How gender and culture affects natural-resource Based Livelihoods: the case of the Baka community in Cameroon

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Abstract

With the impact of climate change, men and women could be affected differently due to place-specific circumstances in the environment. The study examined the role of culture within households and minority groups, and its impact on livelihood outcome for different household types, taking power relations into consideration. A mixed method approach was used to provide a complete analysis of the objectives. The results indicate that culture affects gender structured households differently and highlights the challenges faced by marginalised forest-dependent communities whose culture is often not understood within the climate change discourse.

Key words: *Gender, Culture, Natural resources, Livelihoods, Cameroon*

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa has been depicted as one of the most vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change (Niang et al., 2014), with average temperatures in Africa predicted to rise by 1.5 – 3 ^{o}C by 2050 (Gemeda & Sima, 2015). Given that this region still has the largest proportion of people reliant on natural resources to meet livelihood demands (Shackleton & Shackleton, 2012) and who live below the poverty line (Serdeczny et al., 2017), the implications of this trend, and the associated climatic and non-climatic challenges, are likely to be considerable (Pettengell, 2010; Shackleton & Shackleton, 2012).

The literature indicates that different types of households will be affected differently by the impacts of climate change (Babugura, Mtshali, & Mtshali, 2010), with issues linked to gender inequality and, specifically, the marginalisation of women which is central to vulnerability to climate-related shocks and stressors (Djoudi & Brockhaus, 2011; Shackleton, Cobban, & Cundill, 2014). In this study we unpack the complexities of climate change, gender, and natural resource use within and across different gender-structured household types through an understanding of power dynamics and the role of culture in natural resource access and use, using the Baka community in Cameroon as a study (Permunta, 2013). We then discuss what this means for livelihoods outcomes in the face of a changing future climate.

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For the broader study we worked in two parts of Cameroon, namely the South West and East regions. Here we present results from villages of the Baka communities in the East region of Cameroon. The Baka are forest-dwelling people sometimes referred to in the literature as 'pygmies', now considered a derogatory term meaning 'primitive' (Permunta, 2013). The Baka are mainly involved in hunting and fishing, as well as collecting wild fruits and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) from the forest to secure their livelihoods (Pyhälä, 2012).

Methodology

The study considered Social ecological systems theory, the feminist political ecology theory, as well as the social justice lens as grounded theoretical and conceptual framings. The Moser gender planning and the Harvard analytical tools were considered appropriate in shaping the research objectives related to gender power relations, division of labor and access and control over resources. In this light, a mixed method approach was used, where surveys were collected from 70 households comprising of 29(41.4%) female respondents and 41(58.6%) of male respondents above the ages of 18 years (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017). We also used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to address the research objectives for this study. We used the purposive sampling technique to identify the households to get a representative data, especially as the study focused on specific household types. The data was gender disaggregated and analysed using SPSS and NVivo as quantitative and qualitative tools respectively. The table below (**Table 1**) shows the different categories of participants both male and female placed in the order of headship considered in this study as gender household types.

Table 1: Gender household types for participants (Source: Authors own)

Household structure types	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Male headed households only	2	2.9
Female headed households only	12	17.1
Male headed households with adult females	48	68.6
Female headed households with adult males	8	11.4
Total number of households	70	100%

The total number of households (70) were further categorised to show respondents who fell within the different age group as shown on **Table 2**.

Table 2: Age group of respondents across household types (Source: Authors own)

	Male headed household only		Female headed household only		Male headed household (with adult female		Female headed household (with adult male	
Ages groups (years)	*Frequency*	*%*	*Frequency*	*%*	*Frequency*	*%*	*Frequency*	*%*
18 - 27	0	0	1	8.3	11	22.9	0	0
28 – 37	1	50	4	33.3	17	35.4	1	12.5
38 – 47	0	0	4	33.3	10	20.8	4	50
48 – 57	0	0	0	0	8	16.7	3	37.5
58 – 67	1	50	3	25.0	1	2.1	0	0

68 – 77	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Above 78	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	0	0
Total	2	100%	12	100%	48	100%	8	100%

Findings and Discussions

A wide representation was reflected with (92.9%) of all respondents from the 70 households indicating that women must adhere to the cultural norm that restricts them from hunting, which has always been a male assigned task (**Figure 1**). However, other respondents (7.1%) felt it was about time such a cultural practice be dropped. In-depth interviews with male respondents felt it was appropriate for women to follow the customs and further explained by stating that women were able to do fishing near to the house. The implications for this are huge, especially as communities are fast experiencing climate change impacts on local resources, with rivers drying out and deforestation reducing animal numbers for hunting, making it difficult even for the men who hunt. This scenario presents a challenge for both men and women who may want to stick to cultural practices that might not prepare them for better adaptation options.

