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Changing gender roles in seed yam production among smallholder farmers in Ghana: Implications for food security

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Yam production in West Africa has been dominated by men despite the different roles played by the various gender groups such as men, women and youth in its production. This male dominance creates gender gaps in terms of access to and control over yam production resources especially where agricultural interventions are not gender responsive. A gender responsive CAY-Seed project sought to improve seed yam production through community action of training yam farmers (men, women and youth) in positive selection and good agronomic practices in seed yam to ensure quality seeds for increased yam productivity, food security and wealth creation. The project allocated a separate component to gender and social dynamics in seed yam production through which gender responsiveness, are identified and documented. Through capacity building interventions and transfer of improved seed yam technologies, women and youth have acquired necessary skills in both seed and ware yam production. Participatory approaches through gender sensitization workshops, focus group discussions and key informant interviews; this paper examines the changing gender roles and social dynamics in seed yam production and discusses its implications to enhancing food security. The results reveal that all genders in the selected intervention communities are aware of changing gender roles. These changes are mostly due to training and sensitizations by the CAY-Seed project and the availability of technologies that enable men, women and youth to perform relevant roles. Roles such as seed cutting and planting, which were formally regarded as activities for men are currently performed by women and the youth. Traditionally, female spouses did not own yam farms but currently, male spouses now allocate portions of their field to the females for seed yam production though efforts are still needed to increase the size. Yam is a traditional crop and considered a household asset, decisions on production resources employed was solely by the male household head but women now also have a stake in the decision making process. There is the social acceptance by men on the need to empower women and youth in seed yam production to complement their efforts in providing for the household. These dynamics confirm that gender roles are not fixed but change with time. It also depicts the importance of gender responsiveness in the development and implementation of agricultural development projects for enhancing food security.

Biography

Joyce Afua Sarpong Haleegoah has her expertise in Social Research in Agriculture and a Gender Specialist with CSIR Crops Research Institute in Ghana. Her interest is in women in Agriculture and the Gender and Social Dynamics in Seed Yam Production. She has worked with Inter Disciplinary Teams of Economists and Biological and Physical Scientists in Agricultural Research. Her recent works looked at changes in Local Foods, Actor's Perceptions of Local Foods Safety in Urban Ghana and Gender Roles and Dynamics in Seed Yam Production Demystifying the Myth of Male Dominance in Yam Production.

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