

Executive Summary:

- I. Liberian Women in
The Marketplace**
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Educational and
Legal Status**

A Report for
the
Liberian
Government
by
the
Liberian
Women's
Union



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROFILE OF LIBERIAN WOMEN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROFILE OF LIBERIAN WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

The Profile of Liberian women in target sectors of development, including agriculture, education and marketing as well as the status of Liberian women in a complex legal system, forms the subject matter of this summary. The significant findings and issues from two final reports, covering these topics, prepared by the Profile of Librian Women and Development Project are highlighted.

The Project was initiated in 1977 by the Liberian Federation of Women's Organization (LFWO) which, realizing the need for reliable quantitative data on Liberian women, decided to sponsor a national research project on women with financial assistance from USAID and the government of Liberia (GOL) through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. The University of Liberia replaced the LFWO as the executing agency after April 12, 1980.

The first report focuses on rural Liberian women and is intended to provide information to those working in development, either at the policy or project level, which will help them better understand the role played by women in food production, their access to formal schooling and their legal status. The information is also intended to assist in the further integration of women in the development process.

The second report on the profile of Liberian women in marketing provides valuable and important information on the linkages that exist between the economic role played by women and their social status

in society. The degree of participation or non-participation of women in the country's marketing system is discussed together with an assessment of this participation and an analysis of factors affecting the roles and status of women.

In meeting the objective of the Project, which is to generate a data base on Liberian women that would assist planners and those working in development programs, the methodologies described below were employed in the agriculture, marketing and legal studies. It should be mentioned that there was no systematic methodology for the education study which drew heavily upon census and related secondary sources and previous studies on the subject.

Methodology of the Agriculture Study

Empirical research on Liberian women's roles in agriculture relied upon relatively informal interviews with groups and individuals. This approach conforms to discussion in the methodological literature on the subject and the experience of previous researchers in Liberia. The data were collected from communities in seven counties and two territories.¹ The selection of the communities was influenced by (1) logistic considerations-especially transportation and (2) knowledge of the communities and prior contacts made in these areas by members of the research team.

¹. Since: Greenville, Lexington, Seabeh
Maryland: Pleebo, Bonikeh, Gedetabo;
Grand Gedeh: Zwedru, Poohtown, Zletown;
Nimba: Saclepia, Gawonkpa, Gbanquoi, Payee;
Bong : Fokwele; Montserrado: Todee; Lofa: Bolahun, Kolahun, Massambola-
hun, Foya, Shello, Nyokolitahun, Kpandemai
Sasstown Territory: Felekri, Jekwi, Norkwa; Bomi Territory: Klay,
Bonkahed.

A special effort was made to talk directly to women. Most interviews were conducted in local languages with a minimum of note-taking and no tape recording. After each interview, the discussions were written in as much detail as possible and supplemented by general observations about individual and community variables.

Methodology of the Marketing Study

Three major methodological approaches were used in conducting the field research on women's involvement in marketing. These were (1) systematic observation and informal inquiry; (2) an investigation of the food distribution and price system; (3) semi-structured interviewing of the randomly selected sample of 146 market women.

Additional information on marketing was gathered through informal interviews held with resource persons from various government agencies. The majority of interviews with market women were conducted in English. Notably, the data obtained from semi-structured interviewing were later restructured to allow for some systematic statistical analysis.

Methodology of the Legal Study

Research on the legal status of Liberian women was based on two methodological approaches: (1) observation of cases at customary courts, and (2) the analysis of available documented cases. These approaches were chosen with the objective of identifying the controlling norms governing customary laws as they affect women, and of discerning changes in the legal status of women under customary law. It was decided that empirical research on the statutory judicial system was not required. Instead, compilation and analysis of constitutional amendments, statutes and controlling of cases were carried out. In addition to these two approaches, information was gathered from

resource persons and from interviews with women. The field research on Liberian women's legal status was conducted mainly in three counties - Bong, Montserrado and Lofa - where selected tribal courts and communities were visited.

Limitations of the Study

The methodological approaches described in the previous section have some limitations which should be borne in mind in interpreting the findings of the Project. The following section highlights the major limitations of the methodologies and data for the four target areas that were investigated by the Project.

Agriculture

The major limitation of the methodology and data collected on women's role in agriculture is a bias toward communities along the main roads. This bias was largely due to transportation difficulties, the relatively high cost of traveling to remote rural areas and a time constraint.

