



CONSEIL AFRICAIN ET MALGACHE POUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR
01 BP 134 OUAGADOUGOU 01 (BURKINA FASO)
TEL (226) 25 36 81 46 - FAX (226) 25 36 85 73 - Email: comes@lecomes.org

COMITES CONSULTATIFS INTERAFRICAINS

DOSSIER DE CANDIDATURE A L'INSCRIPTION SUR LA LISTE
D'APTITUDE AUX FONCTIONS DE CHARGE DE RECHERCHES (LAFCR)

Comité Technique Scientifique (CTS) Lettres – Sciences Humaines

ARTICLE SCIENTIFIQUE N°1

Maboudou Alidou Guirguissou and Anke Niehof (2013). Gender roles in cotton production and management of related organisations in Benin. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 17(3) 313–335. IF 2016 (IPP 0,500; SJR 0,236

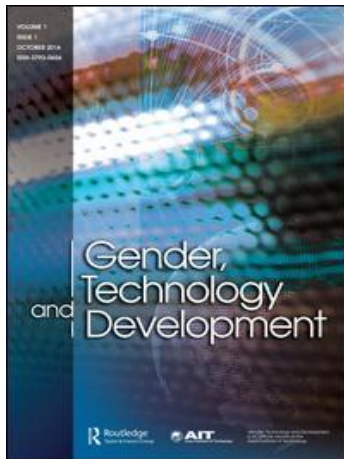
Guirguissou MABOUDOU ALIDOU

Assistant de Recherche

INSTITUT NATIONAL DES RECHERCHES AGRICOLES DU BENIN (INRAB)

CENTRE DE RECHERCHES AGRICOLES NORD-OUEST (CRA-NO)

Session 2018



Gender, Technology and Development

[Advanced search](#)

[Submit an article](#)  [New content alerts](#)  [RSS](#)  [Citation search](#)

 [Current issue](#)  [Browse list of issues](#)

Gender, Technology and Development is an Official Journal of the Asian Institute of Technology



This journal 

[Sample Our
Social Sciences journals](#)

[40 classics in
Peasant Studies](#)

[Click here to access
40 key articles **FREE**
from *The Journal
of Peasant Studies*](#)



Journal news

New to Routledge for 2017

See all volumes and issues

◀ 4	Volume 17, 2013	Vol 16, 2012	Vol 15, ▶
---------------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------------

[◀](#) [Issue 3](#) [Issue 2](#) [Issue 1](#) [▶](#)

Articles

Article

[A Note of Thanks ▶](#)

Page: vii

Published online: 25 Oct 2017

0	0	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Article

[Disclosure of Gender Identity in Internet Forums: A Case Study of Saudi Arabian Forum Communication ▶](#)

Abeer Ahmed Madini & Juliana de Nooy

Pages: 233-257

Published online: 25 Oct 2017

1	0	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Article

Masculine Modernity Trumps Feminine Tradition: Gendered Capacity-building Operation in China >

Cecilia Milwertz PhD (senior researcher) & Wang Fengxian (Associate Research Fellow)

Pages: 259-280

Published online: 25 Oct 2017

0	0	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Article

Development and Use of Gender-specific Technologies: Evidence from China, Poland, and Sweden >

Bo Göransson & Max Rolfstam

Pages: 281-312

Published online: 25 Oct 2017

0	0	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Article

Gender Roles in Cotton Production and Management of Related Organizations in Benin >

Guirguissou Maboudou Alidou PhD (researcher at the Sociology of Consumption and Households Group) & Anke Niehof (anthropologist and demographer.)

Pages: 313-335

Published online: 25 Oct 2017

1	0	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Article

Interrogating the Global/Local Interface: Workplace Interactions in the New Economic Spaces of Kolkata >

Tanusree Paul PhD

Pages: 337-359

Published online: 25 Oct 2017

0	0	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Article

The World at Her Fingertips?: Examining the Empowerment Potential of Mobile Phones among Poor Housewives in Sri Lanka >

Wasana S. Handapangoda & Ajantha Sisira Kumara

Pages: 361-385

Published online: 25 Oct 2017





0	2	0
Views	CrossRef citations	Altmetric

Explore

Most read articles

Most cited articles



<p>Article</p> <p>Women's income generation through mobile Internet: a study of focus group data from Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda ></p> <hr/> <p>Bailur et al.</p> <p>Published online: 3 Nov 2017</p> <p>Views: 147</p> 	<p>Article</p> <p>Mechanical genders: how do humans gender robots? ></p> <hr/> <p>Søraa</p> <p>Published online: 31 Oct 2017</p> <p>Views: 63</p> 	<p>Article</p> <p>Incorporating gender into low-emission development : a case study from Vietnam ></p> <hr/> <p>Farnworth et al.</p> <p>Published online: 3 Nov 2017</p> <p>Views: 44</p> 	<p>Article</p> <p>Health at her fingertips: development , gender and empowering mobile technologies ></p> <hr/> <p>Al Dahdah</p> <p>Published online: 25 Oct 2017</p> <p>Views: 30</p> 
---	---	--	--

[View more >](#)

Gender, Technology and Development

<http://gtd.sagepub.com/>

Gender Roles in Cotton Production and Management of Related Organizations in Benin

Guirguissou Maboudou Alidou and Anke Niehof
Gender Technology and Development 2013 17: 313
DOI: 10.1177/0971852413498739

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://gtd.sagepub.com/content/17/3/313>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

Asian Institute of Technology



AIT

Asian Institute of Technology

Gender and Development Studies



Additional services and information for *Gender, Technology and Development* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gtd.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gtd.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://gtd.sagepub.com/content/17/3/313.refs.html>

Gender Roles in Cotton Production and Management of Related Organizations in Benin

Gender, Technology
and Development
17(3) 313–335
© 2013 Asian Institute
of Technology
SAGE Publications
Los Angeles, London,
New Delhi, Singapore,
Washington DC

DOI: 10.1177/0971852413498739
<http://gtd.sagepub.com>



Guirguissou Maboudou Alidou
Anke Niehof

Abstract

Women's productive roles have generated important debates, heuristic as well as practical, in the scientific and development community. In Benin, women farmers are playing a key role, particularly in agriculture and cotton production, where they are involved throughout the production process. However, only a handful of them are involved in the management of farmer organizations. This article aims to identify factors that constrain or enable women's representation in the management of cotton organizations. It uses survey data and the life history method to meet its objectives. The life history method was applied to two women leaders who are exceptions to the rule, to document their experience as board members of organizations. Both were cajoled into their positions, and then ousted unceremoniously. The results suggest that gender myths and stereotypes still determine the involvement of women in managing organizations. And the male motive in involving women in management continues to remain questionable.

