

Gender Dimensions of Roles and Implications of Plantation Agriculture: A Critical Look at Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC) Debundscha Palm Estate Pre and Post-Anglophone Crisis

ABSTRACT

Background: Gender analysis of plantation agriculture is at an important point in history as more and more women continue to gain entry into plantation work. While governments view it as gender balanced and as an issue of equality in terms of employments, feminists are more concerned with the labour realities and job segregation that affects the status of workers especially female workers.

Aims: To examine the well-being and gender dynamics of workers at the Debundscha Palm plantation in Cameroon, focusing on changes before and after the Anglophone crisis

Study design: This study used two Research Designs, Descriptive and investigative, because it is a mixed study.

Place: situated at the foot of Mount Cameroon and facing the South Atlantic Ocean. The research focused in Njonge 2, Isongo, and Debundscha camps.

Methodology: Using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, the study analyzes data quantitatively with SPSS and qualitatively. It employs frameworks such as the Harvard Analytical Framework, sex role socialization, and Human Capital Theory to explore the low-paid positions predominantly held by women and how the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) values workers' skills for sustainable development.

Results: The findings indicate a pronounced gender-based division of labor, with men in higher-paying positions and women in lower-paid roles. The Anglophone crisis affected all workers, resulting in irregular pay, health issues, and heightened risks of crime and prostitution. Social challenges included inadequate healthcare. Women faced additional discrimination in education and training compared to men. **Conclusion:** Overall, the study underscores the complex interplay of gender and well-being in a labor context marked by crisis, revealing persistent inequalities between gender and labor conditions. The findings emphasize the need for greater attention to gender equity and resource allocation to enhance living and working conditions for all plantation workers.

Keywords: Gender Dimensions, Plantation Agriculture, Cameroon Development Cooperation, Debundscha Palm Estate, Anglophone Crisis

1. INTRODUCTION

Plantation agriculture is a significant economic activity globally, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, which benefits from a tropical climate conducive to growing various crops, including coffee, tea, and cocoa (FAO, 2010). In this region, women represent a substantial portion of

the agricultural labor force, averaging 43% in developing countries. This participation rate varies, with countries like Mozambique and Tanzania having female representation as high as 60% and 54%, respectively. However, despite this high involvement, women's contributions to agricultural production are often underappreciated and vary greatly across different regions (FAO, 2010).

In sub-Saharan Africa, gender roles in agricultural labor are distinctly defined. Men typically engage in more physically demanding tasks, such as land clearing, while women handle less strenuous activities like weeding and harvesting (Yousifi, 2018). This gender differentiation is also evident in other regions, such as Bangladesh, where women primarily focus on post-harvest activities and weeding (Krumbiegel et al., 2020). In Cameroon, women's roles encompass the entire crop production process, yet they often face economic limitations that prevent them from accumulating assets or property, despite earning comparable wages to men (Friedemann, 2020). This disparity highlights the need for a gender analysis in plantation agriculture to understand how such dynamics impact male and female workers differently.

Amid the expansion of plantation agriculture, Africa has also witnessed significant conflicts, particularly since the end of the Cold War, leading to instability and social challenges (Amanda et al., 2018). These conflicts have displaced millions and severely disrupted agricultural value chains, undermining development efforts. While governments may perceive increasing female participation in plantation work as a sign of gender equality, feminists emphasize ongoing issues of labor segregation and the precarious status of female workers. This article explores the gendered dimensions of plantation agriculture and its implications for workers, particularly in the context of pre- and post-conflict scenarios.

Plantation agriculture is vital to many nations' economies, providing millions with employment and contributing significantly to GDP. However, in Cameroon, traditional gender dynamics within palm plantations create inequalities and obscure the challenges faced by workers. The gendered division of labor is deeply rooted in social norms, resulting in job segregation that negatively impacts female workers. Women often bear the brunt of socio-political conflicts, facing trauma while juggling plantation work and caregiving responsibilities. This study explores the health, socio-economic status, and overall well-being of male and female workers at the Debundscha Palm Plantation Estate, particularly amid the Anglophone crisis.

To address the gender inequalities in plantation agriculture, particularly in countries like Cameroon, a multifaceted approach is necessary. First, implementing gender-sensitive policies that promote equal opportunities in hiring and role assignment can help balance the workforce. Training programs aimed at skill development for women should be established to enable them to take on higher-status positions, alongside initiatives that encourage male participation in caregiving roles to challenge traditional norms. Additionally, creating support systems for women affected by socio-political conflicts, such as counseling and financial assistance, can alleviate the burdens they face. Finally, raising awareness about the contributions of women in agriculture through community outreach and education can foster a more equitable environment, leading to improved status and working conditions for all plantation workers (Vicky, 2019).

