songea Municipality, i.e. headquarter for Ruvuma Region. Such localities were considered appropriate as they had Miombo woodland forests with a variety of wild fruits and hence facilitated wild fruits business.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted at Lipaya, Mahilo, Mpitimbi, Lipaya and Mletele villages. Interview guides were used during interviews, while probe questions were administered for clarity and collection of additional information about investigated phenomenon. In total eight (8) respondents participated in IDIs which provided information about particular households and about edible wild fruits and wild fruit trees conservation for the entire areas involved drawing from the experienced selected respondents.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents for IDIs

SN	LOCALITY	MALE	FEMALE	NO OF RESPONDENTS
1	Lipaya	1	2	3
3	Mahilo (Captured at Matogoro)	1	1	2
2	Lipaya	1	-	1
4	Mpitimbi	1	-	1
5	Mletele	-	1	1
	TOTAL	4	4	8

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The eight participants were selected based on “*purposive sampling*”, in order to obtain maximum variations of responses in a way to enriching the volume of information and data collected. The gender mix of the respondents was highly considered as respondents of both sexes were represented whereby half respondents were female. Data were processed manually by transcribing and translating the same from Kiswahili to English language.

Selection of the respondents was based on information gained during the preparatory visits to the same villages whereby villagers were asked about those inhabitants who actually dealt with wild fruits business. The actual selection included those who participated in the business continuously during the past five years. The gender mix was involved in the final selection. The IDI transcripts repeatedly read for the thorough understanding. From the transcripts, themes were identified and coded to obtain the main themes. Analysis was carried out by manually, similar themes and subjects to generate findings.

The three themes used in the analysis were wild fruits availability, gender relations in wild fruits activities and the nature and character of wild fruits business

Table 2 Codes and Descriptions Used in the Study

CODE	DESCRIPTIONS
SWF	Source of wild fruits for the household/village
TYWF	Types of wild fruits available in the area
DWFs	Average distance to wild fruits sources
TWF	Trends in wild fruits availability
WMIWF	Women's and men's involvement in wild fruits
ACT	Activities involved in wild fruits sector
REWFB	Rationale for engagement in wild fruits activities by sex and age groups
PWF	Types of processing of wild fruits
FWFB	Factors limiting wild fruits sector

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Data Analysis

The findings were analyzed basing on the peoples' involvement in activities pertinent edible wild fruits by sex categories followed by rationalization of their involvement.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Collecting wild fruits from the forest

Women were observed to be the key actors in collecting wild fruits from the forest. The task involved walking to the forest, collecting fruits and bringing them back to their homesteads. The types of fruits which were collected by picking the ripe fruits from the ground were *Uapaca kirkiana* (*Masuku*) and *Parinari curallitelia* (*Mbula*); while *Strychnos cocculoides* (*Mtonga*) were collected both from the ground and some ripe fruits were shaken using long sticks forcing them to fall down. As un-ripe wild fruits cannot fall easily they were left to be collected in some days to come, when fallen on the ground.

As women and children were defined to be the collectors of firewood, they are the ones with continuous interface with the forest.

When asked to rationalize women's involvement in collecting fruits from the forest, three reasons were given:

Women were mentioned to be more knowledgeable on the types and location of wild fruit trees within the forest. These made it easier for women to access and collect the wild fruits within a short time and with less stress to wonder around the vast forest. This could be vividly evidenced by the voice of the respondent:

“Women are the right people for the task of collecting wild fruits. They are the most frequent visitors of the forest as they are from time to time go there to collect firewood. They do know where masuku, madonga and mbingimbingi trees are located.”

It could be noted that “knowledge” about the forest, i.e. where and when to locate specific types of wild fruits were said to be highly vested within women and children who accompany their mothers in the process making women the key actors in wild fruits sector. Such knowledge is said to have been passed on through generations, hence putting the women in “expertise position” for the wild fruits business-related activities. This activity profile is deeply entrenched within the traditional set up of the respective human society within a defined geographical area.

