Fact sheet: Congo - Women, agriculture and rural development

Population: 2.4 million
Growth rate: 3.3 %
Fertility rate: 6.6
IMR: 114/1000 births
GNP/head: US$ 1,030

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**Importance of agriculture to the economy**

Agriculture contributed 13% of GDP employed 59% of the labour force in 1992. Staple crops are cassava, which accounts for thirds of agricultural production, and plantains. The major cash crops are sugar cane, palm cocoa and coffee. Forests cover 60% of the land area and forestry is a major economic activity.

**Sectoral Contributions to GDP and Employment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Contribution to GDP</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>11.9% (mid-1980s)</td>
<td>37.0% (1991)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>13.0% (1992)</td>
<td>59.0% (1992)</td>
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**Source:** Europa World Yearbook, 1994

**Role of women in agriculture**

Women play a predominant role in agricultural production, representing 60% of the labour force and 73% of farmers, and producing 80% of the food crops for household consumption. Many women farmers in subsistence agriculture are not counted in the statistics of the economically-active population. Women generally have 3 or 4 plots of land of 0.2 to 0.4 ha each, which enable them to cultivate cassava year round and groundnuts, maize and vegetables seasonally. From these plots, women provide for the food needs of their households and obtain income for basic necessities. The majority of women are subsistence farmers, while men tend to be more engaged in cash crop production.

**Division of Labour by Gender.** More than 95% of rural women work in agriculture, compared to 63.8% of rural men. Women bear the major responsibility for agricultural production and
almost total responsibility for domestic work, including water fetching, firewood gathering, food processing and preparation. Men assist women in some of the agricultural tasks, primarily land clearance and preparation, and to a lesser extent in harvesting.

A 1994 survey in two districts found that rural women spend an average of 8 to 9 hours a day in agricultural work, 3 to 4 hours in domestic work and 2 hours in fetching water and gathering firewood.

**Gender Relations in Decision-making in Farming Activities.** Although data is lacking on gender relations in decision-making in farming activities, a 1992 report on use of income by the Ministry of Labour and Employment indicates that men and women have responsibility for providing for their households in different ways: women's income goes primarily to feeding and clothing the family, while men's income is generally used to buy goods to improve their standard of living, for travel and for new marriages.

**Sharing of power and decision-making**

**Members and Officers of Agricultural/Rural Organizations.** Women are found most often in informal groups and associations which are organized for the purpose of mutual aid in working in the fields and for savings and loans.

The government has promoted pre-cooperatives for the purpose of collective cultivation of fields and marketing of produce. In 1993, a survey of 510 groups in three regions reported that women accounted for 35.5% of the membership. Women generally do not hold decision-making positions in these organizations.

**Women in Decision-making Positions in Ministries and Government Bodies.** Information is not available. Women generally hold few decision-making positions in public life.

**Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women**

**National Machinery.** The Directorate for the Integration of Women in Development (DIFD) was established in 1990 with the mandate to coordinate and promote measures for the efficient participation of women in development and to improve their living conditions through:

- research and recommendations aimed at developing a policy for the integration of women in development;
- monitoring projects in the technical ministries; and
- maintaining links with national and international bodies.

The work of the Directorate resulted in the creation of a Ministry for the integration of women in development, responsible for developing, implementing and coordinating government policy in the area of the integration of women in development.
**WID Units or Focal Points in Technical Ministries.** With the establishment of the DIFD focal points were set up in the Ministry of Youth and Rural Development, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Industry and Crafts, and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).** Since 1990 there has been an increase in women's NGOs oriented to economic and cultural development in the areas of community development, environment, family-well-being, communication, agriculture, marketing of food crops, and health.

**Women's rights**

The Congo is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Although women possess equal rights with men in most matters, legislation protecting women is poorly enforced and widely ignored in society. Although the Family Code of 1984 regulates inheritance, women often find themselves deprived of their rightful share. In most circumstances, women must have the authorization of their husbands to carry out any commercial activity or financial transactions.