Added to this, gender transformative change is conceptualized as the process of reversing unequal power relations and making discriminatory social institutions more equitable (DeMerritt-Verrone et al., 2021). While SDGs highlights the need for gender disaggregated and intersectional data analysis in its agenda 2030 as it emphasizes on "leave no one behind" lays a foundation on how food policy and global agriculture should work on national policies (Anderson et al 2022). More to this, since charity begins at home, multinational programs that

accelerates the process of rural women's empowerment can better enhance intra-household gender parity which will intern trickle down to the public sphere (Quisumbing et al., 2023).

In plantation agriculture, both men and women are involved in various tasks such as land preparation, fertilizer application, weeding, harvesting, and storage. However, specific roles can differ significantly across regions. For instance, in Bangladesh, women primarily engage in post-harvest activities, with weeding being predominantly female-dominated (Krumbiegel et al., 2020). In contrast, women in Cameroon participate in the entire crop production process, from pre- to post-harvest. However, they often face perceptions of being more docile and accepting lower wages and adverse conditions. More to this is women's involvement in the sugar-cane value chain in Uganda which was enhanced by the registration of sugar-cane block contracts in women's name. This however opposes if women discriminatory intra-household gender norms had been addressed as well (Ambler et al., 2021).

Friedemann (2020) highlights that despite comparable wages for male and female workers, women struggle to leverage their earnings for asset accumulation or property ownership due to their financial responsibilities within the household. This situation underscores the need for gender analysis in plantation agriculture to understand the diverse impacts on male and female laborers. Mohiuddin (2009) argues that occupational segregation perpetuates patriarchy by reinforcing gender divisions in labor and maintaining women's economic dependency. In Pakistan, cultural practices lead women to work primarily in the informal sector, limiting their contact with men. Feminist agrarian political economists emphasize the importance of women's labor in both household economies and wage labor within capitalist production systems (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The Anglophone crisis, which began in 2016, has exacerbated socioeconomic disparities between English and French-speaking regions in Cameroon, leading to increased poverty and damaged livelihoods. The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) plantations were severely affected, with net income plummeting from 80 billion to 3 billion in 2018, resulting in operational challenges (Ihalainen, 2021). The crisis has rendered nine CDC estates non-operational, drastically reducing palm oil production and raising security concerns for workers (Hoyle et al., 2012). Similar conflict situations in Mali and Nigeria have led to reduced mobility, access to markets, increased theft, and heightened risks from insurgents.

Verma and Bano (1998) note that the gender division of labor reinforces occupational segregation, which diminishes women's status in the labor market. Analyzing the quality of women's employment is crucial, as they often face poor working conditions and low wages due to prevailing patriarchal norms. Feminist theories—liberal, Marxist, and radical—characterize women's work as doubly alienated within capitalism, as their roles are often undervalued and tied to domestic responsibilities (Buvinic, 2016). This is further complicated by women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, which limits their participation in the formal labor market. When women are eventually employed particularly in agricultural domains, they are being confined in the domestic sphere which places limits to their mobility and options for better pay (Achandi et al., 2023).

Despite agriculture employing 10% of the global workforce, many jobs fail to meet decent work expectations, characterized by unsafe conditions, low pay, and insecure contracts. This affects female agricultural workers, in particular, as they often endure poor work environments and lack rights due to low skill levels (Ihalainen et al., 2021). While governments express support for gender equality and decent work, actual laws often fall short. International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions advocate for equal employment and decent work, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals emphasize gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work for all (SDG 8). Nevertheless, the specific challenges faced by male and female workers in

plantations remain largely unexamined (Donald et al., 2020). This is due to the stereotypical perception of gendered labor divisions which often shapes data collection instruments resulting to a scarcity of gender-disaggregated data on agricultural labor force participation. Thus marinating women's invisibility (Doss, 2021)

This study will examine the gender dimensions of roles and activities performed by male and female workers at the Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC) Debundscha Palm Plantation Estate. Geographically, the research will be confined to the Debundscha palm plantation located on the West Coast of Cameroon. It will focus specifically on the experiences of male and female workers, with particular emphasis on their roles, the challenges they encounter, and their coping strategies. The research will encompass three specific camps: Njonge 2, Isongo, and Debundscha, allowing for the collection of comprehensive qualitative data.

The significance of this study for female workers at CDC Debundscha lies in its potential to propose strategies for improving their working conditions and overall status. For male workers, the research will provide education on their rights and responsibilities, as well as guidance on how to support their female counterparts both at work and at home. This aspect aims to foster a "He for She" initiative, promoting awareness and encouraging equitable treatment in the workplace.

Furthermore, this research will offer the CDC actionable measures to enhance worker conditions and raise awareness about eliminating discriminatory practices within the organization. Finally, this study contributes to the existing body of research on plantation agriculture, addressing the underexplored topic of "Gender Implications of the Roles and Activities Performed by Men and Women in CDC Debundscha Plantation Estate," thus filling a significant gap in the literature.