Since wild fruits were carried in baskets which are socio-culturally “not acceptable” to be carried by men, it somehow becomes a limitation to men dealing with collection of wild fruits. In this way, most men are said to consume wild fruits while in the forest. They scarcely do bring and eat them at home. The quotation from a female respondent justifies this:

“It is certain that we women should collect, transport and sell wild fruits as we are the ones who do balance baskets full of vegetables and wild fruits on our heads. How can a man do that? It will be shameful to him!!”

From the above quotation, one may be logically prompted to perceive wild fruits sector as more of ‘a way of living than an economic activity’ which portrays same chances for women and men to engage in.

As women and children were mentioned to be the main consumers of wild fruits, at village level, it is logical that the same people are engaged in collecting wild fruits. In fact, some women and children consume a large amount of wild fruits while in the forest, and the ones brought back home are meant for sale only. Women collect wild fruits as they value them, an aspect which draws them to extend utility of the same to the urban areas. Supporting this stance is a quote from a male respondent:

“We, men eat wild fruits occasionally, especially when working in the forest. Women and children are the friends of wild fruits. They can easily eat and sell them to others. They actually do know people who would buy them in town”.

It is implicit that the initiative to sell wild fruits in towns basically originates from women. In this way there is little chance for men to engage in the same business.

Women were observed to be the ones who influence and ensure that some wild fruit trees are left to grow in household farms. For this reason, they retain a number of such trees for easy and reliable collection of wild fruits, knowing that it is their task to collect wild fruits. Why not keep them growing in their farms? The quotation from a female respondent:

“I had to leave some wild fruit trees in our farm. How does one clear all wild fruit trees? It is safer to have a few of such valuable trees to get fruits while working in the farm and sell some in town to get little money.”

The reality that women are the ones who accord higher value to wild fruits, indicate that they effectively manage the business as they directly benefit from it. It is no wonder that they keep some wild fruit trees in their farms for sustainable availability of wild fruits.

Processing of wild fruits after being brought at home

The processing of wild fruits was virtually absent in Songea District as neither modern processing factory nor traditional processing techniques were mentioned to exist. This demonstrated paucity of wild fruits processing in the area. Only one woman was mentioned to be involved in wild fruits processing. The processing particularly dealt with fresh juice blending meant for sale and direct consumption at local level. The processing did not involve use of preservatives and bottling of products. Fresh juice produced was served directly to passers-by consumers. The respondents' reactions inclined to the following quotation:

“We just eat fresh fruits. Does it mean that there are ways to process them into more valuable products? I do not have any idea about it”

It was observed that lack of awareness, knowledge and skills on wild fruits processing was one of the major limiting factors for fruit processing in the area. Those who dealt with wild fruits ended up with washing the fruits and selling them to whole sellers and/or consumers. This limited value addition, hence likely contributing to perpetuating poverty conditions among people of the area despite plenty availability of natural resources. It is however, worth mentioning that some organizations such as Small Industrial Development Organization (SIDO) and a number of Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) have conducted training in fruit processing in Tanzania, but no mention was noted for the case of wild fruits in Songea.

Selling of Wild fruits in the Market

Women were observed to be the main actors in selling of wild fruits especially in urban areas. They used two methods which are hawking, meaning moving around with their products looking for possible customers. In this way, long distances were covered anticipating that some people, who know the fruits and would like to buy the fruits, will be found.

On rationalizing the heavy representation of women in wild fruits selling, six reasons were given as follows:

Socio-cultural values of people of Songea would not “allow” men to sell wild fruits. Wild fruits business was traditionally labeled as “women’s business”. Substantiating this statement, one female respondent’s voice captured in the survey was:

“It is pity for a man to be involved in selling wild fruits. Men may only collect wild fruits for their own consumption and rarely for household consumption; but not for sale. This business is meant for us (women) and a few young school boys”.

