

Towards a Gendered Development Discourse in Africa: Visible Women, Invisible Men

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1.1 Introduction

That Africa is at a development cul-de-sac in the new millennium and needs to rethink alternative strategies for an overhaul is unquestionable. As Ibrahim Abdullah observes; “ perhaps it is time we revisit the development literature of the 1960s and 1970s...[i.e.] “the development of under-development” (Abdullah 2005: 24). Today China is a leading consumer society in the world registering the highest growth rate in modern times. The Asian tigers have also demonstrated the economic prowess (Abdullah 2005: 24). While Africa is still stagnating and is still to embark on a similar path in the future to create development possibilities for its peoples, it is constrained for now, and perhaps for a long time indeed, to concentrate on the agricultural sector and its natural resources as the main stay of its sustainable development. The African Union and the NEPAD framework still remains at the level of elitist discourse and is little known or felt by the masses. The principal concern of the masses is food security for survival and any development paradigm that minimizes this basic factor is clearly deficient. It is for this reason that I intend to engage in a pragmatic discourse of development.

This paper refuses to subscribe to the NEPAD-like development rhetoric and rather takes a critical look at the preliminaries of development from a gendered perspective of food security with a focus on the Cameroon North Western Grasslands where subsistence agriculture is an exclusive women affair. It argues that the question of the sustenance of food security is essential for survival of the masses; yet only women are visible and active in this crucial aspect of the economy, while men are invisible and disinterested. There is therefore a developmental swing between women as agents of development and men as agents of underdevelopment. If the population depends essentially on agriculture, there is need for a rethinking on how this sector should be protected and revamped by both men and women. Yet, women as traditional providers of food for their families have tended to be more concerned about this field than men.

The question of food security is very sensitive and women have refused to allow any attempt at endangering the livelihood of their families by allowing the farming sector to be tempered with. Women often stage demonstrations in public places (Barbier 1985) when they felt men were unconcerned about threats to their farming activities or were in complicity with nomadic graziers from whom they depended for favours.

Despite their determination to feed their families, women encounter multiple problems that impede their ambition to contribute fully to the economy, particularly in

the farming sector. These problems confronting women are classified as “invisible” because in the literature dealing with food security, women activities are not considered as important enough to affect the food production sector (Gladwin 2001, 1996, 1997). The presence of nomadic Fulani graziers in North West Province and the various handicaps women face, including the question of land ownership, impedes their productivity. Yet they are expected to care for the household for its survival without taking cognisance of the various impediments that face them.

Who cares about land and who owns the land in the North West Province of Cameroon? This question points to the problematic of a gendered use and misuse of land with its implications for food security and the survival of livelihoods. This study makes the point that for generations now, women have been at the forefront of food production for the sustenance of their families. They are at the same time championing the struggle for the protection of farmland and farm crops against degradation and destruction from visible and invisible forces. As for men, they are either active destroyers of the land through wanton grazing or they are simply indifferent to the destruction of farm crops by graziers. Men are most of the time “missing” in women’s quest for the protection of the food crops against hazardous graziers abandoning this niche to women as leaders¹. In this specific sphere, men constitute agents of underdevelopment while women are the sole occupants of the development bandwagon. Herein fits the paradigm of the development of underdevelopment.

The nexus between women, food production and land (mis)management and ownership is important in understanding the economy of care. Feminist economic literature reveals all forms of motivation including self-interest in people’s choices and behaviours, altruism, caring, and fairness. Although these are associated with women, they are in fact historically and culturally constructed (Beneria 2003, Gaidzanwa 1992, Krishnaraj and Desmurch 1993). This study therefore examines the gendered dimension of food security that is closely associated to land use. The emphasis is on women’s concern on the protection of their food crops as suppliers of food to their households against threats posed by nomadic graziers and the non-chalance of their male folk.

1.2 Conceptual and Theoretical Considerations

The gendered dimension of food security and its corollary, the land question in Cameroon, goes beyond the sexually sanctioned biological differences. The biological approach is significant in the sense that it is integrated in the more global and operational one- the so-called socio-anthropological one. The socio-anthropological approach definition of a woman puts an emphasis on her role in society. Here a woman is conceived as an actor in the same capacity as a man. Thus, one thinks of a woman in a

¹ For interesting sidelines on missing men in the economy of care see Bridget O’Laughlin, 1997, “Missing Men? The Debate over Rural Poverty and Woman-Headed Households in Southern Africa”, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies (ISS).

multi-dimensional view by going beyond the classical opposition between the domestic and the political, and integrating the feminine dimension in the global understanding of society.