1.2 Feminist thoughts on labor Realities

The liberal, Marxist and radical feminist have all characterized women as doubly alienated in capitalism because of the public/private split that relegates their work as mothers and house workers to the home and psychologically denies them full personhood, citizenship and human rights (Pateman, 1988; Fudge, 2014). Feminist hold the view that, it is because women's work tied stereotypically to housework and hence though unskilled is undervalued whether it is cleaning or nurturing work it is connected to natural material motivation which causes women's wages not to measure up with the wages of men (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Pearson, 1998; Kanji and Kolyani, 2001)

The Radical feminists agree that, women's work is part of a separate patriarchal mode of reproduction and in which men exploit women's reproductive labor, women's work ties women to nature and human needs in different ways than men's work does (Harding, 1986). According to a radical feminist, Jaggar (1983), though women are inculcated in to public and private jobs, they are not in favorable positions since patriarchal ideologies influence perceptions of women workers. Feminist hold that, Patriarchal culture and norms relegate women into secondary status in the family and society. Patriarchal perceptions on gender roles are also reflected in the economic occupations of women. Since women are the primary care-givers in the family they are found in care-giving occupations, for example, nurse, doctor, ayah/nanny, teacher, mid-wife and doctor, attract a greater proportion of women. Hence patriarchal relations provide a convincing partial explanation for the existence of sex-based occupational segregation (Jaggar, 1983; Haradhan, 2022).

Furthermore, feminist argue that part-time jobs are mostly “female” occupations because they are a reflection of the dominance of women rather than being a cause of it. Gender theories explain not merely the gendered formal labour market, it also moves on to decipher the predominance of women in the informal sector. Women, predominantly dominate home-based and subcontracting work, where the basis is the putting-out system, and are paid piece-rate. Work in the informal sector is poorly paid. More importantly, it offers women little social protection, it is unorganized, employment is insecure, and there are no social security benefits (Sangster, 2006).

The Marxist feminist like Marx and Friedrich Engles assume that, a woman's subordination is not as a result of her biologic disposition but of social relations, and that the institution of family as it exists is a complex system in which men command women's services. To them, women are an exploited class in the capitalist mode of production, by their husbands within families and by their employers in the paid labor market. The Marxist further argue that, because women are socialized into unpaid domestic labor and childcare responsibilities, they assume that, women are a cheap supply of labour, they are exploited by capitalism, which makes them less powerful both as women and as workers (Marx, 1950; Armstrong, 2020). This however benefits the capitalist system because they do not have to pay women to perform this role and the men because women perform a domestic servant role for all men.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Area

This study was conducted in Debundscha which is situated at the West Coast of Cameroon, a village under Idenau Sub Division (Figure 1). It is found at the foot of Mount Cameroon directly facing the South Atlantic Ocean on the Cameron coast. The West Coast is a distinct area with respect to rainfall pattern. Debundscha is noted to have the highest rainfall in Africa and rainfall is observed throughout the year. It has an extremely wet climate with about 10,299 millimeters of rainfall falling annually. The mean annual relative humidity ranges between 80% and 95% according to CDC weather records. This climatic condition makes the soil favorable for the growth of oil palms, cocoa, cassava and other food crops. The village Debundscha, is included among the five rainiest places in the world which includes Lloro, Mawsynram, Mount Waialeale and Cherrapunji with each of them receiving over 10,000 millimeters of rain annually Council Report. The camps for the study were Njonge 2, Isongo and Debundscha camp (Figure 1).