It was mentioned further that wild fruits business had low level of profitability. Wild fruits business constitutes a component part of small business considered not suitable for men. In fact, men would, for one reason or another, not provide capital to their spouses so as to facilitate the processing and expansion of wild fruits business. Young men became involved in the business at an early age of between 14 and 16 years. They could not continue with such an activity as they identify themselves ‘not being part of it’. As one experienced female respondent strongly voiced:

“Men cannot deal with such low income business. They leave it for us (women). Though they do enjoy the income we earn from wild fruits selling as they expect us to buy some household items which they were supposed to buy. Where do they expect we get the income from? They surely do know that we get it from such small businesses like selling of wild fruits.”

Experience that women gained from selling of other products made them known to various consumers/customers. Such a situation keeps them in a better position in carrying out wild fruits business as well. The reality is that the same labour used to move around hawking vegetables was, at the same time and by the very process, used for selling wild fruits played role in perpetuating their heavy inclusion in the sector. As one female respondent openly voiced:

“We do sell wild fruits along with other products such as vegetables. It becomes easier and beneficial to us. We actually know our customers. We visit them at their homes selling exotic fruits, wild fruits and vegetables. Sometimes we walk while selling different types of products. In this way it becomes cheaper and more beneficial”.

The above quotation indicates that women dominate not only wild fruits sector but the whole range of small business sector particularly dealing with food materials and fruits. Wild fruits sector is, thus, just a subset of the women’s main business territory.

Lack of capital is mentioned to have made the majority of rural women struggle with nature in order to obtain their “own cash income”. Traditionally women could not own a piece of land; therefore, they did not own the products of their own labour, produced in a farm that was owned by the husband. By turning to wild fruit business women were guaranteed of the ownership of income whose capital, if any, was their labour power expended in collection and selling of wild fruits. Despite small financial benefits accrued to them, they as well gained nutritional benefits through consuming some of the fruits. The robust voice of one female respondent could be quoted uttering as follows:

“It is important that I do this type of business which literally requires no capital. I do not have any capital for another type of business. It is easy for me to just walk to the forest to collect wild fruits, wash them and sell them in town.”

The women's traditionally responsibility for petty business such as selling of vegetables exotic fruits and the like does not mean that they selected the activity purposefully. The selling of wild fruits is a continuity of normal socially accepted tasks for women's involvement; which they accept as the only option to them.

Women were associated with carrying vegetables and wild fruits in their baskets and on their heads. Such a method is considered feminine; hence wild fruits selling business is culturally relegated to be women's domain. The female respondent voiced that:

"We women may carry baskets to anywhere. This is our social responsibility, we carry foods and various products to feed families and sell some wild fruits for the up-keep of the same families. Men feel shy to engage in such businesses, selling inferior goods which earn less income."

It may be thought that a vessel or container used to carry traditional products as being a "non-issue"; in this instance it is. Wild fruits tend to vary with geographical localities in terms of types, use and processing. This portrays their being traditional practices. As the portal method is "feminine" involvement of people of masculine gender tends to be sidelined in the wild fruits sector. Hence, it underlines dominance of women in the wild fruits business.

On the distribution of income obtained from wild fruits business by sex categories of the respondents, it was found that women who dealt with wild fruits business were found to have control over the production of income they earned. Husbands had literally no say on the process of earning from wild fruits business and how the accrued income is used. The general perception on the proceeds obtained from such a business were thought to be too low, while men considered it as negligible, hence left it entirely to their spouses.

A deeper analysis of what actually happened at the household level, however, indicates that despite the apparent women's control on the income from wild fruits business, men were the major beneficiaries of the same. Considering that women bought certain types of items using the income accrued from wild fruits business, such as for buying basic household provisions such as salt, soaps, kerosene and the like, it was mentioned that men used them. This implied that men's income that was meant for household provisions was saved, while women's meagre income catered for the entire household. The men's saved income was likely to be consumed or used for personal needs. This kind of relationship is an overt outbalanced gender based one.