Neither roles nor sex alone are sufficient to explain the extent of the differential values between sexes and the functions that are specific to a woman. Roles and status refer back in each socio-cultural milieu to a world of representations, which in itself is inherent to a conception and vision of the world. One should therefore consider the games of vision, symbolism, ideology, and power that ensure society's equilibrium and reproduction. The social status of women and the relationships between them and men cannot be thought of outside the question of power that determines the social dynamics. "Women" must both be naturalised and sociologized. To be a woman is both a biological being and a social actor and one does not happen without the other. The biological and social are linked. They influence each other and sometimes determine each other.

This paper hinges on the socio-anthropological approach of conceptualising women, food security and the related land question. The land question and the land status of women are fundamentally determined by the socio-anthropological structure of women and by the regulation of power functioning in terms of the logic between women and men in society. The socio-anthropological frame enables us to sketch out an operational categorisation of women in Cameroon. Is the food security land question under investigation the concern of women of all categories and of all parts of Cameroon as a whole? This question requires a definition and categorisation of Cameroonian women, an exercise that involves certainties and uncertainties. That the Cameroonian woman is a complex and diversified reality is a certainty. To be sure, there is no unique category or type of woman in Cameroon. There are actually many according to their social origin, education, training, profession, marital status etc. Nonetheless, this categorisation is neither very rigid nor definitive. It contains uncertainties owing to changes in women's fortunes and the dynamic character of women's identity.

Women identities are social creations and they are very fluid. Under certain circumstances, a woman can valorise her peasant identity; elsewhere she might display her educational acquisition or profession, all been done in relation to the interest at stake in a given situation or to her personal expectations. Within the context of this study, the author has made an operational choice that takes into account occupation and the milieu of the woman. The author focuses on the category of women farmers in the rural areas involved in subsistence agriculture. Rurality is therefore privileged and the category of women are full time farmers.

Traditionally, women are not only wives and mothers, but food producers as well. The primary concern of women is providing for their children and husband and this is where their womanhood lies. Since the responsibility of feeding the household was incumbent on them, they had to indulge in farming. This explains why in Cameroon, rural women have come to perform sixty to eighty percent of the agricultural work; more than any other continent in the world. These women are responsible for at least half of the food produced yearly (Berg 1997). Today they own barely any land and are often

overlooked in development projects. In the Cameroonian context, it is the woman who exploits the land most for farming and other agricultural activities (Goheen 1991,1993).

The greatest adversaries of rural women farmers are the nomadic Fulani graziers who are almost exclusively men (Kaberry 1952, Njeuma and Awasom 1990, Awasom 2003b). The cattle Fulani mismanagement of land and their perennial trespass into women's farmland often generates a gendered response. While women often take the Fulani to task, the men are almost always mute as if the food crops cultivated do not enter their bellies. Understandably, men do not generally own food crops and are less embittered by Fulani cattle trespass. The primary preoccupation of women is to ensure that a situation of food insecurity does not arise because graziers have destroyed their farmland.

Food security is better understood as "sufficient food consumption by all people at all times for a healthy and productive life" (Gladwin *et al.* 2002:3). Food insecurity can be transitory or chronic. Transitory food insecurity is a short-term food insecurity problem caused by a shock to the food production or economic system arising from natural or man-made hazards and where income or resources necessary to adjust to shock in food production are not available. Chronic food insecurity is a long-term problem caused by lack, at the household level, of income or assets to produce food adequate to the household.

Households are vulnerable to food insecurity when their income sources are inadequate (chronic food insecurity) and/or their incomes are vulnerable to exogenous shocks (transitory food insecurity) arising from a fall in food production caused by animal and insect destruction of food crops or natural calamities. In Cameroon, like most of Africa south of the Sahara, over 80 per cent of the population live in rural areas and depend on agriculture either directly through production or indirectly through providing labour in the farming sector for their income. The link between access to food and agricultural production is very strong. This is so because most households depend on agriculture as the basis of their income and survival.