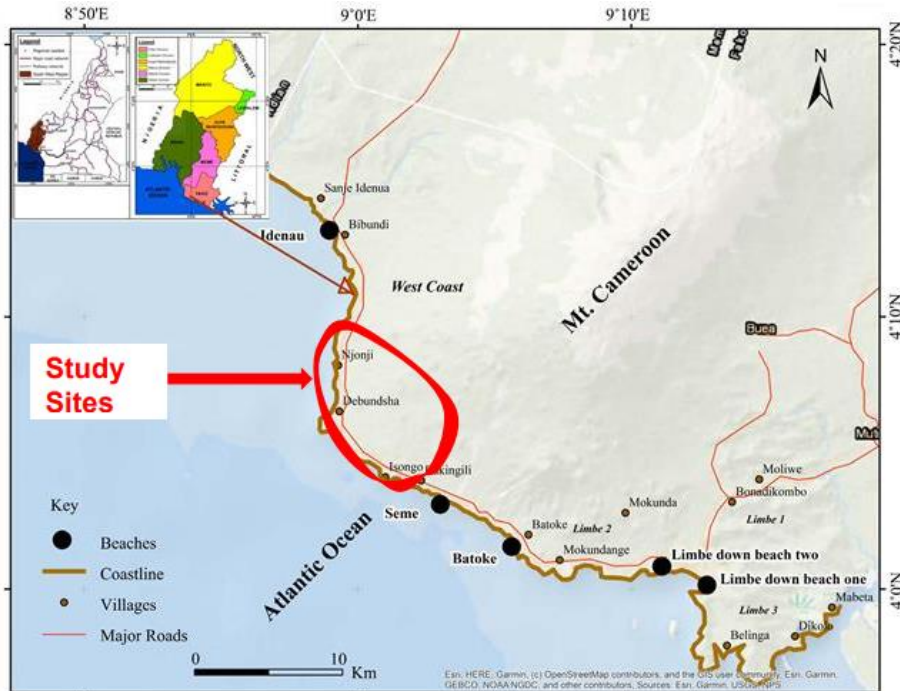


Figure 1. Map of the study area showing sampling sites on Limbe-Idenau Coastline (Ndumbe et al., 2023)

2.2 Research Design

This study made use of two Research Designs which are; the Descriptive and investigative design because it is a mixed study that combines both quantitative and qualitative method of data collection. As for the sample population and size, the total number of workers were 490 but this work focuses on 50 participants. (24 male and 26 female workers). 50 out of 490 workers were selected to easily collect highly detailed descriptions of human behaviours and opinions using an in-depth interview guide questionnaires. While 26 female respondents were chosen as oppose 24 male respondents to gather more lived experience and working conditions of female workers that literature has painted to be worst off. The target population was the staff, male and female workers in CDC Debundscha Palm Plantation who have worked for 5 – 10 years. These categories of workers were selected because, they can better explain the effects of plantation work from experience. The sampling technique for this study was the purposive sampling technique. These respondents were selected using the purposive sampling technique because the sample size or respondents have specific characteristics (worked from 5- 10 years) which match with the particular purpose and focus of the researcher.

2.3 Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique used is the purposive sampling because respondents were selected based on experience of work between 5-10 years. The instruments employed in the study are; Questionnaire, Semi – structured interview Guide and 2 Focused Group Discussions.

2.4 Data Analyses

Data collection was done secondarily using (journals, books, and archives) and primarily with the use of (field research). Data was analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for

Social Science (SPSS) presented in percentages, frequencies, mean and qualitatively using the Grounded Theory Wherein voices were classified and categorized into codes to form key ideas which were use in the study.

2.5 Scope of Study

Debundscha is an area having localities of natives like WeteWete with its main activity as fishing and plantation camps such as Njongi 1 and 2, Debundscha camp, Isongo and Mabanda. But this work will capture 3 camps which are Njonge 2, Isongo and Debundscha camp to effectively come out with a good qualitative data. The time frame is limited between 2015 to 2016 pre Anglophone crisis and 2016 to 2024, during the Anglophone crisis.

2.6 Ethical Issues

A formal and legal permission was obtained from the Department of Women and Gender Studies in the University of Buea. The consent of the respondents was sought as respondents were asked to sign a consent form while the researcher explained the objectives, purpose and significance of the research to them. All respondents were given reassurance that information collected will be used only for the research. Interviews will be conducted by the researcher at the convenience of the respondents with the aid of Pidgin English to ease communication. Also, the identity of respondents will be withheld to avoid easy identification of the ideas given by participants with the different respondents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of male and female workers at Debuncha

A great number of respondents fall between the ages 20-40 years with the minority being female of child bearing age. This is true as 28% of respondents have ages between 20-39 years, 40% have ages between 31-40 years has 28%, 20-30 and 51 and above years has 18% and 12% respectively.

Table: 1 Distribution of Respondents by Age Range

Age range	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
20-30	8	33.33	10	38.46	18	35.90
31-40	8	33.33	12	46.15	20	39.74
41-50	4	16.67	2	7.69	6	12.18
51 and above	4	16.67	2	7.69	6	12.18

Most respondents at Debundscha Estate are married, with female respondents comprising 69.23%, while 58.33% of males are single, and 11.54% of females are widows.

Table: 2 Distribution of respondents by marital Status

Marital status	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	

	n	%	n	%	n	%
Single	14	58.33	3	11.54	17	34.94
Married	10	41.67	18	69.23	28	55.45
Divorced	0	0.00	3	11.54	3	5.77
Widow	0	0.00	2	7.69	2	3.85
Total	24	100	26	100	50	100

Female workers report significant challenges in balancing CDC work and childcare, particularly as nursing mothers who must return to work just two months after childbirth without flexibility for breastfeeding. This burden extends to male workers as well; one male harvester noted the difficulty of arranging meals for their children due to his wife's demanding work schedule, resulting in late or early meals that contribute to child malnutrition. This highlights the broader issue of how work demands impact family well-being for both genders.