Generally speaking, women's position, within wild fruits business sector observed them to be at a disadvantage. Economically, women suffered a greater loss by extending their labour time to cover wild fruits business. They thought that they could earn more income for themselves and for their children through wild fruits business, only to find that they actually 'assisted' men in fulfilling their responsibility of providing for their households.

At this point, it may be inferred that socio-economic and cultural factors fueled women's dominance in the wild fruits sector. Men were found to shy away from the sector as it is considered to be small (brings low income), socially un-acceptable and culturally a misfit. The same reasons, conversely, places a woman into a disadvantage as the extra amount of money earned through wild fruits business is consumed by the entire household members augmenting level of exploitation based on the perpetual gender imbalance. The ultimate fact is that men benefited from the industry which they neglected, but at the expense of women and children.

It is complex to explain on the factors which cause and support gender based engagement in various social and economic activities that take place at community level. Rural areas have complex interaction of factors which tend to result into certain types of observed and clandestine relations. Some socio-cultural values that originate from old patriarchal systems have historically tended to dominate basic issues that include land ownership, distribution and inheritance.

In most societies in Songea District; and elsewhere in Africa, women have traditionally not been allowed to own land. Women, when married, are regarded as “got married”, meaning that they left their family (where they could not and in fact did not own land) to join the husband's family, where they are not supposed to be given a piece of land to own. At most they may be given a piece of land to cultivate for the husband. The social position of a woman is that of ‘a new comer’, “child bearer and keeper” and “a producer”. These conditions limit a woman in Songea District from charting a means of development which is outside the web of the husband and husband's family. Such relations are considered to be exploitative, hence need to be addressed. Women's involvement in wild fruits business is not by design; but it is the socio-cultural context which generates an economic force dragging them that way. Despite the fact that the current Tanzanian Land Act No 4. 1999 addressing the issues, of equal access, ownership and control of land (URT, 1999), it will take some time to be fully accommodate in the society since the traditional issues are deeply entrenched in peoples' mind sets.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Gender relations in wild fruits business in Songea District demonstrated the dominance of women's involvement in collecting, processing and selling of wild fruits. Therefore, in this context, social relations were characterized by inequitable gender relations whereby the wild fruits sector was left to be “operated” by girls and women. A small proportion of men, mainly boys aged between 14 and 16 and the elderly were as well acting in the sector.

Patriarchy is the basis of inequitable gender relations experienced at household level in Songea District, Tanzania in general. The outdated patriarchal values tended to limit innovation and contribution of women to household income and development. Women were mentioned to lack incentive to expand production and processing of wild fruits due to the observed skewed gender relations in the sector.

The paper realizes that women's efforts in wild fruits business render relatively less benefits to women as the main actors despite the apparent control of income, which consequently benefits all family members, men inclusive. This is the gist of backward position of women who try to work "outside" household land, thinking they were circumventing patriarchy in terms of the traditional land tenure system, only find themselves still trapped within the web of the same old socio-cultural system that persistently controls household's economic system.

Recommendations

It is important that awareness be created by various parties such as the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) on the importance of the wild fruits sector so that people of both sexes participate in all the activities of the sector for the benefit of the entire household and the nation at large. This will aim at enhanced men's involvement in wild fruits related activities.

Concerted short term and long term efforts should be put in place by responsible government organs, NGOs and CBOs to change patriarchy and other old values through training and dialogue so as to make all household members realize the fruits of their labour equally and for the sustainable benefits of all. This will act as a catalyst for socio-cultural transformation needed for more productive engagement in production activities by all household members.

There is the need to sensitize the community members on equitable sharing of household income as a condition for household's improvement in terms of children's access to education, nutrition and health services. This may be a permanent development agenda.

Further studies on gender relations in wild fruits sector are recommended the better understanding of the dynamics involved in a move to making the sector is termed more contributive to household income and national development.

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