Guirguissou Maboudou Alidou is a PhD researcher at the Sociology of Consumption and Households Group, Department of Social Sciences, Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands. He is also a researcher at the Programme Analyse de la Politique Agricole, Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Bénin, Porto-Novo, Benin. E-mail: guirguissou@gmail.com

Anke Niehof is an anthropologist and demographer. She holds the chair of Sociology of Consumption and Households, Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands. E-mail: anke.niehof@wur.nl

Keywords

Cotton farming, gendered division of labor, women leadership, Benin

Cotton Production in Benin and the Division of Labor

Benin's development is being hampered by persistent gender disparities and consequent inequalities in the access to and control of economic and social resources (World Bank, 2002, 2003). The prevalence of these disparities is in part due to the overlapping of traditional codes on gender, which still govern the beliefs and behavior of a large swathe of the population, with the current laws (Falen, 2008). Women are often "treated as minors with most of their rights coming through their relationships with men—fathers, husbands, and brothers" (World Bank, 2002, p. 17). Gender disparities are acute in rural areas, where agriculture is the main source of employment and where traditional practices perpetuate women's subordinate position. Indeed, about 80 percent of the active population in Benin engages in agriculture, which constitutes an important source of employment for 69 percent of women and 66 percent of men. According to the World Bank (2007), women's contribution to agricultural activities is at least as important as that of men, and their share in the agricultural labor force amounted to 46 percent in 2003–2005. The increase in women's participation in agriculture is the result of changes in production patterns such as the extension of cash crops, specifically cotton (World Bank, 2002).

Before the 1990s, the cotton sector was under a state monopoly. Its production was mostly a male business and its revenues were marginal (Gandonou, 2005; World Bank, 2003). At that time, women's role in cotton production was restricted to that of casual labor for male cooperatives, the main instrument of cotton production (Albert, 1993). From the early 1990s, cotton became the most important cash crop in Benin, thanks to the liberalization of the sector and the consequent boom in production. It provided up to 80 percent of the income of rural households, and it was also responsible for 40–45 percent of the total foreign exchange earnings of the state (Gergely & Poulton, 2009; Hahonou, 2011). Cotton became the only agricultural value chain whose production was

organized into a marketing channel (Nissanke & Mavrotas, 2010; World Bank, 2003). A network of institutional stakeholders manages the sector under the control of an association of professionals. One of the most important stakeholders has turned out to be farmer organizations. Individually or as groups, farmer are producers of raw cotton and constitute the largest stakeholders, although they are often considered weak (Sinzogan, Jiggins, Vodouhè, Kossou, Totin, & van Huis, 2007). For the management of the inputs and the marketing of the output, farmers have been organized from village to national level in accordance with the three-level administrative division of the country. At the village level, there are farmer groups, grassroots organizations that form a farmers' union at the district level. District farmer unions form a departmental union at the department level, and the latter constitute a farmer federation at the national level, a huge network of farmer organizations. Each level of the organization is governed by a board whose members are elected or appointed. Membership of a grassroots organization, however, is the basic criterion for accessing the boards at any level.

Ever since the economic significance of cotton increased and it became critically important for rural welfare, its production has moved from being a primarily male business to becoming a concern of both men and women (Baffes, 2004; World Bank, 2002). As a consequence, women can now have their own cotton plot, independent of their husbands. However, only those women who are heads of households can be registered individually in the cotton organizations, and married women still operate under the authority of their husbands (Tama-Imorou, Wenninck, & Nederlof, 2007). But still, women continued to remain absent from the boards of organizations until the end of the 1990s, when intra- and inter-group conflicts led to the breakup of large networks. And some boards started accepting women as board members. But even now, women are critically under-represented in the boards. The management is overly male dominated, and the handful of women who do form part of the management are hardly representative of the large number of women involved in cotton production.

The gendered division of labor in cotton farming follows the traditional pattern: heavy tasks are performed by men and the lighter ones by women (World Bank, 2002). Tasks requiring physical strength, such as plowing, and activities that pose health risks or require specific knowledge, such as the application of pesticides, are considered unsuitable for

women. Insecticide treatment is considered particularly more harmful to women than to men (World Bank, 2002). Tasks such as sowing, fertilizing, and harvesting are done by all the household members on the main plot, which is prioritized. Additionally, women also cook meals for the workers, although this is rarely mentioned as a cotton production-related task. Taking all this into account, the World Bank (2002, 2003) estimated that women spend more time in cotton production than men, and that the time they devote to agricultural work could be underestimated by official statistics.

Drawing on fieldwork by the first author, the present article analyzes the challenges to women's representation in the management of cotton organizations as well as the factors enabling their representation in the specific setting of Benin. It addresses the following questions: why are women under-represented in cotton farmer organizations in spite of their increasing contribution to cotton production? What is the profile of women who do become board members of cotton organizations and what kind of challenges do they face?

In the sections that follow, we introduce the theoretical approach. After this, we describe the study area, particularly with regard to the gendered division of labor, and provide information on how the study was conducted. The results are presented according to the methods of data collection. Finally, we discuss the findings, simultaneously drawing some conclusions and implications for policy measures.

