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Access right to food tree species: the case of women access to néré (*Parkia biglobosa*) in Central-West Burkina Faso

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Introduction

Despite access to land, West African women generally do not plant trees due their restricted rights to plant permanent crops, their shortage of labour available for tree cultivation as well as their relatively weak tenure rights in cases of disputed claims over the resource with their male counterparts. Women have thus ‘under-invested’ in tree crops (Berry, 1987). Also, according to Gray (2008), women’s rights are often through ties to their husbands and these rights may cease to exist upon divorce, widowhood or failure to have a son.

The literature is lush and abundant on the issue of insecurity of women’s access to environmental resources. However, we find the emergence of two main ideas: a) the non-secured access of women to natural resources is due to the fact that their rights are subordinated to those of their household’s or lineage’s chief (their husband or any other man of their lineage, depending on the region or relevant tradition); b) women access rights are limited or restricted and they do not hold ownership but just usufruct rights. Both aspects described above highlight a clear disadvantage of women in terms of their access to natural resources. In addition, as described in this study, women’s rights are precarious. The study here presented examined access rights to food tree species, with a particular focus on néré (*Parkia biglobosa*) and addressed the following questions: how are the access rights of women to trees defined in the region of central-west Burkina Faso? How are they characterized?

Néré—the African locust bean—is a very important tree species not only in Burkina Faso but across West Africa. It plays a significant role in the diet of rural and urban populations in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Burkina Faso. The fruit provides seeds, which women process into a highly nutritious sauce (soumbala) that is eaten with grain-based dishes. Although women are the ones to harvest néré seeds for income and direct consumption, they have no secure access to tree resources.

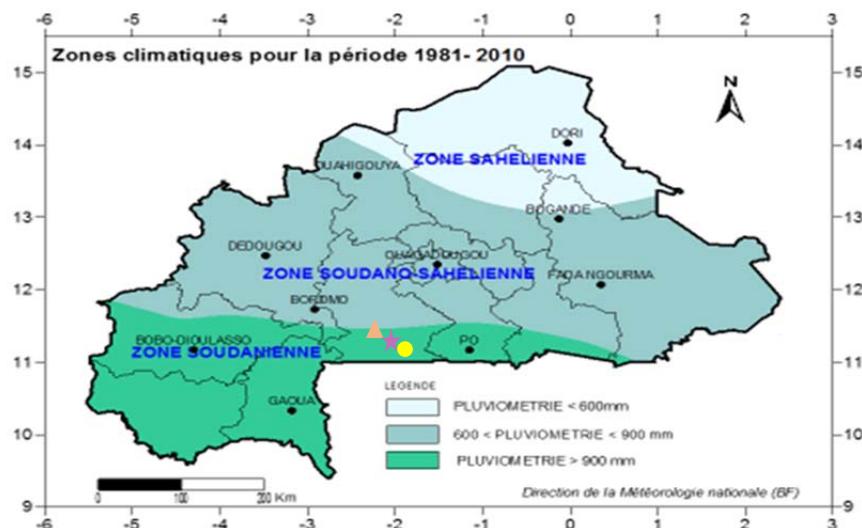
Moreover, the density of néré is declining because of threats hindering its regeneration, including population growth and the expansion of cultivated crops in an extensive agrarian system.

Changes in women’s access rights and use of natural resources are taking place in a context of resource scarcity and increasing demand.

This paper first presents a clustering of women based on the characterization of their distinct access rights to néré. Secondly, the types of access rights are characterized also in spatial terms, based on the type of land use where the women harvesting is exercised.

Material and Methods

Description of the study area



Kassolo ▲	Pien ★	Nebou ●
W 002°06'59,3" N 11°31'36,0"	W 001°58'16,0" N 11°04'23,2"	W 001°52'07,0 "N 11°19'00,6"
Strong presence of former migrants who have obtained access to land (higher integration)	Strong presence of migrants; without access (low levels of integration)	Strong presence of migrants and new forms of access

The study was carried out in three villages in Central-West Burkina Faso: Kassolo, Pien and Nebou. The first two are located in the Ziro province and the third is located in the Sissili Province (Figure 1). The study site includes non-migrant and migrant villagers. The autochthonous group belongs to the Gurunsi ethnic group, also called Nouni and represents less than 50% of the population of the area. The group of migrants includes Mossi and Fulani, who represent 50-90% of the population.