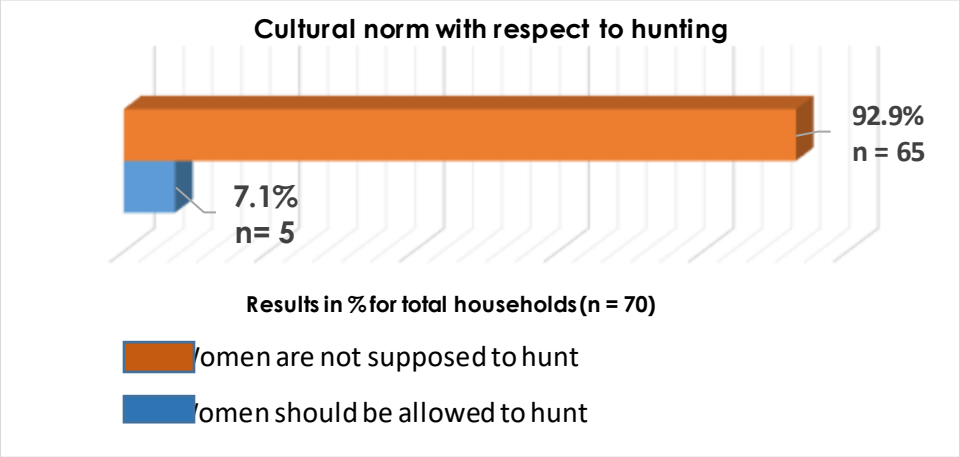

Figure 1: Cultural norm with respect to hunting (Source: Authors own)

The findings with regards to land access showed that most of the respondents from male-headed households with adult female(s) present (37.1%) could easily access land. While 4.3% of respondents from "female only" headed households (with no male present) expressed the difficulty they encountered in accessing land. Surprisingly, 8.6% of respondents from female-headed households, where male family member(s) were present, indicated that they easily had access to land. This could mean that women found within these households had access rights as widows or had financial capital that enabled them to rent land as shown on (**Figure 2**).

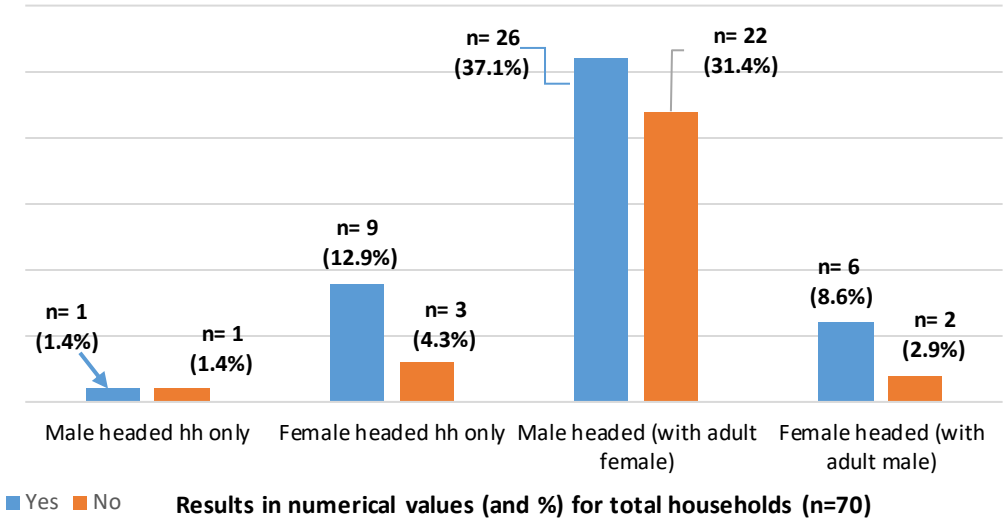

Figure 2: Access to Land (Source: Researcher's data analysis).