Gender and Leadership

Women's reproductive functions have always been more acknowledged than their productive roles in society (Sprague & Kobrynowicz, 1999). This has generated important intellectual debates, heuristic as well as practical, within the scientific and development community, leading to theories, approaches, and concepts about women's position and needs in society (see, for example, Molyneux, 1985 and Moser, 1989, 1994). Molyneux (1985) coined the concept of women's interests that pertains to the shared concerns of women ensuing from their female nature. However, this concept glosses over the differences among women, and is different from the concept of gender interests that are "those arising

from the social relations and positioning of the sexes and therefore pertained...to both men and women” (Molyneux, 1998, p. 232). Gender interests can be either practical or strategic (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1989). Practical gender interests are “interests based on the satisfaction of needs arising from women’s placement within the sexual division of labor,” such as access to safe water for domestic production, while the strategic ones relate to “those involving claims to transform social relations in order to enhance women’s position and to secure a more lasting re-positioning of women within the gender order and within the society at large” (Molyneux, 1998, p. 232). The latter, therefore, call for gender equity and improvement in women’s subordinate position.

Gender equity is perceived to be beneficial to society as a whole, and can result from modernization, when “socioeconomic development brings systematic changes in political, social, and cultural life” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 46). Recent progress in gender equity is reported in domains such as economics and politics (World Bank, 2012). Gender differences in political participation in the sub-Saharan Africa may be smaller thanks to institutionalized forms of participation, which constitute “safer arenas for women to participate” (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011, p. 259). However, this formal equality and political representation hides an exclusion from leadership roles. Most organizations may still exhibit gender disparities because of their failure to change (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). For instance, based on informal practices and subjective criteria of competence, for a long time, it has been conventionally understood that managerial jobs are suitable for men and not for women (Billing, 2011; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). In addition, women have a lesser say than men in decision making, both in the private and the public spheres, and are poorly represented in the public sphere (World Bank, 2012). Such a paternalistic organizational culture is blocking women’s access to leadership positions, particularly in rural areas in developing countries. Women’s emancipation is constrained by myths and customs that deprive women of their rights, which undermines the achievement of their strategic needs. Those who do attain leadership positions have to conform to male stereotypes of leadership to be able to lead, or they are squeezed out of the system (Painter-Morland, 2011). Among factors that force some of them to resign voluntarily from their positions are the “exclusion from male social networks” and “value clashes.” Thus, “organizations are failing to retain their executive female talent because of their paternalistic

organizational culture, the poor quality of management and their inability to accommodate the needs of their top female performers” (Clark & Kleyn, 2011, p. 203). Quoting Gardner (1995), Werhane and Painter-Morland (2011, p. 1) argue that defining leaders as “individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviors, and/or feelings of others” may affect members’ mindsets and result in a “demeaning” authority relationship. Instead, leadership should be conceptualized as an interactive and complex interrelationship between various individuals or individuals and leaders of organizations. To better understand the gender role in leadership dynamics within organizations, Werhane and Painter-Morland (2011, p. 2) ask why so few women rise to top leadership positions within their organizations. The answers lie in persistent myths about leadership and issues of the site where leadership is enacted, the structures it requires, and the individuals who participate in it. In society, the low representation can be self-perpetuating, with women unable to convey their ability to lead (World Bank, 2012). The present research seeks to find out why so few women get into leadership positions in cotton organizations, and whether these positions empower the women who do so.

Study Design and Data Management

The data used in this study come from a research project about cotton networking that was carried out from January 2009 to April 2011 in the north-eastern departments of Benin (Benin is divided into 12 departments, which are sub-divided into 77 communes (INSAE, 2004)), Borgou and Alibori, from where the bulk of the cotton produced in the country is sourced. As in other departments of the country, traditional codes, which overlap with legal decrees, govern the gender-related beliefs and behavior of a large part of the population. The region is characterized by many ethnic groups, among which the Baatombu are dominant. The Baatombu society has a patrilineal kinship system, virilocal residence, and a patriarchal culture. Historically, however, women could hold many noble titles as important as head of a chiefdom.¹ A few of the honorary ones can still be inherited today. Contrary to the achieved titles of men, these titles for women are ascribed. One of the most important titles is that of “*Yonkogui*,” the Queen Mother who chairs the name-giving ceremony by shaving and

bestowing a “baptismal name” on young descendants of noble families (Mama Debourou, 2009; Schottman, 2000, p. 94). But still, women’s productive functions are constrained by their limited entitlement to landed property. Land is mostly community property in this region, and the inheritance of agricultural land is regulated by customary patrilineal codes. As a result, women’s “rights are contingent on status” and they depend upon men for the location of their personal fields, which is often not the best land (Gray & Kevane, 1999, p. 18; World Bank, 2002).

The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, which were applied in three main phases: (i) an exploratory phase consisting of focus group discussions with farmers in 10 purposively selected villages; (ii) individual in-depth interviews in five villages with 148 respondents selected from eight cotton organizations; and (iii) key informant interviews that were conducted whenever a potential key informant was identified. The focus group discussions used a checklist, while the in-depth interviews were carried out by means of a semi-structured questionnaire to simultaneously collect quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was constructed based on the outcomes of the focus group discussions. It addressed more specific gender issues, such as the division of labor in cotton production and women’s dependency on their husbands during and after the cotton boom. Some of the data for this study were collected using the life history method (Angrosino, 2002; Hagemaster, 1992), which was applied to two women leaders. We used their life stories as the primary data source (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005), but complemented them with individual in-depth interviews for a better understanding of the full complexity of their lives (Pamphilon, 1999). Issues addressed included the women’s family of origin, their own family, their involvement in cotton production, their trajectory as board members, and the challenges they faced, as well as the favorable factors that helped them to get on the board.