Findings reveal that, most workers are uneducated especially female workers. According to the table 3 below, at the farm site are primary school holders (46.15% as oppose 20.83 male) and secondary school holders (34.62% while male account for 25%). Meanwhile mostly male respondents employed in the offices are holders of either a high school certificate, vocational training or has obtained a University Degree.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education

Educational level	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
Primary	5	20.83	12	46.15	17	33.49
Secondary	6	25.00	9	34.62	15	29.81
Vocational training	6	25.00	2	7.69	8	16.35
High school	4	16.67	2	7.69	6	12.18
University	3	12.50	1	3.85	4	8.17
Total	24	100	26	100	50	100

Female respondents bear a heavier burden of household responsibilities compared to male respondents, with 42.31% of women living in households of 5-6 members, while only 25% of men do. Conversely, the smallest households of 1-2 members are predominantly male, with 45.83% compared to 15.38% for females. Women report managing all domestic chores—such as cooking, cleaning, and fetching water—before and after their work hours, in addition to caring for their children and husbands. This dual responsibility is compounded by inadequate housing, as the limited space provided for farm workers often cannot accommodate their larger families, leading to a lack of privacy and comfort. One female worker highlighted the challenges of living in a one-room house with five children and her husband, emphasizing the strain on their living conditions.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Household Size

Household size (No of persons)	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
1-2	11	45.83	4	15.38	15	30.61

3-4	4	16.67	8	30.77	12	23.72
5-6	6	25.00	11	42.31	17	33.65
7 and above	3	12.50	3	11.54	6	12.02
Total	24	100	26	100	50	100

Data indicates that a significant number of female respondents have young children dependent on them, with 42.31% having kids aged 0-11 years compared to 37.50% of male respondents. In contrast, more male respondents (41.67%) have children aged 12 years and older, while only 19.22% of female respondents do

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Age Range of Children

Age range of children (years)	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
0-5	9	37.50	11	42.31	20	39.90
6 - 11	2	8.33	7	26.92	9	17.63
12 -17	10	41.67	5	19.23	15	30.45
18 and above	3	12.50	3	11.54	6	12.02
Total	24	100	26	100	50	100

The findings highlight that the dual burden of productive and reproductive work heavily impacts women, particularly nursing mothers who struggle to balance childcare with work obligations. Many female workers report that they are required to return to work just two months postpartum without consideration for breastfeeding needs, while pregnant women receive some concessions with reduced hours and lighter tasks, though they are often paid the same as men despite performing less demanding roles. This reflects ongoing gender disparities in labor expectations and treatment within the workforce, aspects highlighted by feminists on labor market realities.

3.2 Roles Performed by Male and Female Workers.

Most jobs in the Estate have been masculinized and feminized. Evidence from field data confirms that, there exist gender division of roles by sex and educational level. Field work shows that, women's representation is higher at low paid jobs and lower at high paid jobs as a result of their level of education. While more men turn to cluster in jobs of higher wages. The position of a manager is (2.08%) occupied by 1 man, human resource worker (2.08%) occupied by 1 man, meanwhile the position of a field assistant is (6.09%) where female occupy 1 position as oppose that of male with 2 positions, heads men (4.17%) zero for women and 2 for male, added to this, drivers accounted for (2.08%) with no female. Harvesters summed up to 22.92% male only while 28.85% accounted for only female weeders. Yard keepers and domestic staff are (5.93%) within which there are 2 female and 1 male each.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Sex and Roles

Role Performed by Respondents	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		N	%
	n	%	n	%		
Manager	1	4.17	0	0.00	1	2.08

Human resource officer	1	4.17	0	0.00	1	2.08
Field assistant	2	8.33	1	3.85	3	6.09
Secretary	0	0.00	2	7.69	2	3.85
Insurance clerk	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	1.92
Nurse	1	4.17	3	11.54	4	7.85
Security guard	2	8.33	1	3.85	3	6.09
Harvester	10	41.67	1	3.85	11	22.76
Weeder	1	4.17	12	46.15	13	25.16
Driver	2	8.33	0	0.00	2	4.17
Heads men	3	12.50	1	3.85	4	8.17
Domestic staff	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	1.92
Yard keeper	1	4.17	3	11.54	4	7.85
Total	24	100	26	100	50	100

As shown on Table 6, most workers with high qualification are male and are mostly placed in decision making positions which are well paid as opposed female workers who are mostly uneducated and are employed in low paid positions. This finding ties with that in Tanzania were 85% of the workforce on flower farms involve in planting, harvesting and grading are women while men occupy a small number of managerial positions¹. This is the same in Colombia's flower-cutting industry even when women find formal sector employment, they do not easily advance into managerial positions. For example, most unskilled workers are women, while they have a much lower share of managerial jobs². It is worthy to note that, even with the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis, the role of male and female workers in CDC palm plantations have not changed. **The above findings corroborate the concern raised by feminists on labour realities and job segregation that affects the status of workers especially female workers**

3.3 Health Issues of Respondents

The health conditions of CDC workers during the Anglophone crisis was an eyesore as most workers, male and female alike where attacked by separatist fighters while carrying out their tasks as CDC workers, according to findings the most affected CDC areas during the crisis were; Tiko, Mongo, Illuani, Boa and Mondoni Estates. In the Tiko Banana Estate, sector workers working on the plantation sites got their hands amputated by separatist fighters who were against any one working on days declared as non-working days "ghost town days". In Mongo Palm Estate, many CDC houses were destroyed, banana plantations were destroyed in Illuani, Meanwhile Debundscha was not directly affected by the Anglophone crisis because the Estate is surrounded by a military toll gate, military camp, the mountain and the sea which are heavily guarded making it difficult for separatists to penetrate.