Yet female farming in Cameroon's North West province is quite precarious owing to the invisible factor. The constraints facing female farmers are proving to be greater stumbling blocks to agricultural development than those faced by male economic activities. Women lack access to land for they beg for land rather than own it. What they own on the land is the food crops while the males own the land (Goheen 1996) thereby exposing a type of gendered partnership. Women lack capital or credit or cash (they do not usually grow the coffee cash crop which is in the domain of males), fertilizer or manure, technological training and sufficient extension services. Most importantly, Fulani cattle are a perennial threat to the destruction of their food crops. Such problems confronting rural women's farming activities are classified as the "invisible factor" of production because these gender-related constraints are deleterious to women's productivity, yet they are almost never mentioned as explanations for poor agricultural yields in Africa's food security literature (Gladwin 1992, 1996, 1997). To link gender-related constraints that impact on food production in Africa to the issue of food security

is incumbent on policy makers if a viable solution is to be contemplated. Women farm crops must be protected in order to guarantee sustained food security.

The issue of landownership and crop ownership must be addressed to understand the ambivalent attitude of men towards the destruction of women's food crops. In almost all Cameroonian societies, land is traditionally considered as a common heritage, that is, as a physical, cultural, collective space inherited from ancestors. It is a community resource space transmitted from generation to generation that is managed by the community's legitimate representatives. This management ensures the social reproduction of the group both in terms of identity and survival. As a communal land, it has a cosmological relevance and as a resource space, land is not strictly speaking ordinary property that can be appropriated or commercialised. In both judicial and farming terms, land is identified with the lineage or village community to be used or managed without necessarily been owned. In this sense, ownership is different from civil heritage and is dependent on the community and not universal solidarity. Land used to be nobody's property but a common property that was treated as shared wealth (Barrier 1997, Le Roy 1991).

Land is also conceptualised as a resource, a property. In present practice, land in its different forms (farming, forestry, judicial) is a resource, highly solicited by both the state and the population. It is the object of many stakes: political, economic, social and cultural. For the state, land is of political and economic relevance. The state poses as the overall owner of all lands, for national lands is the special expression of the state's power, sovereignty and also a source of financial revenue. For the population, the stake is political and economic but also social and cultural. Land is a factor of power and strength. The withholder, owner, or user of land has power in society and controls the dynamics of production and reproduction of social groups. Land is a vital resource. But culturally and symbolically, land is a sacred object that ensures the mediation of men and women to the sacred. It is an element of social status in the sense that it determines the relationship of individuals to different networks to which they. Economically and socially, land ensures life and the means of subsistence. Although land is understood as both a heritage and resource, it is more and more understood as an exploitable resource. Accordingly, land in Cameroon has come to take on the predominant sense of farming and forestlands. Land as an exploitable resource is at the centre of growing covetousness on the local, regional and national scale (Logo and Bikie 2003).

Since men are considered in the North West Province as the community's legitimate representatives, they are the real owners of the land while women are the real owners of the food crops on them (Goheen 1991, 1996). The Fulani graziers occupy mostly the highlands in the rainy season and the valleys in the dry season. Owing to continuous usage of grazing lands over several generations, the Fulani grazier class have emerged as one of the largest land owning class in the North West Province. It is interesting to examine the different attitude of men and women towards the destruction of food crops and farmland by Fulani cattle.

In this paper, we attempt relate food security for women in the North West province of Cameroon to the management and mismanagement of farmlands. To be food secured women farmers must ensure that their farmlands are protected as their primary source of wealth while they may engage in multiple livelihood strategies. In Africa women farmers equally engage in petty trade and the informal labour market (Pearce et al. 1996) but the basis of their livelihood is farming and they must be concerned with the protection of their food crops.

1.2 The Resurgence of New Threats on Women's Food Crops and Farmlands in the Colonial Period

There are two principal threats to food security in the North West Province: first, land degradation and the destruction of food crops from natural and artificial forces; and second, the modernisation drive of the colonial and postcolonial state. The first threat is attributed principally to the arrival and activities of the Fulani graziers in the North West. The second comes from attempts by the government to reverse traditional methods of farming in the name of modernisation, which is seen by women as an attempt to experiment with their survival.

Traditional, the North West Province of Cameroon is not a grazing territory and grazing started in the area in earnest from 1903 when the nomadic Fulani started penetrating the region from neighbouring Nigeria (Njeuma and Awasom 1990). When the British took over the administration of North West, which is largely the savannah grasslands region in 1916, it was largely an agricultural region with women as the principal agents of food production. The North West Province was confronted with the arrival of successive waves of Fulani graziers that streamed into the predominantly agricultural region owing to its favorable grazing climate.