For the individual interviews, a sample of 148 cotton farmers was constructed, combining purposive and random sampling. A total of 33 leaders at the top of the organizations’ hierarchy, of which only one was a woman, were purposively selected for the first round of the interview. The remaining 115 farmers were selected by systematic sampling from farmer group membership lists at village level. These included 23 women, which raised the number of women in the sample to 24 (16 percent). In search of women leaders in the organizations, we were informed of

three other women who had occupied board positions. The first was the wife of a leader, who had appointed her to be “in charge of women’s affairs.” She left the position a few years ago, after she divorced her husband. The other two were appointed as treasurers in different villages, but both stepped down many years ago and could not be reached. Therefore, as the only recently active women on cotton organizations boards, the two women leaders were chosen for the life history method.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS statistics 19.0 for a t-test and a chi-square to compare men and women with regards to cotton production, and a binary logistic regression was used to assess factors that affected farmers’ leadership status in cotton organizations. Qualitative data were interpreted through a narrative analysis. The life stories of the two women leaders were transcribed for a discourse analysis (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005).

Results

Gendered Profile of Cotton Farmers and the Division of Labor

The t-test for equality of means (Table 1a) and the chi-square (Table 1b), which compared cotton farmers’ profile according to gendered groups, revealed significant differences between women and men with regards to selected characteristics.

On average, men had longer experience in cotton production ($M = 21.32$, $SD = 10.49$) than women ($M = 14.17$, $SD = 6.98$), with the mean difference significant at $p < 0.01$. Moreover, men’s cotton area was larger ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 2.60$) than that of women ($M = 0.96$, $SD = 1.13$). This difference was highly significant at $p < 0.001$. With regards to the membership history in cotton organizations, women had been members of fewer cotton organizations ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.70$) than men ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.78$), with a significant difference at $p < 0.01$. There was also a significant difference at $p < 0.01$ between the average number of board positions occupied by men ($M = 1.02$, $SD = 0.95$) and by women ($M = 0.29$, $SD = 1.08$). A highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$) also existed between the average duration of appointment on boards of men ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 4.66$) and that of women ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 2.70$). In addition, the cross-tabulation

Table 1a. Comparison of Male and Female Cotton Profile (t-test for Equality of Means)

Variables	Gender		t
	Female	Male	
Farmer's household dependency ratio	1.51 (0.31)	1.55 (0.44)	-0.36
Experience in cotton production (Years)	14.17 (6.98)	21.32 (10.49)	-3.22**
Size of the average cotton plot during the past 5 years (ha)	0.96 (1.13)	2.91 (2.60)	-3.61***
Share of cotton income (%)	36.10 (19.91)	46.66 (27.26)	-1.62
Cotton organizational membership history	1.67 (0.70)	2.15 (0.78)	-2.78**
Number of board positions occupied	0.29 (1.08)	1.02 (0.95)	-3.38**
Duration of appointment on boards (years)	0.67 (2.70)	4.62 (4.66)	-4.02***

Note: ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$; figures in parentheses are standard deviation of means.

Table 1b. Cross-tabulation of Gender and Education

Level of Education	Gender		χ^2
	Female	Male	
No education (0)	20 (83.3%)	63 (50.8%)	9.05*
Primary school (1)	1 (4.2%)	26 (21.0%)	
Secondary school (2)	3 (12.5%)	31 (25.0%)	
University (3)	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.2%)	

Note: * = $p < 0.05$; percentage appear in parentheses.

of gender and education showed a significant association between the level of education and gender $\chi^2(3) = 9.05$, $p < 0.05$.

On the division of work in cotton production, the answers reflected the taken-for-granted gendered division of labor that underrates women's share. Thus, men widely cited harvesting as exclusively a woman's task. Plowing and pesticide treatment were listed as exclusively male tasks,

while sowing and fertilizing were identified as shared tasks. However, to avoid delays in work on their cotton farms, certain women household heads were forced to perform tasks that were deemed unsuitable and risky for women, such as plowing and pesticide treatment. Even so, men continued to harp on the inferiority of women to men. During a discussion about the gendered division of labor, a former organization leader ridiculed the idea of equating men and women.

Is it not you intellectuals who have decreed that women are equal to us men? You ignore the common first inquiry after a birth. Which child [sex] is it? “Tònkuro” [a girl], meaning someone who is going to leave the home, or “Tònduro” [a boy], meaning the one who is coming into the house. How can you equate the two?

In addition, women were less involved in the management of cotton production at the household level than men, and this was reflected in the level of accuracy of cotton-related information they provided. While men were likely to record cotton production data in the area, and could specify tonnage over the past years, women rarely did so. The figures the latter were able to provide were mostly about the amount of money they received from their production. As a woman admitted: “I do not go to the cotton market. It is my husband who goes there and brings back home what is left after deducting the cost of the inputs.”

Women and Cotton Organizations

Women figured in the organization lists of members and represented about 16 percent of the random sample. However, they still lacked control over their membership and often did not know the name of the organization they were part of. As a divorced woman put it: “I am a member of the organization of which my brother is a member.” Owing to this lack of control, she could not freely change organizations as long as her brother was a member, though she had been growing cotton for three years without being paid. When the brother finally decided to step out, she felt deeply disappointed and abandoned cotton growing.

Women’s absence from cotton marketing at times led to tension among couples. A cotton farmer swore that he had not received money

from the last cotton season, neither for himself nor for his wife. But the wife did not believe him. "She has been accusing me of having spent her money without telling her," complained the farmer. A woman farmer had a different experience with her husband. At the end of the 2007–2008 season, she had quite a good harvest and was expecting some cash. But, her husband was in debt. Applying the principle of joint liability for debt reimbursement between members of the same organization, the board used the earnings from the woman's production to pay for her husband's debts, without her consent. She could not accept that "as a woman, one grows cotton to pay for a man's debts." Because of her husband's incapacity or unwillingness to reimburse the sum, she decided to separate and go back to her parents. But there were also married women who were growing cotton on plots shared with their husbands. They were mostly not registered in cotton organizations in their own name. After marketing, they received their share of the proceeds from their husband. In polygamous households, as we found in a remote village in the heart of the cotton belt, the redistribution was done according to each wife's contribution to the production as estimated by the husband. A head of a polygamous household, husband of three wives, observed that "this collective way of growing cotton is more beneficial for wives because they earn more than they could have got from a separate plot."