3.4 Issues on Respondents Specific Needs

Respondents are also faced with some issues as they work and live in CDC Debundscha Camps (Figure 2). However, these social challenges differ with the sex of respondents. The most common challenge is that of no portable water (50%). Wherein 30% accounts for female responses and 20% for male responses. This is because female respondents make use of water in most of their household activities like providing drinking water and water to bath for

¹ C. Eaton, A. Sheperd. Contract farming: partnership for growth. Food and agriculture org; 2001

² G. Fontana. Religious socialization as a contribution to school success: the effect of print exposure. University of California, Berkeley, 2008

their husbands. That of far markets (40%) affects women more as female responses amount to 32% against 8% for male responses. Most of the male provide the farm product such as plantain, cassava, cocoa yam for their wives to sell at the market and the money gotten from the sale is used to buy food stuff for the family. Meanwhile, for poor accommodation more females are affected as out of, 22%, female responses account for 14% while male responses were 8%. These poor accommodations are mostly provided by the company for their low wage works. Just like in the case of Tanzania, women also suffer from discrimination in benefits allocation where housing is provided; unmarried workers are given housing units suitable for men without dependents but extremely small for female-headed households³.

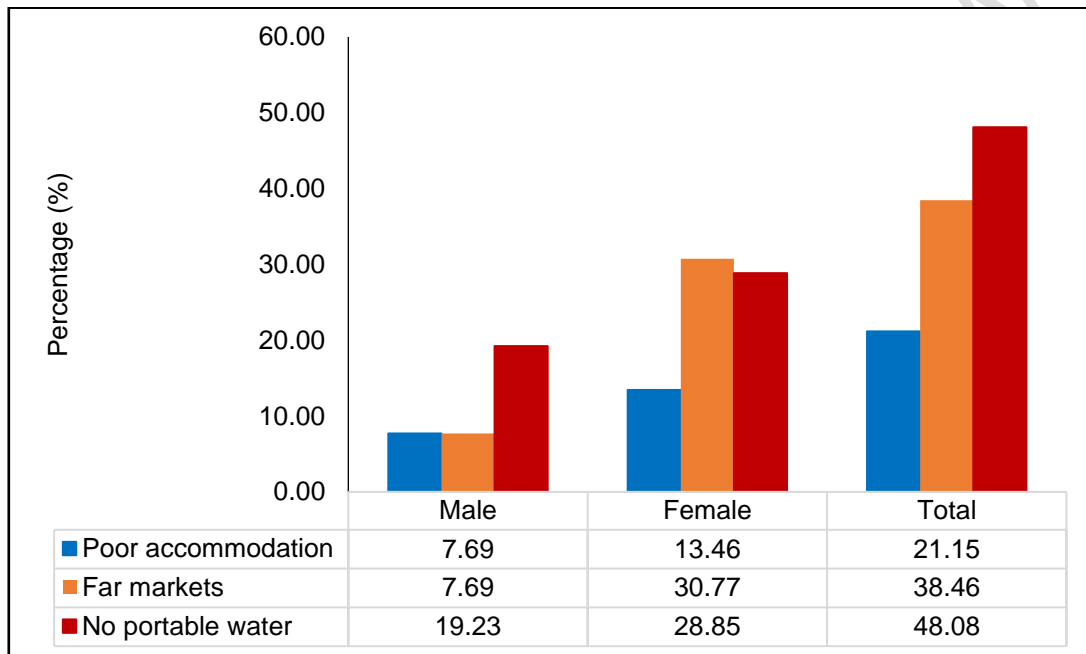


Figure 2. Distribution of Respondents by Sex and Specific Needs (Source: author's field data)

From multiple response, women unlike male workers are faced with multiple task as they engage in their roles as workers, wives and mothers. According to female weeders in a focused group discussion, the problem of water is alarming. This is evident as they all said "...the lack of portable water in camps causes illnesses to inhabitants since they depend more on salty stream water which causes stomach pain and even when it is used for laundry the cloths are never clean and when they get dry traces of salt are all over the cloths..." Other women added that, shortage of water causes uncleanliness in the camps as workers feel reluctant to take their bath because the available salt water causes skin diseases.