The early decades of Fulani presence was beneficial to both indigenous men and women for several reasons. The ruling elite often benefited from the largesse of the Fulani herders who paid taxes in cash and kind to them and the colonial administration. It is even said that there was a scramble between the various chiefdoms of the North West Province to attract the Fulani into their chiefdoms in order to benefit from their presence. As for women native farmers, they benefited from cow droppings, which constituted manure for their crops. The cattle Fulani were therefore an asset to both men and women and they co-existed peacefully with the indigenous peoples (Awasom 2003b).

A significant increase in the cattle population brought the Fulani- native entente to an end because the animals tended to feed on farmers' crops and destroy farmland. The cattle population, which was initially 10,000 in 1922, had risen to 91,782 in 1940 (Njeuma and Awasom 1990: 219). As a result of this explosion the demand for more grazing land proportionately increased while that of farmland did not decrease. This explosion in cattle population coupled with traditional shifting cultivation farming technique of the women made the conflict with graziers inevitable. Given that the native depended on their farms for their livelihood, the destruction of their crops was tantamount to genocide and could not be tolerated by the natives.

The women practiced shifting cultivation, which involved the annual change of farmland from one place to another to get greater yields, and allow the previous farm plot to recover its fertility. This system of farming gave rise to scattered cultivated plots all over the lowlands and highlands thereby making it very probable for farm plots and crops to be trampled upon by cattle,

The practice of shifting cultivation by the native women gave the British the wrong impression that there was more than enough land in the North West Province (Kaberry 1952). In 1943, the A.D.O of Bamenda carried out some surveys to determine the amount of land necessary for farming by women in the kingdom of Nso. He calculated that each woman on the average farmed 1.1 acres of land a year². The Assistant District Officer's estimate was subsequently considered by Kaberry, a female anthropologist, as fair when she visited the North West Province for the first time in 1945. After her own field work in 1948, she estimated that a woman worked just 1.5 acres of land of which 75 per cent was planted in cereals. With improved standard of living, a single woman had more children, and consequently more mouths to feed than was the case in the past³. She finally wrote her report from the minutes of the Native Authority meetings, Native Court records and her field work. Her intension was to draw the attention of the government to the plight of the woman who were principally farmers and were in trouble with the Fulani graziers. Her report therefore traced the beginning of the farmer-grazier problem from the late 1930s to the climax of the problem in the 50s⁴. There was therefore the demand for more farmland by women and protection of these lands from cattle trespass while the Fulani also wanted more pasture land.

When Kaberry started her study of the economic position of women for the colonial office in 1945, she could not escape the problem of farm damage by Fulani cattle. The women had been informed by the administration that Kaberry had come to solve their problem, which for them meant the cattle problem. So when Kaberry asked any question to the women, they only talked about cattle. When she realized that she could not undertake any research without attending to the cattle problem, she complained to the administrative officers in these terms:

Something will have to be done...Do you think I can talk about anything except the Fulani and their cows? No matter what I try to discuss, house building (the cow ate all their thatching grass), cooking the cows have eaten the corn, the size of their farm harvest, (cows) sickness of children, the cows have eaten the children's food, women's work) it is hard because of the cows),- it all comes back to this bête noire.... I don't want to be a

² National Archives Buea, File Ab, 1945/99980/C, Dr. P Kaberry, Lady Anthropologist, Posting of the Cameroon Province, 1945. Kaberry was sent to Cameroon to study the economic position of women in order to enable the colonial administration to integrate them in mainstream more fully into the economy.

³ National Archives Buea, File Ab 1958/99989, P.M. Kaberry, Report on Farmer-Grazier Relations and Changing Patterns of Agriculture in Nsaw

⁴ P.M. Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields* (H.M.G.O, London 1952), National Archives Buea, File Ab 1958/99989, P.M. Kaberry, Report on Farmer-Grazier Relations and Changing Patterns of Agriculture in Nsaw.

scaremonger, but if matters continue for any couple of years or so, the administration may be up against serious trouble⁵.

In some areas toured by Kaberry, she inspected the farms and noticed in some places that the Fulanis had camped within a quarter of mile of the village and that the women had been compelled to abandon even their own kitchen gardens. Some even travelled distances from 3 to 5 miles only to look for farmlands that would escape devastation by the Fulani cattle. Not even farms in the village, devoid of cattle, were free of cattle trespass.