The poor involvement of women in organization management was captured by another woman in the following statement: "We women, we do not know the answers to your questions because we are not involved in the management of the organization. So you should ask our husbands." However, most women spoke about the futility of being on a board. As a woman put it: "It is not worthwhile to be a board member as a woman, because you will always be left out from activities with no information." Another woman, who was assistant to the councilor of a village, agreed, saying that a woman's presence on a board was merely symbolic. "When a woman is invited, it is merely symbolic, because men would first agree among themselves before inviting you as a woman."

The absence of women from cotton boards came to the fore as one of the causes of lengthy discussions with women when investigating the causes of conflicts within and between farmer organizations. Indeed, the binary logistic regression, with leadership as the dependent variable that takes the value "1" for leaders and "0" otherwise, revealed a positively significant effect of gender ($p < 0.01$) on leadership status (Table 2).

Table 2. Logistic Regression of Determinants for Accessing Leadership Positions in Cotton Organization

Variables	B (SE)	Exp(B)
Farmer's household dependency ratio	-0.25 (0.64)	0.78
Experience in cotton production (Years)	0.04 (0.02)	1.04
Cotton production in ha (mean of the past 5 years)	0.06 (0.10)	1.06
Cotton organizational membership history	1.01** (0.34)	2.74
Gender	3.05** (1.13)	21.07
Level of education	1.82*** (0.37)	6.18
Constant	-6.29*** (1.73)	.00

N = 148; R² = 0.56 (Nagelkerke); Model $\chi^2(6) = 79.52$; Prediction power = 78.9%

Note: ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$.

Education and cotton membership history were also significant at $p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.01$ respectively. The model, $\chi^2(6) = 79.52$, had a good prediction power of about 79 percent, with an $R^2 = 0.56$.

Life History of Women Leaders

The life history method was applied to investigate the life experience of the two women leaders interviewed during the research.

Case 1: Rita the "Iron Lady"

Birth and childhood: Rita is a 57 year old woman, living in a remote village in the north-west of Benin. Although Rita's father was extremely poor, she was sent to school at the age of 6 years. Rita was still in primary school and all of 9 years of age, when she used the money she had saved to pay taxes for her father who was arrested because he could not pay them. After the father was released, he declared, in tears: "If it were possible to change the sex of a child, I would have transformed you into a boy to stay with me forever." When Rita was in the third year of secondary school, her father could no longer afford her education and took her out from school. Rita then stayed with a religious foster family, where she took up petty trade.

She used to sell at the church, where she met her husband, who was the pastor. The pastor was amazed by her diligence and hard work, and expressed his love for her.

Family life: A few months after Rita got married to the pastor, he was assigned to a remote village where life was hard, according to Rita. But her experience of the economic hardship she had suffered as a child helped her brave the situation. She combined farming and petty trading to make her family's life more comfortable. However, the relative wealth of the family made the church hierarchy send them twice to places where they would not have the opportunity to cultivate or trade. After the third assignment, Rita had an argument with her husband who would not let her farm anymore because he did not want to move constantly. However, Rita managed to acquire a piece of land and started farming, while also doing petty trade. The resources generated by her activities allowed them to build the house they currently live in. "I am proud of these achievements. We have no salary but God blessed us!," says Rita.

Rita is a mother of 12 children, of whom only her eldest daughter got a baccalaureate, but the two had a fallout when the daughter refused to continue with her studies. Now, Rita is no longer in contact with her daughter.

Cotton farming and related organizational activism: Rita started growing cotton at the end of the 1980s, after the third assignment of her husband. In 1998, she was elected as the treasurer of the district farmer union, "against a man" (she proudly specifies). From 2001 onward, after Rita resigned from the organization, she has spearheaded the launch of three dissident cotton organizations in the district. She was successively appointed as in-charge of women's affairs, deputy treasurer, and general secretary, in the respective boards. She always battled for better management of these organizations.

In the third organization, the private cotton ginner to whom they used to give their produce brought in several million FCFA² to the organization during their second season. The few board members who collected the money from the businessman kept it for themselves and denied having received it. Among the frustrated board members, Rita was the only one who dared to confront them on the issue. She declared them guilty at a meeting. Later, the other male colleagues congratulated her, saying: "We really appreciate your courage, and we would like you to join us to create our own organization." But she told the men of her fears, saying

that she preferred to stay at home and take care of herself instead of suffering for people “who will leave me out from the redistribution of the benefits.” But they promised to be fair with her. The initial meeting was organized at her place, where they decided to set up a new cotton organization and assigned board positions to the founders. The organization operated for four years before an extraordinary assembly was convened. Rita refused to attend because she was informed very late and had to travel far for the meeting. In addition, she could not leave home while her husband was traveling. At the meeting, partial changes were made in board membership positions and Rita was ousted for “unknown reasons.” Rita did not react to her ouster. She explained: “I decided to keep quiet to avoid controversy, though they have never notified me of any fault of mine for being ousted in this way.”

Being a member of many cotton organization boards one after the other, Rita attended many important meetings and negotiations with inputs suppliers, most of whom she accused of being inclined toward corruption. She said that many times she had been offered significant sums of money, directly or through intermediaries. She is proud that she never succumbed to temptation. She also faced all kinds of gender stereotyping as “men never accepted me as a full member capable of achieving something.” Her commitment earned her the moniker “iron lady” from her fellow board members and “crusher” from inputs suppliers. “They thought that by giving me names, they would upset me and I would give up, but I did not mind,” she said. Rita still recalls how some people tried to discourage and de-motivate her followers when she promoted breakaway organizations, saying: “You are silly! Otherwise you would not follow a woman. Do you want to be ruled by a woman?” But she did not give up and many followers trusted her. For that reason, she calls her participation in boards a success and continues to grow cotton. She said:

If I stop producing cotton now, farmers would think that I betrayed them. They acknowledge my contribution in defending their interests, and usually say: “Without that woman who halted other board members’ theft, we would have been in a lot of trouble for a long time.” I am grateful for such an acknowledgment.