As a result of the Anglophone crisis, CDC got short of funds to pay its workers regularly. Thus, many marriages were broken due to financial constraints, as male workers were unable to take care of their families. Most women married or single or divorced resulted in to prostitution to take care of their basic needs while others engaged in petit trading like the sale of road side fuel, became food vendors and sold fish for a living.

³ C. Doss. If Women Hold up Half the Sky, How Much of the World's Food do they produce? Background paper prepared for the State of Food and Agriculture 2010.

3.5 Challenges Faced by Respondents

This study equally reveals that, respondents are faced with some issues as they carry out their task work, office work and as they live in CDC Camps.

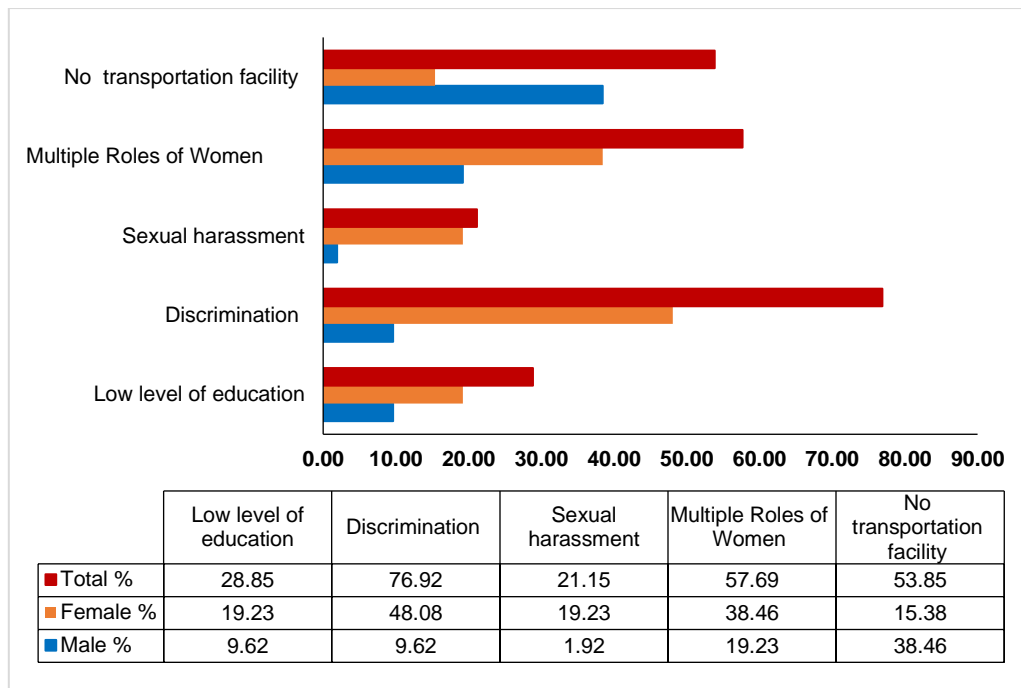


Figure 3. Distribution of Respondents by Sex and Work Related Concerns/Roles (Source: author's field data)

Multiple roles of female respondents at Debundscha Estate, both unskilled and skilled field workers are required to start their work at 6 AM, while managerial and administrative staff begin later at 9 AM and finish at 3 PM (Figure 3). This early schedule disproportionately impacts female workers, who often wake as early as 4 AM to prepare meals for their families, leaving their young children without adequate care during their long work hours. Although pregnant women receive some accommodations by working only four hours with lighter tasks, they earn the same pay as male workers engaged in more strenuous jobs. This situation reflects a broader trend in developing countries, where women bear the dual burden of agricultural responsibilities and domestic duties, highlighting their critical yet constrained role in agriculture.

Discriminatory practices at Debundscha Estate significantly contribute to the subordinate status of female workers, who are often excluded from key positions such as heads of operations and harvesters, roles typically reserved for men due to patriarchal norms (Figure 3). Findings indicate that male workers receive preferential treatment in terms of education and training opportunities, which facilitates their advancement to better-paying jobs, while women remain stuck in low-paying positions. A female respondent from Njonji Camp noted the lack of opportunities for skill development or promotions, reinforcing the cycle of poverty for female workers who are primarily seen as sources of cheap labor.

Transportation challenges at Debundscha Estate complicate access to work sites, particularly during heavy rainfall, which forces workers to trek long distances while carrying heavy tools (Figure 3). Both male and female workers report that this leads to fatigue before they even begin their tasks. A male harvester expressed how the absence of transportation facilities affects productivity and well-being, while a female weeder noted that the arduous journey often

results in illness, hindering her ability to manage household responsibilities after work. The introduction of new transportation trucks by the CDC represents a significant improvement, addressing the unsafe practices of the past. This aligns with the case in Malaysia where, farm plantation workers experience poor working conditions and discriminatory practices which affects women more. Women work six days a week on a rotational basis and receive menial wages in return for their work. Furthermore, fear of losing their job makes them put up with unpleasant conditions including offensive remarks and undue pressure, electricity and water bills are deducted from salaries. Women sprayers are often not in good health. They suffer from acute and chronic ailments related to their work (Sulochana, 2000).