Marketing

The existence of an urban bias should also be noted in the data collected on women's role in marketing, which led to a more systematic investigation of urban localities, despite the emphasis placed on rural women in the project proposal. Consequently, 80 percent of all urban markets were visited as compared to only 30 percent of rural markets. This bias was due also to the constraints mentioned above for the agriculture study.

Additionally, it is important to note that the total number of markets estimated, from which the sample of markets was selected, should be viewed with caution. This is because the estimate was based on information provided by sources which cannot be considered as totally reliable.

The legal study

The empirical data collected on Liberian women's legal status can only be considered representative of proceedings in urban tribal courts, since an insignificant number of courts in rural areas, indeed outside of Monrovia, were visited by the researcher. The urban bias can be attributed to the lack of additional research personnel¹, a factor which also resulted in the concentration on women's status under the customary and statutory systems of law to the exclusion of Islamic law. Consequently, the absence of field research on women's status under Islamic law should be recognized as an additional limitation of the legal study.

Education

Despite the specification in the project proposal for empirical research on Liberian women's access to and participation in the educational system, data on education were collected mainly from secondary sources. However, it was possible to draw some broad trends from inductive research on the educational status of Liberian women. The lack of primary data on Liberian women's involvement in education should therefore be considered as a limitation of the study.

¹ Only one researcher conducted the investigation on the legal status of Liberian women.

The issue of women in development in Liberia is a development issue and not a "feminist" or "special group" issue or fad. Development policies and projects affecting women could be more effective and implemented more successfully if the roles of women were identified in the particular setting or environment in which they live as they relate to these policies and projects. Liberian women, like women elsewhere, bear much of the responsibility for providing the basic needs of their households. Hence, women are central to the basic needs approach to development which emphasizes an improvement in nutrition, health, housing, education and so on, as the main goals of development.

Women's status and roles cannot be analyzed in isolation from the broader economic and social environment in which they live. These basic assumptions should be borne in mind in understanding the Profile of Liberian Women in Development.

Before discussing the significant findings of the study, the following overview of Liberian women within the national socio-economic system is presented.

LIBERIAN WOMEN: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Liberian women live and function within a complex socio-economic, cultural and administrative system. Their historical experience differs in some respects from that of women in the neighboring countries, although some similarities do exist between their experience and those of their counterparts in other countries.

Historically, the original inhabitants of Liberia belonged to a number of ethnic groups, mainly the Mande, Mel and Kwa speakers. The early migration of these groups from North-West Africa continued until the early 19th century when the settler population from the Americas first arrived and were subsequently followed by the "Congoes" who were recaptured Africans from slave ships in the Atlantic Ocean in the years following the abolition of the slave trade.

A complex social and cultural system emerged characterized by two categories of women. First, women of the indigenous ethnic groups and second, women of the settler communities. The first group of women were mainly occupied in farming. They spoke the language of their particular ethnic group, were accustomed to polygynous marriages and often received their education through initiation schools of women's secret societies. The second group of women spoke English as their first language, were Christian and were accustomed to monogamous marriages. They were likely to be educated in formal Western oriented schools.

The economy in which Liberian women function has experienced a considerable degree of stagnation in recent years. After a period of relatively rapid economic growth between 1964 and 1974 of 5.7 percent per annum, the growth rate per annum in the Gross Domestic product dropped to 1.7 percent between 1976 and 1980 and was a negative 4.4 percent in 1980. These declining growth rates occurred within the context of the world economy which most directly affected Liberia with respect to its main export and revenue earners: iron ore and rubber. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in public

debt which grew from \$175 million in 1976 to \$520 million in 1980.

The agricultural sector is the largest employment sector in the economy, accounting for approximately 80 percent.

Demographic and migration data indicated linkages in the modern and subsistence - oriented small holder farming sector in the form of withdrawal from the latter sector of its most important resource: people, especially men. In recent years, there has been an increasing rate of migration among young women who frequently go "up and down" between the rural areas and the places of work of the men (concessions, urban areas). The withdrawal of labor from the subsistence sector to the modern sector has had profound effects upon the farming capacity of the rural system to function more effectively. More seriously, this system is less able to absorb the loss of adult female laborers.

Liberian women also function within a complex administrative structure which evolved from a dual system similar in some respects to the British colonial system of indirect rule. Originally there were five coastal counties governed by the statutory legal system and three internal provinces governed by customary law. The present nine counties were established in 1964.