Membership in organizations: Rita is also a member of many organizations other than cotton, on the boards of which she has held positions

such as president (of a women's group) and treasurer (on the board of the district civil society organization). For over 10 years, she has played a leadership role in the women's group. Whenever it comes to renewing the board members, "women say 'it is you we prefer' and they do not want to replace me," she says. Rita also entered political life, though with no affiliation to any particular political party. In 2008, she headed a list of independents and ran unsuccessfully for a position at a municipal council.

According to Rita, her domestic responsibilities rarely come in the way of her activism. "My husband encourages me in my organizational activities...He is not like others," she said. When asked why she has been appointed to so many boards and how she deals with her duties, Rita replied: "You know nobility is not given; it is deserved."

Case 2: *Gnon the "Libertine"*

Birth and family of origin: Born the eldest in a family of five brothers and four sisters, Gnon is a 37 year old widow, living with her siblings, together with their widowed mother. She takes care of the family with the help of her unmarried younger brother. However, it is the brother who acts as the head of their household. Gnon dropped out of school when she was in the third grade because she was ashamed to have to repeat the class while her friends went to a higher grade. "It was due to ignorance. If it were now, I would have simply redone my class," she regrets. After Gnon dropped out, she was trained as a seamstress. Soon after getting a diploma, she got married.

Own family: Gnon married into a large household of seven married brothers, sharing domestic tasks with many "co-wives." She gave birth to four children. Her matrimonial duties did not hinder her active role in various organizations, in spite of the gossip going on at the time because of her multiple travels for training. Her husband was regularly confronted with statements such as: "You are an illiterate farmer, you have a drop-out wife travelling everywhere...Make her stop these activities." But he would answer: "Only her father knows how much he spent to educate her. I am not willing to spoil her job. I would like her to continue because what she gets belongs to my family." Unfortunately, he died young, much to Gnon's regret.

After her husband's death, she and her children returned to her parents. However, she continued cultivating the land of her late husband,

which was owned by her in-laws. Five years after the husband's death, the eldest brother-in-law asked her to leave this plot of land, the yield from which she was using to raise her children. The brother-in-law allegedly declared: "A woman cannot inherit land from her husband!"

Cotton farming and the cotton organization experience: Though Gnon started growing cotton with her husband, her involvement with cotton boards started only after his death. She started by working as the person in charge of weighing cotton in a farmers' group. When the fourth breakaway organization emerged in the village, its local president could not find a man to be the secretary as he was involved in a violent conflict. He approached Gnon and tried to convince her to accept the position, but she refused. Then he asked her parents to intercede on his behalf, saying that their daughter could "save him from shame." Gnon's father obliged and asked her to accept the position, directing her "to go and help him in doing what he wanted." According to Gnon, her presence on the board made the group steadily grow in size. She recalled new members saying: "As a woman is the secretary of this group, it should be trustworthy because women are not contaminated by hypocrisy." However, she also challenged skeptics who were waiting to see how a woman would be able to manage cotton marketing. She says: "I marketed cotton as any man would do. I had no debts and no arrears." When asked what made her leave the organization, she answered: "If a husband who courted you does not accept you anymore, it is better to leave him and go your way..."

But in truth, she was forced out of the organization. At the end of its second cotton season, the organization decided to allocate motorbikes to some leaders. Gnon was selected among them, but a few days before the motorbikes were to be allotted, a board meeting was convened by the president, who declared: "At the point we are now, the government...said that it is time for change. You Gnon, as I see you, you will not be able to do the work...it is beyond a woman's capabilities."

When asked why this work was beyond a woman, Gnon said: "Because change had come, our president said...and only men would be members of the board." In spite of her disenchantment, Gnon respectfully knelt in front of the president and said:

Daddy, thank you. When you needed me to run the organization, I was not an incapable woman. But I will tell you one thing: this is a white power (a modern power). If it were a traditional title I was entitled to inherit, you would

never have been able to oust me without fear for your life. Thank you and only God will pay you back.

Back home, she told her parents what had just transpired, and blamed her father for her ouster. The father argued that a board position was not an inherited title, and that god would punish the president for what he had done.

Membership in organizations: Gnon is a very active woman who participates in diverse activities. Apart from sewing, she is the secretary of a women's group, the only woman literacy teacher in the village for 10 years, and a community volunteer for health promotion. Gnon's membership in organizations other than those related to cotton started a few months after she got her diploma, and she was appointed the secretary of the woman's group without her knowledge. But despite being busy with all these duties, she has misgivings about being a "free woman." She feels people's eyes are constantly on her because they think that she does not want to marry again. "I am really concerned about getting a husband, but I am not lucky," she laments.

Male Reaction to Women's Ouster

Men were not inclined to comment on the way the two women leaders were ousted. The president of Rita's organization, who was ousted together with her, explained that he did not attend the meeting because he had decided to stay away from cotton, which had become a troublesome business. He said he did not know why Rita was ousted and was not "willing to comment on it." The newly appointed president argued that the "former board," of which he was also a member, "did not report to network members." The leader of Gnon's organization, tried to justify her ouster by saying: "You know she is not so clean morally."