Sexual harassment is a pervasive issue at Debundscha Estate, predominantly affecting female workers who face harassment from male supervisors (Figure 3). Reports indicate that these supervisors often employ coercive tactics, such as unwanted touching and suggestive glances, to manipulate female workers into compliance. Those who resist may experience reduced work hours and wages, while those who comply may receive increased hours and pay without fulfilling their work commitments. This toxic environment creates pressure on women to engage in sexual relationships for job security, contributing to a culture of exploitation that severely impacts their psychological well-being and work performance. This work is conversant with the case in Bangladesh where in large scale production companies, women are forced to face double jeopardy when it comes to sexual harassment. They are vulnerable to physical, psychological and sexual abuse in the workplace; they are frequently subjected to harassment in the public domain of the street. According to a health survey on safety regulations in the garment industry, sexual harassment is likely to be the most dominant source of stress for garment workers. Sexual harassment is commonplace and justified by some male banana and pineapple producers as 'part of their culture' (banana link 2015).

For discriminatory practices in the Debundscha estate (Figure 3), the findings highlight that female respondents are often relegated to subordinate positions, as certain roles, such as heads of operations, are masculinized and primarily occupied by men. This bias in treatment extends to education and training opportunities, where males are prioritized, allowing them to advance to better-paying jobs while women remain in low-paying positions. This situation contradicts the human capital theory, which advocates for the valuation of workers' skills and abilities. The persistent discrimination against female workers limits their economic opportunities, contributing to a widening economic gap between male and female employees.

3.7 The Impact of the Anglophone Crisis

According to findings gotten from the interview with the Estate Manager of Debundscha, the outburst of the Anglophone crisis drastically changed the lives of all workers ranging from managers to the lowest rank of workers. However, the crisis did not in any way cause discriminatory practices amongst male and female workers. This is because all workers suffered the same fate of financial crisis. But the consequences affected male and female workers differently. The female workers in low ranking positions who are bread winners were more affected. This to him is because unlike unpaid male workers who have unpaid wives but both work together using alternative jobs like small provision store businesses and sale of clothes to assist their households, a single female worker with the singular responsibility to provide for the family had to suffer more.

He added that, the poverty situation among CDC workers as a result of irregular salary payments also led to a breakdown of family structures, as many women became worst off and had to turn to prostitution to earn money to sustain themselves and their children. Meanwhile male workers turn to seek income from small jobs like fishing and sale of roadside fuel. However, this crisis unlike in other CDC estates mostly affected the financial condition of

workers. While in other CDC estates, workers suffered devastating consequences like deaths and kidnaping for ransoms.

Drawing from the pre and post periods of the crisis, women face challenges as they are being discriminated upon, relegated at low paid jobs (weeders) and not given opportunity to empower themselves as their male counterparts who are sent for capacity building trainings that allows for them to easily climb to top positions. Meanwhile in the Anglophone crisis period, women are not being discriminated upon by CDC but they turn to suffer more than their male counterparts as they have to bear the burden of single handedly fending for their families, which causes them to get involved in illicit activities like prostitution to source for money.

3.8 Coping Strategies:

3.8.1 Measures Taken by CDC

In response to these challenges, the CDC has made adjustments to working hours, implementing a task-based system that allows workers to complete their assignments at their own pace. Workers are still required to report at 6 AM, but they can choose when to finish their tasks throughout the day. This flexibility helps workers manage personal matters alongside their job responsibilities. Additionally, social amenities such as healthcare clinics and aid posts are available to support workers' health, although deeper issues related to gender roles and women's autonomy remain unaddressed.

3.8.2 Coping Strategies of Respondents

Workers at Debundscha Estate have developed various coping strategies, such as starting small businesses to supplement their incomes. While social amenities like accommodations and healthcare are available, they are often unevenly distributed, favoring male workers. Many women seek low-cost jobs that allow them to balance work with family responsibilities. Following the crisis, workers have turned to informal jobs, such as food vending and selling fish, to sustain their livelihoods, reflecting their resilience in the face of systemic challenges

4. CONCLUSION

This article examines the gendered impacts of plantation agriculture on workers at the Debundscha Palm plantation, particularly before and after the Anglophone crisis. Findings reveal that female workers are disproportionately affected, facing barriers to training and promotion that reinforce their subordinate positions in the workforce. Labor distribution is gendered, with high-wage managerial and skilled roles reserved for men, while women dominate low-wage, unskilled jobs, exacerbating income disparities. Additionally, female workers experience higher rates of sexual harassment, negatively impacting their work performance and overall well-being. The demands of triple roles-household, office, and community women worse off than men, aligning with UNESCO's 2030 goals for gender equality and reduced inequality.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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