With this background, the following sections present the main features of Liberian women's roles, status and importance in the country's agricultural, educational, legal and marketing systems.

WOMEN AND AGRICULTURE

The nature of the food production system of Liberia and the role which women played in that system are issues that are central to understanding women and food production in Liberia. The present study identified four major types of farming systems in Liberia, namely, concession farms, corporation - managed or supervised farms, Liberian owned commercial farms and traditional or small holder farms.

Women's involvement in concession farms is marginal. Some women are involved in commercial farming while comparatively fewer women are engaged in agricultural wage labor in corporation managed farms. However, there is some indication that their participation may be increasing as they now work as tappers on some rubber farms, including Firestone Plantations and as laborers on the Decoris Palm Oil Project in Maryland County. Women's participation in agriculture is therefore mainly concentrated in small holder farms.

Rice production exemplifies the main features of the food production system in Liberia where shifting upland cultivation or swidden cultivation is practiced. Technically, it is a horticultural rather than an agricultural system, where hand tools are utilized and energy inputs are all human. The system relies upon rainfall and water control is practiced.

The preparation of farm sites involves the clearing of foliage and felling of trees, leaving palm trees and the stumps of other trees. This is followed by burning, planting and weeding. The last process is harvesting which is done when the rice has ripened.

It should be noted that farm sites are left to fallow for a number of years at the end of harvesting and thus these processes are not necessarily repeated on the same site.

There is a sexual division of labor in the allocation of tasks in rice cultivation which varies somewhat throughout the country. Generally the tasks of brushing, burning, and clearing are male tasks while planting, weeding and harvesting are female tasks. There is a variation in the actual division of labor at the regional level and within households. Male labor inputs into rice cultivation tend to be higher in the north-western section of the country where men may assist with planting and harvesting. Female labor inputs are higher in the south-eastern section where women may do everything except felling the largest trees and the burning. The two tasks which are more rigidly assigned to either sex are burning, which appears to be done exclusively by men, and weeding, which is done exclusively by women.

The report underlines the fact that the rice farm tends to play a greater role in the life of a woman farmer than a man. Women, more than men, have to adjust their time and other activities around the requirements of the rice farm. With the exception of the slack period following the harvest, a woman will spend most of her day on the farm, going soon in the morning and returning when the sun sets.

The major issues which affect the role of women in the food production system are the land tenure system, farm tools utilized in rice cultivation, the household structure and its relationship to farming, the organization of rice farm, the rice cycle, the allocation

of labor in rice farming and cash crops including cassava and the problem of pests, particularly birds and groundhogs.

Generally women have been receptive to additions to the agricultural cycle which complement rice cultivations and to diversifying their activities to fill slack periods with new tasks.

Both men and women have adopted swam rice in several parts of the country. The technology adopted has utilized the same basic tools already available to farmers and has not required any substantial amount of capital. The data suggest that women have been more receptive to this innovation than men.

On the other hand, the adoption of swam rice technology involving water control and transplanting has had limited success. Women farmers appear interested if they have access to male labor required initially to prepare the swamp.

The major technological innovation has been the chain saw which is used predominantly by men to clear the farm sites more efficiently. This decreases the amount of time women spend in weeding which results into a higher yields. Access to saws is limited to those who either own or rent the saw, apart from the money needed to purchase or rent fuel. It is also required to operate them. Their use is therefore still limited.

Women have responded to the introduction of rice mills and palmnut processing facilities. They save considerable time and energy when they use rice mills at a relatively low cost.

The major innovations in new crops have primarily been cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, sugar cane, and peanuts. Also included are

some citrus fruits and some vegetables such as cucumbers.

New ways of organizing and recruiting labor have also been adopted. Cooperative work groups have been introduced in some towns and there has been a shift in the division of labor. Women now have cooperative work groups for brushing and clearing farm sites, a task which was formerly male. The use of hired migrant labor for some tasks is a development of the past 25 years.

Most of the innovations in the agricultural cycle have occurred independent of any government or project. Rural markets have developed in response to a growing urban market demand. Women have responded to a growing need for cash by producing and selling agricultural produce. They have also responded to the growing demand for processed foods.

Finally, the type of community in which women live was found to be one of the major variables affecting their farming activities. If married, the type of community in which women live affects the range of options available to them and their husbands. Apart from the community, three other variables were identified.

These are (1) the status of women in the household which affect the control over their own labor and outputs and their access to and control over the labor of others; (2) their access to land under customary rights or under freehold and (3) whether women are engaged in other occupations or activities.