Discussions and Conclusion

The random selection of women from the list of the organizations reveals that women's membership of cotton organizations has progressed, and that they can actually be registered as members in their own name. This could be partly due to the fragmentation of organizations, and the consequent

competition for membership. The ignorance that many women showed about the organizations of which they were members means that some of them might have been registered by their husbands or other male relatives to raise the group size of the organizations. The ensuing culturally underpinned division of labor, by forcing women to adopt and adapt to male hegemonic view, has social implications. Deeply entrenched myths and stereotypical images are internalized by women as well, even though these are demeaning to them. This is what Bourdieu (1989, p. 18) called a “construction carried out under structural constraints” through which even the most disadvantaged actors tend to perceive their world as natural. Such cognitive processes take place in everyday life. The significant differences between men and women with regards to their experiences in cotton production, the area under cotton, and the organizational membership profile (membership history, number of board positions, and the duration of the appointment) are certainly rooted in these processes. For instance, harvesting is widely considered a woman’s task because it is considered easy. In reality, it is a very tiring and time-consuming activity that requires concentration. Also, the boundary between ‘heavy or risky tasks’ and ‘light tasks’ in cotton production has blurred since the labor constraints force women to perform tasks that are supposedly a male preserve. As a result, women’s participation in cotton production actually runs throughout the entire production cycle. This shows how women’s contribution is underrated, and they end up handling tasks that men are reluctant to perform. A similar observation has been made in Uganda where a “systematical perceptual bias against work” performed by women, which becomes de-skilled and/or de-valued, undermines their ability to be fairly remunerated (Lodin, 2012, p. 261).

Even though women contribute to the entire production cycle, they are largely absent from the cotton market, where the produce is weighed and payments are made, thereby losing control over their yield. Women are deprived of essential information, and have limited autonomy in decision making within cotton organizations. They are resigned to accepting the money given to them by their male representatives even though they don’t trust them, as is evident from the dispute between two farmers and their spouses mentioned earlier. This lack of control of women in the public sphere originates from cultural practices that strongly shape the women’s position in the private sphere, and affects their strategic as well as practical interests. For instance, economic and

consumption needs made both Rita and Gnon the de facto heads of their respective households, though with different entitlements. While Rita's role in the household was acknowledged, Gnon's was not. Her younger brother was seen as the head of the household, due to social and cultural norms that prevent a woman from heading a household where there is a man (Moser, 1994). Also, society at large seems to resist women's autonomy, as illustrated by the biases faced by the two women leaders in their family and cotton boards. Women exercising their agency seldom manage to overcome the hurdles that come in the way of achieving their aspirations. Consequently, with practical gender needs being the overriding concern, it is almost impossible for women to meet their strategic gender needs.

Women are poorly empowered within cotton organizations, as is evident from their membership history in cotton organizations as compared to men. This, in turn, limits their chances of being on the board of cotton organizations, as a farmer who has been a member of a number of cotton organizations stands a better chance of becoming a board member. Leadership in cotton organizations is highly affected by gender and education, a field where women lag behind. Less than one-fifth of the women in the sample had enjoyed formal education compared to one out of two men. The World Bank (2012) identified education as one of the main factors in reducing gender gaps in the developing world. This is evident from the positive correlation of education and gender with leadership in cotton organizations. The odds ratio (OR) of 21.07 for gender means that for each shift from 0 (female) to 1 (male), a male farmer is about 21 times more likely to become a leader in cotton organizations. The level of difference in education among men and women is about 6. This illustrates how excluded women are from cotton organizations. It is from such interactions that Crenshaw (1991) coined the concept of intersectionality.

Rita and Gnon are exceptions. Both exhibited exceptional traits that many other women lacked, and which favored their emergence as leaders. Both were relatively well-educated women in their respective villages. At the household level, both Rita and Gnon were fortunate to have open-minded husbands whom they both qualified as "different from the other men." Rita's hardworking nature caused her family to be moved from one place to another by the church hierarchy. As for Gnon, her capabilities were acknowledged by her late husband, who rejected the gossip about her, saying that her extra-domestic activities benefited his

household. Men, it appears, are inclined to give more freedom to women when they find their activities benefiting themselves. This implies that portraying gender equity as being in the interest of men could help it gain more acceptance among the male community in rural areas.

Rita and Gnon were quite active as members of various cotton organizations and even played leadership roles. Rita's initiative and assertive nature enabled her to confront her male board mates with their embezzlements. A natural leader, she was approached by many farmers, including men, for advice on agricultural issues even before she was appointed the treasurer of the district union. As a result, she benefited from the support of ordinary farmers, and in turn was concerned about their welfare. As Werhane and Painter-Morland (2011, p. 3) stated, "leadership is not necessarily restricted to individuals appointed to positions of authority, but is a dispersed capacity of the organization as a whole." Rita herself concluded the interview with a meaningful statement about the character of nobility.

The fate of the two women leaders within their respective organizations confirms the male stereotypical denial of a woman's capability to lead, although men individually admitted to their ability. Paternalistic culture is still dominant in the region, causing men to deny certain principles at the group level while acknowledging them as individuals. However, the reaction of Rita and Gnon to the unfair way in which they were ousted uncovers some differences in perception about organization-related conflicts between men and women. Gnon's reaction shows how the reference to traditional noble titles is negotiable, offering a different perspective. But considering the position on the board is elected and a non-ascribed title, she accepted her ouster, regardless of the way in which it had been orchestrated. Rita's reaction was to keep quiet and not stir trouble. Their reactions are at odds with those of leaders in other cotton organizations in Benin, who are not known to cede their position without a struggle. Most male leaders are known for their reluctance to forfeit their positions on boards, and often refer to traditional ascribed titles to justify their behavior. Thus, the women's reaction to group conflicts contrasts radically with that of men. As indicated by Carli (1989), while men focus more on disagreements, women are more likely to voice agreements. The women's presumption that their presence on the boards could reduce intra-group conflicts does not seem to be entirely unfounded, although in this case, the two women leaders were disempowered.

Consequently, “the socialized differences between men and women” that are captured in the concept of gender should highlight the value of the female nature for an “effective and much-needed management style” (Ely & Meyerson, 2000, pp. 108–109). There are policy implications in this study which the planners will do well to heed.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the Netherlands University Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC) for funding the research. We are also very grateful for the work of the anonymous reviewers, whose comments, questions, and suggestions enabled us to enhance the quality of the article.