In 1948 Kaberry estimated that an unassisted woman cultivated just about 1.5 acres of land of which 77 percent was in cereals, By 1958, a woman cultivated 2 acres of which 1.5 acres was devoted to maize. An increase in the demand for cultivated land is explained by the fact that the total number of children per woman had also increased and there were therefore more mouths to feed. Men needed land for coffee, a cash crop, women needed land for the cultivation of food crops, and the Fulani needed land for grazing. Trespass at Ngonzen, Fufu. Zeh and Memfu became so acute in July and August 1955 that villagers demanded the eviction of all Fulani from their area. Women could no longer farm in the village and had to travel several miles from the Nkambe borders to find land.

In May 1958, a delegation of women walked to Kaberry's house and complained to her about regular cattle trespasses. She asked them to take the matter to the native court but they were reluctant to do so because the court officials had come under the sway of the affluent Fulani graziers. Kaberry set up a committee including victims of trespass cases to investigate the problems. At Malef, the committee noted that a Fulani had successfully obliged women to vacate the vicinity by building his hut on farmland. At Kai a similar incident was observed. A large encampment of Fulani had successfully installed themselves on farmland. They were ordered to vacate the place within a month but it was only under the help of the police that the Fulani was ejected in the area in the later part of the year. In January 1958, a group of over 200 women from fifteen villages and outlying hamlets assembled at the council meeting about the familiar problem of crop destruction. The report of the committee set up to investigate the matter was pitiable. Cattle destroyed crops and in some cases no harvest could be expected for that year⁵. Because of this state of affairs, the relationship between the native and the Fulani deteriorated to its lowest ebb in the 1950s⁶. The Fulani were no more viewed as good neighbors but a nuisance and liability to North West region (Awasom 2003b).

The government of Dr. E.M. L. Endeley attempted to modernize farming in the British Cameroons in 1958 by introducing legislation which required women in farm across the slope and not parallel to it in order to minimize erosion. Agricultural officers

⁵ National Archives Buea, File Ab 1958/99989, P.M. Kaberry, Report on Farmer-Grazier Relations and Changing Patterns of Agriculture in Nsaw

⁵ St. Croix, a veterinary officer in Bamenda who had served in Northern Nigeria, blamed the farmer grazier problem on the Fulani on grounds that they poorly herded their cattle. He stated that there more cows in Northern Nigeria than Bamenda, yet farmers and graziers successfully co-existed with minimum friction

⁶ National Archives Buea, File Ab 1958/99989, P.M. Kaberry, Report on Farmer-Grazier Relations and Changing Patterns of Agriculture in Nsaw.

went to the fields to sensitize women on the *raison d'être* of the reforms. Women in the hilly district of Kom panicked at the prospects of the government requiring them to change a traditional method of farming they had no quarrel with and which had functioned well in the past. Using their traditional governing institution, the *Anlu*, the women staged a mammoth demonstration against the scheme and this contributed to the collapse of the government of Endeley government in 1959 (Awasom 2003).

The attitude of Men towards the Fulani Grazier and the Complaints of Women farmers during the colonial period

Throughout the course of farmer-grazier clashes during the colonial phase, British officers, Village Heads and Native Authorities who were exclusively males, were generally sympathetic towards the Fulani because the Native Authorities depended on more than 60 per cent of their revenue from taxes derived from the cattle industry (Njeuma and Awasom 1990). They were therefore inclined to consider the Fulani as an integral part of the indigenous population who were entitled to fair treatment. During the meeting of Nsaw N.A, a council member on behalf of the D.O stated:

God has given you people unlimited land. The Fulani, some of whom are born here, are entitled to grazing land and must not be seen as aliens. The administration would, however, ensure a fair distribution of land and bring farmer grazier conflicts under control.

The fact that administration envisaged the redistribution of land between the Fulani and the native farmers shows how much importance they were attributing to the Fulani, the reason being that they were contributing enormously to the revenue of the North West region. The Fulani were clearly a nuisance because their cattle destroyed farm crops and farmlands. The attitude of the British and the Native Authority toward the Fulani was a combination of these two aspects: to compensate the Fulani for their contribution to the economy of the region and formulate a scheme for the integration of the Fulani in the region.