WOMEN AND MARKETING

The finding that women play crucial and determining roles in the food distribution system in Liberia is consistent for marketing. In playing these roles, they control the above systems through which a large quantity and wide variety of locally produced and imported food commodities are distributed efficiently to the various groups in society, irrespective of their residential, social and economic status and the period of the year.

The main motivation for getting involved into marketing for the majority of women sellers was not profit, but rather the necessity of taking care, wholly or partly, of the essential household requirements such as food expenses, payment of children's school fees, clothing, etc.

Some women in Greenville, (Sinoe County), for example, indicated that they were in marketing because they were responsible for feeding their families and could not depend upon their husbands' incomes to meet their cash needs. Some said they did not have access to the necessary male labor to make farm.

There is also the fact, confirmed by the study's findings, that the husbands of most urban market women tend to be either unemployed or employed in relatively low paying jobs. Nevertheless these findings and the results of other studies show that the majority of Liberian women participate in the money economy with the apparent consent, encouragement and financial help of their husbands, and other relatives, through the sale of locally produced food commodities.

This fact is sufficiently revealed by the data of the study which show that 86% of the 146 respondents interviewed had received their initial marketing capital from their husbands or relatives. The majority of the remaining 14% received such capital from the sale of farm products, while a few received funds from friends. It is revealing to note that a 1978 study of married market women in the city of Monrovia discovered the same trend, namely that over 80 percent of the married market women received their marketing capital from their husbands.

The field observation further showed that market women perform different marketing roles depending on the type of market in which they sell or buy their goods. The major differences between these roles are based on such factors as the type of produce sold, the size, in monetary terms, of the market and the impact of government regulations on them.

A positive relationship between the roles of market women and the function of marketing sites was found to hold true irrespective of geographical and ethnic differentiations. For this reason, a market woman who operates in a daily market in Bong County, for instance, may easily move to another daily market in Grand Gedeh County and maintain her previous status/role in the marketing system. In spite of this fact, the residential mobility of market women, especially professional market women, was found to be quite limited. This may be due to their embedment in the extended family system.

Small scale women business managers share with the professional market women a generally low level of education and a lack of formal

training in business practices. However professional market women were found to have a relatively firmer control over the Liberian food distribution and marketing systems. Four main factors explain this important role: (i) the number, volume and scope of their operations; (ii) their status as full time marketers; (iii) the quantity and importance of the commodities they distribute within the marketing system and (iv) their relatively good understanding of marketing techniques. The field data point to a potential growth in the area of professional market women becoming actual small-scale business operators although the number of such individuals is still insignificant to warrant categorization. Information gathered from group discussions indicate that professional market women make very little profit from their marketing activities. Consequently, very little capital formation occurs among this group in the marketing system.

The reason for this trend is that the main motivation for buying and selling remains the provision of the needed funds for basic household requirements either as supplementary or main funds. The yearly marketing capital of the average professional market women is estimated at between \$1,000.00 and \$3,000.00.

Small scale women business managers were mostly Mandingo, Fanti and Nigerian in that order. In Lofa County, however, there are indications that the Loma, Gbandi, and Kissi women who operate in the Kolahun, Foya, Koindu and Nongowa areas are becoming adept in this method of operation.

The field data indicated that most Liberian market women are

married (customary or statutory type marriage), and that most of them have not received formal Western type education. They also suffer from non-participation in decisions pertaining to marketing and lack the necessary technologies that would facilitate marketing activities. They are almost exclusively confined to the sale of perishable food commodities, and tend increasingly to specialize in marketing at the expense of their dual career as farmers and marketers.

The field investigation revealed that there are approximately 120 different market places in Liberia. Out of this total, 46 or 38% of the country's estimated markets were visited by the research team, six major categories of markets were identified and investigated in the nine counties and three territories.¹ In rising order of centrality, these are: House Seller Sites; Clusters of Sellers; Village Periodic Markets; Daily Neighborhood markets; Town City Daily Market; and Central Daily Markets.

These categories of markets were differentiated along a number of variables including size, number of sellers, frequency of markets, age, types of available facilities, price variety, types, quantity and quality of commodities sold, presence and absence of marketing associations and their functions, types of customers who buy from the market, etc.