Further findings revealed that women within the male-headed households had a bigger challenge accessing land (31.4%) as compared to those in only female-headed households. This means that their access could mostly come through their husbands or adult male relatives. Such a situation might be problematic if marriages ended. In terms of decision making by households on what, how and when to use available land, the results indicated that men in male headed households (79.2%) made decisions without consulting their wives or other adult female member (s) as shown in **(Figure 3).**

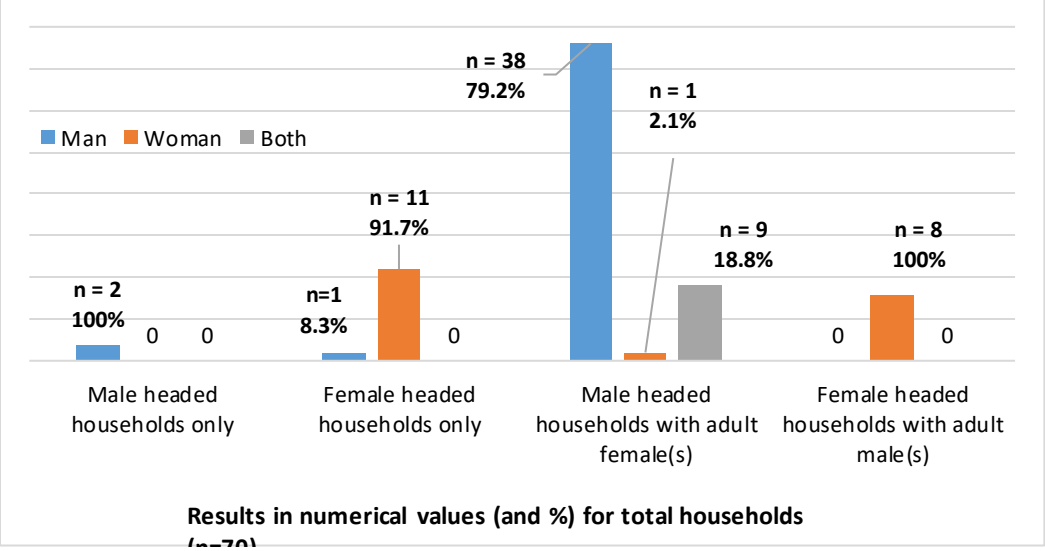

Figure 3: Decision over land use (Source: Researcher's data analysis)

In our qualitative results, a man in a male-headed household with an adult female present (his wife) had this to say: "*Well, it is normal for me to control everything about land in my house. I don't see anything wrong in deciding what to plant, when and how without talking to my wife..... Remember, she is a woman and is under me no matter how young I am..... that is how it has been made..... We have to follow it*".

This too was noted in female-headed household with adult male(s), where all the respondents (100%) of the women said they made decisions without the consent of the male relatives(s) since they were in a position to make decisions.

Evidently, there is a kind of conflict of interest as seen in both household types and this could have negative consequence in securing food where land has a major role to play. These findings highlight challenges faced by marginalised forest dependent communities whose culture is not understood in light of climate change.

Conclusion

In a context where adaptation strategies must be achieved, considerations of vulnerability should not only be restricted to binary categorisation of 'male' or 'female'. Our results have highlighted that hidden inequalities exist beyond this categorisation, with the manner in which households are i) gender-structured, and/or ii) mediated by culturally-ascribed gender roles affecting the adaptation options available to them.

Our study therefore, enabled us to understand how vulnerability could be influenced by gender structured households and be limited by cultural practices. Many found it difficult to diversify livelihood activities, due to such entrenched cultural and gender biases, especially in the face of a changing climate. This could be challenging where many communities are dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and are heavily affected by climatic impacts. Thus, there is need to evaluate cultural dimensions within communities to better understand their limits to adaptation whilst building on the positive cultural roles that some communities exhibit.

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