Methods

Data collection was based on-farm visits from April to May 2013 in the three villages. A survey involving 180 women and direct observations of néré harvesting practices by women during the harvest period was carried out.

Four hundred trees were selected, marked and monitored in three villages. Specific questions on access rights were posed to individual women regarding individual trees, in order to obtain very details responses.

Results

Different access profiles of women to néré

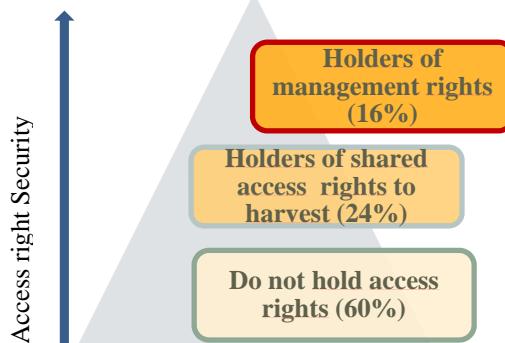
Three main groups of women, defined based on different access rights to néré were identified: "holders of management rights", "holders of shared access rights" and "non-holders of access rights". The classification of these harvester's profiles follow pyramidal hierarchy (Figure 1).

At the top of this pyramid are holders of management rights". They are a minority (16% of the harvesters surveyed). Within this group, non-migrant women, Gurunsi / Nouni, are more represented than migrants,Mossi and Fulani. This group is the best positioned in term of access arrangements to néré although these vary slightly across ethnic groups.

The "holders of shared access rights" are positioned in the middle of the pyramid (Figure 1) and represents 24% of the sample of harvesters involved in the study. They share access rights to néré with other women, specifically the wives of members of the lineage with ownership of the néré trees, through a concession system. In this group, the majority of women are Nouni (45%); Mosse and Fulani constitute the 7% and 3% respectively. For women in this group, access right to harvest néré depending on the authorization provided by the "holders of management rights" of their respective lineages.

The "non-holders of access right" are at the base of the pyramid base (Figure 1) with no rights to harvest néré. The majority of the women involved in this study falls into this category (60%), which is mainly composed of Mossi migrants (87%) and Fulani (81%), while Nouni harvesters are 28%.

Figure 1 : The pyramid of women access profiles to néré



Different access profiles of women based on types of land use where harvesting occur.

The results of the survey revealed five types of harvest space (Table 1). Women gain access to the néré on the first three types by marriage to the owner of the land or to a member of that family.

On the first type, the "lands belonging to the husband" there are the husband's fields and fallow (Table1). These lands are under the authority of the head of household. The majority of "holders of management rights," 56% harvested on these spaces.

On "land belonging to the lineage, it is about lineage ownership exercising. It is a property right shared among different households members from the same lineage. The "holders of shared access rights" mainly collect on these places.

These first two harvest areas represent the highest level of security access to the tree because of the exclusive nature of property rights that is applied. In the household or lineage fields, secure access to néré is the fact that the occupation of these areas by agricultural activity. For fallow, however, secure access remains when it is not transferred to others. But fields' fallowing and fallow's loaning or sale by another household (migrant generally) drive to unsecure access context of harvest. The nouni harvesters outnumber migrants (Mossi and Fulani) in these secure harvesting conditions (Table 1).

On borrowed land and land owned by others, the third type of ownership is applied. Any decision of harvesting on these lands is took by a person belonging neither to the household nor to the lineage of the harvester. So, on land of others, harvesters' presence thereon is illegal, we further note that the largest number of pickers, including Mossi and Fulani, were recorded thereon compared to Nouni. But in borrowed land cases, it's about migrant households which borrowed

land with a non-migrant households that are nouni's families. In these situations, harvesters from land borrower-households share or negotiate access right to harvesting with the women of land owner-households.