¹.Gibi, Marshall and Bomi Territories

It is necessary to define briefly the aforementioned categories of markets as follows:

- (i) House seller's sites have the smallest number of commodities and serve a relatively small population from the immediate neighborhood in items like cigarettes, biscuits, etc.;
- (ii) Clusters of sellers are of two types. First, those in front of supermarkets in Monrovia, Buchanan, Bong Mines and Lamco, and second, those at busy road intersections or car parking lots in the vicinity of cities;
- (iii) Village periodic markets meet once a week and perform mainly the function of assembling local agriculture produce for export into regional town and city markets and distributing imported, mostly non-food, commodities for local consumption;
- (iv) The daily neighborhood markets are concentrated mainly in the Monrovia metropolitan area. They receive the daily inflow of commodities from different parts of the country as well as the central markets for distribution to residents of the neighborhoods in the city;
- (v) The town/city daily markets are primarily oriented towards a population of non-food producers in towns like Gbarnga, Ganta, Saniquellie, etc. For the majority of these markets, there exists special market days during the week;
- (vi) Central daily markets are located in Monrovia. They function as the apex of the food distribution and marketing systems in the country.

About 44% of the total estimated number of market women in the country operate in central and neighborhood daily markets in Monrovia and its suburbs.

Women in town/city daily markets play the major role of transmitting the food demands of the growing urban population to village farmers. They play a more professional role in the marketing system than women in other market categories. The markets in which they operate serve as the final collection points for export and the primary location for the distribution of imported goods.

More than 34,000 self-employed females are estimated to be marketers in Liberia. This figure is approximately 60% of the population of self-employed females reported by the 1974 census (56,491).

The General and Rally Time Markets, the country's two central markets located in Monrovia, are referred to by most marketers and buyers and were found to have an estimated total selling population of 12,500 market women. It is estimated that these two markets cater to the daily food and essential commodity needs of an almost totally non-farming urban population of more than 300,000 inhabitants.

The neighborhood markets play an important function in the Monrovia urban system. Their estimated total selling population of 1,450 represents about 12% of the population of sellers in the two central markets.

The regional percentage share of estimated women sellers in daily/weekly markets is as follows: Lofa, about 27 percent; Nimba, about 21 percent; Grand Bassa, including Marshall Territory, about 23 percent; Bong, about 15 percent; and about 5 percent in Gibi Territory. The balance selling population of 1,100 (about 10 percent) is distributed among the remaining counties and territories.

The control of the marketing system by Liberian women is seen further through their efforts to organize themselves into marketing association in decisions pertaining to the choice of market location, the size and other characteristics of the market sites, they play important roles in the internal regulations of women's marketing activities and in the undertaking of projects on a self-help basis.

Finally, it was found in this study that the "susu", a traditional system of credit and loan cooperative is alive among Liberian market women. However, close to three-fifths of the respondents in the sample claim not to belong to a "susu" organization (58.5%). Most of those in this category attribute their non-participation in a "susu" cooperative to the low level of their marketing capital and profit. Only the more prosperous marketers could participate in a "susu" organization.

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Education is usually taken to refer to the formal Western oriented school system in Liberia although a number of indigenous societies have their own educational institutions often associated with the Poro and Sande Societies.

In this section, the discussion on the education of Liberian women is first in terms of their socialization especially in the rural areas and the relationship of that socialization to adult female tasks followed by their status in formal education.

Women in rural Liberia are often dependent upon children's labor for the performance of productive and domestic chores. Tasks are assigned to children according to their physical and intellectual abilities and the amount of responsibility is found to have a low, if not zero opportunity cost, and therefore women operating primarily in the subsistence - oriented sector attach value to their labor. However, it does not appear that women assign tasks to children in order to have more time for other tasks or activities which children are not capable of doing.

Tasks are assigned to children so that in the process the children learn the various tasks which they will have to perform as adults. They learn tasks by proceeding from the easier, simpler level to the more complex and demanding tasks.

Girls begin to learn the basic tasks needed for their life time at an early age. At 2 or 3 years they accompany older girls and women to the waterside and return with small pans of water on their heads. This is followed by other domestic chores which are permissible with a gradual rise in age. In learning at any age, emphasis is placed upon imitation, observation and following orders while they are discouraged from asking questions.

Much of a girl's socialization is "on the job" and an important part of her socialization in much of rural Liberia is the "bush school" or initiation school which is most often associated with the Sande Society for women and the Poro Society for men. The Sande Society is primarily found among the Mende and Mel Speaking peoples.