1.3 The Postcolonial State, Fulani Destruction of Food Crops and Farmland and Women's Distress Cry

From the 1960s to the 2000s, women farmers have continued to struggle with the Fulani graziers, and a new class of male indigenous graziers, over the issue of land use, trespass and crop destruction. Graziers are generally an affluent class and they have the means of buying off traditional rulers and their councillors, and to manipulate the forces of law and order and the justice system to their advantage (Interviews with informant 1,2, 3, 4, 5). Women often take their complaints to their traditional rulers or to the courts but hardly get a long lasting solution to their problem. Given the serious implications of crop destruction to the livelihoods of ruralites, women often dramatize their frustrations in a colourful manner. A few anecdotes would capture the reaction of women to the destruction of their crops.

In 1978 and 1979, demonstrations were staged by women in Wum in Menchem division of the North West Province over the destruction of their farms in the heart of the farming season by Fulani cattle. The women organized themselves and a crowd of over 6000 barricaded the palace of their traditional ruler to seek the immediate expulsion of the Fulani graziers from Wum is the only solution to the problem of cattle trespass. They all appeared in white-painted faces with clubs in their hands and some carrying children on their backs. The traditional ruler managed to appease the women to no avail. When the women started accusing the traditional ruler of complicity with the Fulani because of material gains, he became frightened and managed to escape. When it became evident that the traditional ruler had taken off, the women moved to the office the Senior Divisional Officer, who is the representative of the Central government. There, they stripped themselves and rubbed themselves with wood ash as a sign of mourning. They camped in the premises of the Senior Divisional Office for four days waiting for the government to address the issue of impending famine to which the Fulani graziers had subjected them. When they finally embarked on a seventy-kilometer trek to the North West Provincial headquarters of Bamenda, the Governor rushed to meet them in Wum. A hasty meeting was organized with all the stakeholders of the agriculture department in Wum and the government tried to establish an accord between the women and the graziers. The women received compensation from the government according to the established extent of damage they suffered as determined by a mix commission. The Senior Divisional Officer was charged with monitoring the food needs of the women farmers so that appropriate measures could be taken to avert famine and shortage of seedlings for future famine. The demonstration was an all-women affair because it concerned food and they are the primary concerned parties.

In 1979 a similar incident of women taking siege of their chiefs palace was reported by a female anthropologist-Goheen who had lived and worked for twenty years in the area. She took note how the women were clad for the demonstration in the Nso chiefdom:

In 1979, during my first week or two Nso', I was startled in my trek down the steep hill to the Fon's palace by a group of about twenty women running down the main road to the palace. Naked to the waist, faces painted white, with long sticks in one hand and hoes in the other and leaves tied around their necks draped down their chests--they were quite a spectacle with their ovulating and chanting-- they were obviously agitated. Their children were with them, some being carried on their backs. When somewhat startled--this was a long time ago, and I was relatively young, and certainly naive about rural Africa--I asked what in the world was going on, my young research assistant told me these women were on their way to the Fon [Chief] of Nso' to complain about crop damage caused by cows and goats. During the hot dry season, livestock of various kinds get into the young gardens and destroy entire crops before the rains of June cause the tall grass to grow and alleviate the problem. These women were able to collectively protest to the palace and

win compensation for their crops---and several jugs of palm wine to boot!
(Goheen 1991).

Although the Fon of Nso appeased the women, he had in turn to turn to the Fulani graziers to make good his expenditures.

Women in West Africa have long had the ability to act collectively in defence of their own interests and from all the evidence we have, this is a right they have often asserted. But the operative idea here is being able to act in their collective self-interest when men are perceived to upset the traditional gendered discourse of power. Women obtain power by virtue of being female--primarily through their roles as wives and mothers and providers of food to their households. And women obtained the major part of their power and respect by virtue of being *mothers*. When women protest today, they do so not to claim some kind of androgynous space and claim it, but they do so by virtue of their status as *female*--and especially as mothers with responsibilities for children. Goheen points out that western feminists movements do not fully grasp African feminism. They tend to push through a different agenda in African feminist movements.