The very old and fallow pastures, also collectively known as "bush" or forest, are common goods of customary tenure. These areas are subject to a tenure held by nouni traditional leaders.

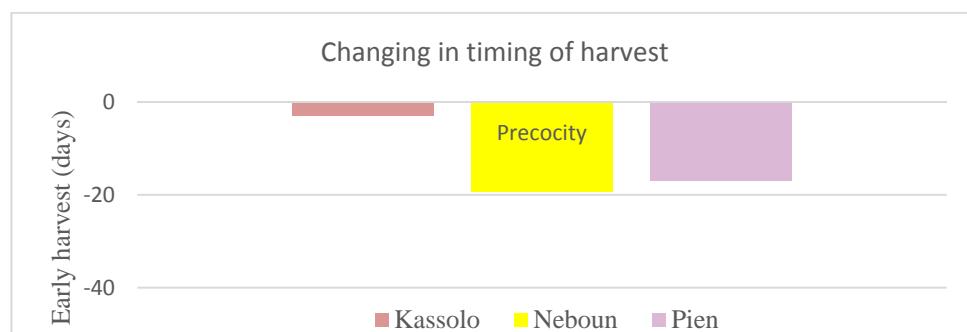
The latter two types of space are mainly harvest places for "non-holders access to néré" from migrant household (Table 1).

Table 1: Women access to néré tree harvesting sites on different kinds of lands

TYPE OF SPACE	Authority/Decision	Women's access conditions	Level of security of access rights		% Migrants among women harvesters	% Non-migrants women harvesters	Drivers of unsecured access to néré
			Space/Land	NÉRÉ			
HH'S Field	Head of household	Marriage	++	++	2	21	Fallowing
HH's Fallow			+	-	8	13	Cession to another (loan, lease, sale)
Lineage's Lands	Head of lineage	Marriage	+	+	6	57	Cession to another (loan, lease, sale)
Borrowed Lands	Land owner; Head of Borrower's Household	Marriage	+	+	11	0	Fallowing; Transfer of space to owner
Lands of others	Land owner	Illegal access; Secondary harvest; Provision of harvest service	-	-	65	9	
Forest	None	-	-	-			

Moreover, the practices for transferring the land to another household or that of fallowing are contexts favouring access to insecure néré. They also create a competition around this resource. This therefore leads to a phenomenon of early harvest (Figure 2) of néré among harvesters, each wanting to reap the maximum harvest.

Figure 2: Early start of the harvest period



Discussion and conclusions

This case study highlights the context of insecurity in which women have access to an important tree species, néré, through the analysis of the spatial and social distribution of access rights of women to tree individuals of this species in three villages in the Central West region of Burkina Faso.

Two main access profiles of women to néré emerged from this study: a large majority of women without access rights and a minority of women, primarily from the Nouni ethnic group, with access rights, but vulnerable to changes in their access rights.

Women in a more privilege condition of access have gained this right through marriage to a member of household or lineage with ownership of the trees. However, they could lose their rights in case the marriage is broken due to widowhood or divorce. A Nouni widow can still claim rights to néré if she has a son who inherits assets from his father.

Thus, marriage enables women to access natural resources, such as tree products, though this right is not permanent, inalienable and unalterable. Other aspects that contribute to insecure rights are evolutions in land use types where néré is found, such as farmers' fields and fallow.

This study show that the majority of women have only partly secured or completely insecure access rights to a resource that play a key role in their livelihood. The results from this study illustrate how women's access to food and natural resources is sensitive to changes in social status and the evolution of land uses in the areas nearby their villages. This evidence supports the need to promote land policies that integrate gender sensitive approaches in land tenure and the need to propose technological packages for conservation taking account differentiated access rights to néré of vulnerable groups.

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