It follows from the aforementioned patterns of socialization that the knowledge which a girl must learn to be an adult farmer is not available through books but must be acquired through working on farm. This is not compatible with attending school. Primarily because of this reason, there exists considerable ambivalence in most rural societies about the benefits of formal Western oriented schooling. It is recognized however that getting a job in the modern sector is dependent upon "knowing book". The common notion is that these jobs are primarily for men and hence it is boys who need to go to school

and for whom the limited financial resources for that purpose are allocated first.

More important than the limited financial resources and the availability of schools is the necessity of girls learning the skills necessary for farming. The task of an adult female in rural Liberia is to make farm. She must learn these skills while growing up. A Farming might appear relatively simple to outsiders but it is in fact a complex system involving knowledge of the environment, the varieties of crops to be planted and the techniques of cultivation. It is against this background that the socialization of females through observation, imitation and practice becomes extremely crucial.

Turning to formal education, there is a small elite of well-educated women, many with degrees from abroad, whose access to education has been greater than that of many men and the vast majority of other women in the society who have had little or no access to education. However, it is clear from the existing data that females have completed fewer grades in school than males. The explanations for the lower attendance rates of females are economic and sociocultural.

However, school attendance rates are higher in the urban than rural areas. It is only in the 10-14 year age group that females are more than 50 percent in school. Although attendance figures are higher for both sexes in the urban areas, the rate of females attendance is comparatively lower than that of male attendance in rural area. Among the 10-14 year olds, the difference in school attendance between males and

females is smaller in the urban than the rural areas. So while urban females have a better chance than their rural counterparts to be in school, their comparative position with respect to male attendance has not been improved.

In 1980, female students were 42 percent of pre-elementary students, 35 percent of elementary students, 29 percent of junior high and 27 percent of senior high students. Women were 27 percent of the students at the University of Liberia and 37 percent at Cuttington University College.

Two-thirds of the women graduates of the University of Liberia in 1980 came from Montserrado, Maryland, Cape Mount and Bassa Counties taken together. These statistics would appear to be consistent with a survey of university students conducted in 1975 which indicated that there were considerable differences in the socio-economic background of male and female students at the University of Liberia. More than a quarter of the 713 students surveyed were women. The data indicate that these women who are able to maintain themselves in school to reach the university level came from a small sector of the Liberian population. They are more likely than men to have come out of the private school system and to have parents or guardians with the financial resources to support them in school. The comparatively higher educational background of parents of the surveyed students than the population as a whole indicates that the parents are an elite group.

Finally, it is important to draw the attention of planners and policy makers to the fact that the goals of educating rural Liberian women and of maintaining and possibly increasing food production are yet to be achieved considering the present economic and educational systems within which women operate.

Even if the necessary expansion of the educational system occurred to provide access to education for all Liberian children, it will not increase female enrollment unless there are major changes in the curricula of schools and in the current small holder system of farming. It is therefore likely that for sometime to come that the percentage of girls attending school will not increase significantly and may even decline. The current situation in which illiteracy rates among women in rural areas are extremely high is therefore likely to be perpetuated for some time.

The educational system in its present form is unresponsive to the needs of women farmers and marketers. Unless national institutions recognize and are responsive to the contribution of these women, the base upon which the Liberian economy depends may be endangered.

THE LEGAL STATUS OF LIBERIAN WOMEN

The dual legal system under which contemporary Liberian women live, is a function of their socio-economic status, their educational level and their ethnic and religious affiliation. Depending upon their relative statuses, Liberian women are provided with differing options in seeking redress for their grievances. The main options are the statutory and customary systems. The statutory system is the result of received laws which are often at variance with the indigenous system making the co-existence of the two systems an un-

comfortable one. The differences were clearly brought out in the present study by the examination of the assumptions upon which each system is based. The emphasis of the statutory system is on the concepts of monogamy, bilineal inheritance and the nuclear of family while the customary system emphasizes polygyny, unilineal inheritance and kinship ties and obligations.

According to the suspended constitution, all Liberian women are guaranteed equal rights with men and afforded special protection, through provisions that grant them dower's right in property that their husbands owned at the time of death and provide for the security of property owned in their own right. The reality of the situation is not as clear-cut, as in many cases, these rights have been denied to women while statutory marriage is seen as a contract between individuals, customary marriage is one between families. Dowry, which has no parallel in the statutory system, is important, as it validates the marriage and transfers a woman's reproductive and productive rights to her husband. The refusal to accept dowry is becoming more common in light of the growing number of divorces, parents' fear of their inability to refund it in the event of divorce, and women's desire to be economically independent and to have custody of their children.