Within the context of a commodity economy, women in Cameroon have had to bear the largest burden of the economic crisis, which has debilitated much of Africa. Becoming especially acute in Cameroon over the past decade where it has been exacerbated by structural adjustment programs attempting to curtail the overspending and corruption of its government in a number of ways, one of which has been a fifty percent devaluation of the CFA--a move which caused prices for most household essentials to triple within a few months. During this time women's formerly inalienable rights to particular resources such as land have been increasingly threatened as commodification of land and of food crops has proceeded apace--with an increasing population and with the possibility of a civil service job shut off for most men--and with drastic salary cuts within the civil service, many men have taken over available farm land as commercial enterprises and many have been selling ancestral land to be able to maintain a middle class life style. The burden of women's responsibilities to earn a cash income to pay school fees, medical bills and other obligations formerly paid by men who no longer have access to any kind of work--essentially to fulfil what has always been women's role--to reproduce the household and underwrite the rural standard of living-- has grown almost exponentially. If women have to rely on their farmland for survival, the Fulani in particular and graziers in general, have not made things easier for them.

The Fulani graziers have come to stay in the North West province and the solution to the destruction of women's food crops is not by chasing them away as if they have another home elsewhere. Women and livestock owners have been continuously concerting to find a solution to their common problems with the assistance of NGOs. In February 2003, for instance, farmers and livestock owners in Oku village in the North West Province joined forces to improve production and overcome local conflicts and protect the area in the endangered Kilum Mountain forest (*Afrol News* 2004). They were nominated for the Equator Prize 2004. The Itoh Community Graziers Common Initiative Group's 60 members are from two ethnic groups that have been at odds--the Fulani graziers and the indigenous farmers who are predominantly women. Confrontations often

grow out of crop destruction by cattle and encroachment on grazing areas by farmers seeking land for crops. Begun in 1999 by the UNDP with support from the European Union, the pilot project has worked with the group to carefully integrate crops and livestock over a 140 hectare area to limit conflicts, improve animal production and farmers' livelihoods and conserve the unique environment. The forest is a source of wealth. It provides medicinal plants, natural erosion control for the watershed, firewood and favourable conditions for farming and rearing livestock. According to UNDP, the group constructed a fence around the community grazing area to keep livestock from invading neighbouring farms; divided grazing land into paddocks for cattle, goats and sheep so the animals could graze in rotation; upgraded pastures with improved forage species; and built a livestock dip to protect against parasites. The project members have also planted over 30,000 trees of various species - some medicinal and others for livestock feed and offering pollen for bees, promoted modern livestock rearing techniques and use of oxen for farming, and established a plant nursery. The project has instilled a spirit of tolerance among the grazier and farming community. Fon Ngum III, the village head of Oku is leading the project team to the Equator Prize event in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. People are benefiting from improved food yields thanks to UNDP support for training to preserve the bio-diversity including better skills, and water management resolving conflicts over lands use.

1.5 Conclusion

Food security and the question of land ownership is central to the economy of the North West province and this can appropriately be handled by the involvement of both men and women. Economic development should be the concern of both sexes. The advent of the nomadic grazing community to the North West province at the beginning of the 20th century created the perennial problem of the destruction of women's food crops and its implications on the livelihoods of households since women are the providers of food for the family. Women have therefore carried the burden of successive remonstrance against the Fulani graziers, their husbands and the government in order to draw their attention to the dangers cattle destruction of food crops and farmlands.

What interpretation can be given to these women demonstrations in the North West Province of Cameroon in the context of national and global feminist discourse? Women in Cameroon underscore motherhood as a virtue to be protected and upheld and the complementarity of power. This stance is in opposition to western feminists quest for equality in access to what is traditionally marked as the male sphere-with women having access to power by virtue of being female. It is for this reason that Goheen (1991, 1996) underscores the need for international sensitivity to African gender discourse and a respect for local belief, value and organization of gender. While it is important to empower women, the changes westerners might want to see in terms of individual opportunities and a challenge to what they might perceive as patriarchy or male domination has to be reorganized from within the African context. Women's primary concerns--access to sufficient food, protection of food crops and farm land from destruction, clean water, health care, children's education--indeed are their most pressing issues. Women's local agendas do not dovetail with international feminist concerns.

International aid and international programs aimed at women must take into consideration their real needs and not the pursuit of a western inspired feminist agenda. Helping the rural woman to improve her agricultural yields, protect her farmland from cattle trespass and degradation are more meaningful than attempting to catapult her to the same pedestal with men. Most importantly, the involvement of men in the vital area of food security is essential if a solid base for development must be created.

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Informant 1: President and Executive of Mankon Women's Association in Mankon

Informant 2: President and Executive of Wum Women's Association in Wum

Informant 3: President and Executive of Oku Women's Association in Oku

Informant 4: President of Executive of Nso Women's Association in Nso

Informant 5: President and Executive of Nsungli Women's Association in Nkambe