Notes

1. Key informant interview with Babou, a *griot* (storyteller), at Parakou, 2011, March 16.
2. *Franc de la communauté Française de l’Afrique*, currency common to 13 French African colonies. The average exchange rate at that time (2004) was 1 USD = 528.28 FCFA (World Trade Organization [WTO], 2005).

References

- Albert, I. (1993). *Des femmes une terre: Une nouvelle dynamique sociale au Bénin* (Women land: A new social dynamics in Benin). Paris: Harmattan.
- Angrosino, M.V. (2002). Conducting a life history interview. In M.V. Angrosino (Ed.), *Doing cultural anthropology: Projects for ethnographic data collection* (1st edition) (pp. 33–44). Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Baffes, J. (2004). *Cotton: Market setting, trade policies, and issues. World Bank policy Research Working Paper 3218*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Billing, Y.D. (2011). Are women in management victims of the phantom of the male norm? *Gender, Work & Organization*, 18(3), 298–317.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 14–25.
- Carli, L.L. (1989). Gender differences in interaction style and influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(4), 565–576.
- Clark, D., & Kleyn, N. (2011). Why do they leave? Voluntary turnover of South African women executives. In H.P. Werhane & M. Painter-Morland (Eds), *Leadership, gender, and organization* (pp. 185–207). London and New York: Springer.
- Coffe, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2011). Gender gaps in political participation across sub-Saharan African nations. *Social Indicators Research*, 102(2), 245–264.

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Ely, R.J., & Meyerson, D.E. (2000). Theories of gender in organizations: A new approach to organizational analysis and change. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 22, 103–151.
- Falen, D.J. (2008). Polygyny and Christian marriage in Africa: The case of Benin. *African Studies Review*, 51(2), 51–74.
- Gandonou, A.J.-M. (2005). *Essays on precision agriculture technology adoption and risk management*. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky.
- Gergely, N., & Poulton, C. (2009). Historical background and recent institutional evolution of African cotton. In D. Tschirley, C. Poulton, & P. Labaste (Eds), *Organization and performance of cotton sectors in Africa: Learning from reform experience* (pp. 31–44). Washington DC: World Bank.
- Gray, L., & Kevane, M. (1999). Diminished access, diverted exclusion: Women and land tenure in sub-Saharan Africa. *African Studies Review*, 42(2), 15–39.
- Hagemaster, J.N. (1992). Life history: A qualitative method of research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 17(9), 1122–1128.
- Hahonou, E.K. (2011). *Benin (Vol. 6). Africa Yearbook*. Brill Online: ECAS 2011/Africa Studies Centre.
- Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- INSAE. (2004). *Cahier des villages et quartiers de ville (RGPH3)*. Cotonou: Direction des Etudes Démographiques.
- Lodin, J. B. (2012). Intrahousehold bargaining and distributional outcomes regarding NERICA upland rice proceeds in Hoima district, Uganda. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 16(3), 253–278.
- Mama Debourou, D. (2009). *La société baatonnu du nord-Bénin: Son passé, son dynamisme, ses conflits et ses innovations, des origines à nos jours. Essai sur l'histoire d'une société de l'Afrique Occidentale* (The Baatonnu society of the northern Benin: Its past, its dynamics, its conflicts and innovations, from the origins to the present days. Essay on the history of a West African society). Unpublished thesis, Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou.
- Molyneux, M. (1985). Mobilization without emancipation? Women's interests, the state and revolution in Nicaragua. *Feminist Studies*, 11(2), 227–254.
- . (1998). Analysing women's movements. *Development and Change*, 29(2), 219–245.
- Moser, O.N.C. (1989). Gender planning in the third world: Meeting practical and strategic gender needs. *World Development*, 17(11), 1799–1825.
- . (1994). *Gender planning an development: Theory, practice and training*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Nissanke, M., & Mavrotas, G. (Eds). (2010). *Commodities, governance and economic development under globalization* (1st edition). Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Painter-Morland, M. (2011). Systemic leadership, gender, organization. In H.P. Werhane & M. Painter-Morland (Eds), *Leadership, gender, and organization* (pp. 139–165). London and New York: Springer.
- Pamphilon, B. (1999). The zoom model: A dynamic framework for the analysis of life histories. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(3), 393–410.
- Schottman, W. (2000). Baatonu personal names from birth to death. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 70(1), 79–106.
- Shacklock, G., & Thorp, L. (2005). Life history and narrative approaches. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds), *Research methods in the social sciences* (pp. 156–163). London: SAGE Publications.
- Sinzogan, A.A.C., Jiggins, J., Vodouhè, S., Kossou, D., Totin, E., & van Huis, A. (2007). An analysis of the organizational linkages in the cotton industry in Benin. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, 5(2–3), 213–231.
- Sprague, J., & Kobrynowicz, D. (1999). A feminist epistemology. In J.S. Chafetz (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of gender, Vol. 11* (pp. 25–43). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Tama-Imorou, C., Wenninck, B., & Nederlof, E.S. (2007). UCPC's role in pro-poor service provision in Benin. In B. Wenninck, E.S. Nederlof, & W. Heemskerk (Eds), *Access of the poor to agricultural services: The role of farmers' organizations in social inclusion* (pp. 105–124). Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT).
- Werhane, H.P., & Painter-Morland, M. (2011). Leadership, gender, and organization. In H.P. Werhane & M. Painter-Morland (Eds), *Leadership, gender, and organization* (pp. 1–8). London and New York: Springer.
- World Bank. (2002). *Benin strategic country gender assessment (Briefing note for the PRSP and the CAS)* (Draft). Washington DC: World Bank.
- . (2003). *Benin poverty assessment* (No. 28447-BEN). Washington DC: World Bank.
- . (2007). *World development report 2008: Agriculture for development*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- . (2012). *World development report 2012: Gender equality and development*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- World Trade Organization (WTO). (2005). *Benin: Diagnostic trade integration study*. Cotonou: World Trade Organization.