With the payment of dowry, a woman is considered the property of the man and his family and upon his death, the marital contract continues with the family, who have certain obligations and responsibilities to the widow if she remains with the family as wife to another relative. Because of this family obligation, a woman is not usually entitled to inherit from her husband or to administer his estate. In recent years,

many Liberian women are choosing to leave their husband's families after the death of the husbands and are finding this abrogation of their inheritance rights to be a hardship.

Many Liberian women are now straddling both legal systems, making it necessary for them to be afforded equal rights under both systems.

Women married under the customary system are also concerned about other inequities. Two of these are the payments of \$100 damage fees to the husband in the case of divorce and the high incidence of woman-palaver cases in which nassy-wood trials, a violation of the privilege against self-incrimination, are held to force women to confess their lovers so that they can be made to pay damage fees.

There is a clear need for further investigation of the legal systems of Liberia. One of the most persuasive arguments for this recommendation is the influence of urbanization and political and social change on the structure of the customary system and on the values of the people. A second and equally powerful argument is the inequitable situation that exists for women who fall under customary law. However, with education and literacy, many of these women are adopting values inconsistent with custom and tradition, thereby creating a need for the harmonization of the two systems.

Implications of the Study

The results of the study on the Profile of Liberian Women in Development reveal certain practical constraints facing Liberian

in marketing and agriculture. These constraints have serious policy and planning implications and should accordingly claim the attention of policy makers and planners.

First, there are five major constraints to the marketing conditions of women that warrant immediate attention. These are: (1) the constraint imposed on markets in general by the relatively unsystematic price regulation system used by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Transportation, (2) the lack of an adequate transportation system and the bad condition of the motor roads, (3) the lack of adequate marketing facilities, (4) the lack of appropriate credit and loan facilities, and (5) the lack of adequate storage facilities.

Second, the communities in which Liberian females live are becoming increasingly diverse. This diversification provides women with differing options and constraints. The limitations created by the bad condition of roads and other transport networks affect the conditions of women and increase the costs of transportation of their commodities. This constraint creates a strong pressure on their time and limited financial resources and conditions of work.

Also the allocation of women's labor is a function of whether their households are monogamous or polygynous and the number of adult women present in the household. Head wives tend to have more access to land and control over the labor of other women. The more women are in the household the more they are likely to be able to engage in supplementary rice production or vegetable production.

Some women are primarily market women and own farms. Their access to land is customary, although some of them have the potential of obtaining land deeds. They may do some farm work themselves or may rely upon their kin or hired labor. As a result of the aforementioned constraints, women farmers and sellers tend to abandon their principal productive roles in farming and migrate to the towns where they join their husbands and boyfriends and engage in full time marketing. In the towns, progress in their status and roles is further retarded by the pressure on their meager household expenditures generated principally by the inability of their male counterparts to contain household expenditures.

When women engage in direct exchange of material goods, their cultural values are transmitted, interchanged or distorted. It is also in playing this role that particularly the village farmers and sellers abandon their primary roles in agriculture.

Turning to the statistical problems, it is revealed that a further constraining factor on development programs in general is the unavailability of a reliable and sound data base. Women form one of the major groups on which there is a striking paucity of reliable data. In Liberia, like in many other developing countries, data on women's involvement in social and economic life are scarce. Additionally, their activities tend to be underreported and underestimated.

The examination of data from the national census, survey and other primary sources indicate that women's work in both food production and distribution is not being reliably recorded. As these

sources provide the national data base for planners for a period of time, it is critical that attention be given to the labor force and related definitions used in them and their operationalization so that the activities of women in critical target areas of development will be recorded more accurately in the future.

The provision of adequate socio-economic data base on women as a neglected group in the Liberian Society could prove to be the single most important step in helping to alleviate these constraints. Through this means, priority areas will be identified to which development resources could be directed to correct the biases against women in development policies and plans.

Finally the following major implications which have direct ramifications for development planning and policy making should be considered for each of the major areas investigated in this study.

Agriculture

Liberian women farmers are the base of the Liberian economic system. The viability and development of that economic system is dependent upon the maintenance and strengthening of its base.

Marketing

The involvement of women in the development process is not to be divorced from that of men's since in Third World countries men and women, in the process of social and economic development are extricably enmeshed into the domestic group which forms the basis of social organization and production.