**Dimensions and determinants of rural poverty**

The *disengagement of the government from marketing activities* since 1986 has made it difficult for women to market their produce and has thus deprived women of their main source of income. As a result many rural women have opted for subsistence farming. The *Structural Adjustment Programmes* and the devaluation of the CFA (unit of currency) has resulted in food insecurity and left many people in a situation of not being able to satisfy their basic needs. Women are affected more severely by the *increasing poverty* because of their marginalization in society, lack of access to education and training, and their exclusion from decision-making positions. Agriculture is carried out with *low-levels of technology and inputs*, resulting in low productivity. Deteriorating road conditions hinder marketing. The systematic importation of food stuffs is a disincentive to farmers. The percentage of women farmers suffering from *chronic calorie deficit* increased from 23% in 1987 to 47% in 1992. In the rural areas, *female-headed households* represent 22.4% of total households.

**Civil Status of Female-headed Households in Rural Areas, 1991**


Access to agricultural resources and services

**Land.** Although women comprise 60% of those economically active in agriculture, they own only 25.5% of the cultivable land. Most of this (70.4%) is owned by single, widowed or divorced women. The majority of women only have land use rights, and most are dependent on a male (husband or chief) to access land. Approximately 60% of women cultivate plots of less than 1 ha. Married women must also work on their husband's land, and generally do not receive any benefits from this work.

**Livestock.** Data collection needed

**Forestry.** Data collection needed.

**Water.** The majority of rural households do not have access to a safe drinking water supply. In the rural areas of the south, about 70% of the population obtains its water from a spring, 16% from rivers and nearly 10% from wells, while in the rural areas of the north 40% get their water from springs, 40% from the river and 12% from wells.

**Credit.** Women have very little access to credit from commercial or development banks. From 1987 to 1989, women obtained only 17% of the credit granted by banks.

Because of the difficulty that small farmers have in accessing traditional sources of credit, the Rural Credit Bank of the Congo (CRC) was created in 1989 to extend loans to rural, semi-rural and pert-urban areas. Loans are granted only through village savings and loan associations. Of the 71 loans given by this bank, only 9 (12.7 %) were granted to women, primarily in the urban areas.
The Women's Mutual Savings and Credit Fund (CFCM), established in 1992, is a project assisting women micro-entrepreneurs primarily in urban and peri-urban areas, although some loans have also gone to women in agriculture.

**Extension services and agricultural training.** Women's enrolment in agricultural technical secondary schools rose from 34% in 1984 to 53% in 1989, and in agricultural vocational centres from 46% in 1984 to 51% in 1989.

There are 10 extension centres in the country which reach 13.6% of the population engaged in agriculture. As these extension services are directed to food crops (cassava, groundnuts, maize), women comprise 55% to 64% of those reached.

However, a World Bank and UNDP financed National Project for Extension and Applied Agricultural Research, covering 10 regions, utilizes mainly male extensionists (91.2%). The recent creation of a Rural Promotion Service with a women's component within the Directorate for Research-Development, Training and Extension of the Ministry of Agriculture, is contributing to improving this situation.

**Agricultural Extension Staff by Position and Gender, 1989**
Selected programmes in support of women in agriculture, forestry and fisheries

Access to Agricultural Resources and Services. The Ministry in charge of Integration of Women in Development is supporting local women's initiatives by promoting women's groups and giving technical assistance to those which have decided to organize themselves into cooperatives.
A number of projects funded by multilateral and bilateral agencies have components directed to providing women access to credit and other resources. Data is not available on the percentage of project funds targeted to women or on the percentage of women beneficiaries of projects.

**Areas to be strengthened**

**Policy Planning and Research.**

· Rural women should be involved in all phases of the development of national policies in the areas of health, food and nutrition.

**Legal and Policy Reform.**

· Legal and policy reforms are needed to effect a fundamental change in the disadvantaged socioeconomic situation of women.

· Basic legislation should be drawn up to facilitate women's access to land.

· Trade agreements should protect local production.

**Access to Agricultural Resources and Services**

· Measures should be taken to improve women's access to credit; household, agricultural and food processing technologies; energy and water supply; and extension.

· Marketing systems should be improved by creating linkages between NGOs and women's groups in the cities and countryside.

Source: *Rapport national sur les femmes, l'agriculture et le developpement rural, 1994.*

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