Education

The educational system in its present form is unresponsive to the needs of women farmers. Unless national institutions recognize and are responsive to the contribution of women farmers, the base upon which the Liberian economy depends will be endangered.

Legal Status of Women

The customary legal system continues to support the traditional agricultural system, but changing socio-economic conditions make that legal system increasingly unresponsive to and inadequate for the concerns of women and the reality of their lives.

Generally, development plans that ignore the importance of women's roles in socio-economic production in Third World countries miss their expected goals and objectives because the resource base of the society is basically mis-oriented and unequally distributed with a majority increasingly accumulating the wealth in its hands and the poor, including women, being overlooked and neglected in the process of development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Profile of Liberian Women and Development study is based on two premises. The first is that women's roles do not exist in isolation, but are integral to society, complementing those of men. The second assumption is that the issue of women and development is a development issue, which has as its major concern the integration of women in the development process.

In the light of the above premises, a number of recommendations can be made for policy implementation and the designing of research and projects on women and development.

First, it is important that development projects be sectoral in nature. For example, projects targeted at women entrepreneurs should be considered as business projects rather than women's projects since experience elsewhere indicates that when projects are designed

specifically as women's projects, they tend not to be subjected to the same scrutinizing with reference to their feasibility and viability and do not receive adequate funding.

Second, it is important to recognize that rural Liberian women are primarily interested in improving their productivity and their income earning capacity.

As such, they are not interested in traditional home economics-type projects nor are they interested in projects with a "social welfare" orientation. Furthermore, unless women see that they will benefit from their labor inputs in any project, there will be little or no incentive for them to participate.

Lastly, it is important that projects take into consideration the regional variation within Liberia and the range of communities.

The aforementioned points should be borne in mind when considering the following recommendations for further research and policy making which are aimed at upgrading the marketing system, Liberian women's legal status and improving their roles in marketing, agriculture and the educational systems.

MARKETING

Given the overall constraints which were found to act against market women, it is recommended that development and planning agencies in Liberia officially include market women under the general category of worker and producer.

In line with the findings on the financial constraints operating against market women, it is recommended that financial institutions,

possibly in the form of cooperatives, be established which will lend funds to marketers. This recommendation also takes into account the need to extend existing credit and loan programs which assist marketers in areas outside of the capital city, Monrovia.

There is a need to redesign existing credit and funding programs for marketers so as to meet the specific capital needs of market women.

In order to increase the effectiveness of projects geared toward market women, it is proposed that development and planning agencies design marketing projects in conjunction with marketing associations due to the leadership potential of the latter.

It is suggested that the cost of production of local produce, as well as their quantity, quality and availability, be taken into account by the Government in determining sale prices. Other measures of price determination should also be devised which will allow the supply and demand mechanism to operate more freely.

A detailed study should be undertaken to investigate how market women acquire and expend capital and the implications of their financial situation for their role and status. Such a study should also attempt to identify factors which influence advancement from the position of professional market women to that of business operator.

It is recommended that a study be specifically designed to evaluate the "susu" system.

AGRICULTURE

It is recommended that more projects be developed which involve food production, particularly the production of vegetables and fruits for market sale. Such projects must recognize women as a primary target group.

More projects should be developed to provide women with appropriate technology which would help alleviate heavy work loads associated with domestic chores and the processing of crops.

Research is needed on the issue of varieties of seeds and how these are diffused and adopted. A better understanding of how new varieties are introduced and adopted within the existing smallholder system might indicate how an agricultural extension service could operate more effectively.

THE LEGAL STUDY

Because property has become an issue for some Liberian women, those married under the customary system should inherit upon the death of their husbands, as do women married under the statutory system.

Widows choosing to leave their husband's family after his death should not have to refund dowry.

The practice of requiring women to pay \$100.00 "damages fee" to their husbands should be abolished.

A legal aid bureau should be established by concerned lawyers which will inform women of their rights and assist them in processing their cases through the legal systems.

Research should be conducted on the legal status of Liberian women under Islamic law, and more generally on the operations of the customary legal systems in areas outside of Monrovia.

EDUCATION

It is recommended that a program be developed to teach non-English speakers, particularly women, English. Such a program has

obvious and important implications for the entry of more women into marketing and business.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that an institutional framework be set up in Liberia to help ensure that women are integrated as full partners in development. Such an institution, which could have the status of a bureau, should be professional and technical in its orientation and operation and should either be a semi-autonomous unit or incorporated into the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.