As in many other West African countries, men dominate in open-space urban vegetable farming in Ghana, particularly open-space irrigated vegetable farming. Women are found to dominate marketing of urban farm produce, partly because of the Ghanaian tradition that marketing in general is a woman’s job, but also because Ghanaian women perceive marketing as more profitable, and less risky than farming.

Many studies, particularly in East and Southern African cities, report that the majority of urban farmers are women. This may lead to the generalisation that in any African city urban farmers are predominantly female. And this dominance of women is often attributed to the fact that women continue to bear primary responsibility for household sustenance and well being (Hovorka, 2001) largely due to traditional/cultural views and societal expectations. Women tend to have lower educational status than men, and thus have fewer opportunities for finding suitable wage employment in the formal sector (Obosu-Mensah, 1999). It therefore becomes imperative for women to seek other ways to fill the gap between their cash income and what is needed for household survival.

However, most of the open-space farmers in West African cities like Dakar, Lomé, Cotonou, Bamako and Ouagadougou are men. The situation differs from region to region, from country to country and even among the different farming systems (see also the findings of Kessler et al. on page 16).

**STUDY APPROACH**

Several studies in the three main cities in Ghana (Accra, Kumasi and Tamale) show that men dominate open-space vegetable farming (Obosu-Mensah, 1999; Keraita, 2002). On average, less than 10% of the open-space farmers are women. Even in household backyard gardening, where the main purpose of production is subsistence and women were expected to be in the majority, an IWMI survey in Accra showed that the numbers of men and women were nearly equal (57% men; 43% women) with women usually being older than the men. A similar situation has been reported for Kumasi (Ayamba, 1999). Various studies have given reasons to explain why men dominate urban vegetable farming in Ghana.

In this study, a focus group approach was applied to verify these reasons and to ascertain whether any change had occurred over time. Farmers and vegetable vendors were engaged in group discussions at the farm and market levels. The majority of the market vendors were not members of farm households. The study sought to find out why men dominate open-space vegetable farming in urban and periurban Ghana and why women dominate the marketing aspect. In this study “vegetable(s)” refers to exotic varieties like cabbage, carrot, cucumber, lettuce, cauliflower, and spring onions.
Traditional roles of men and women provide supplementary explanation

not depend on one’s gender but rather on the individual’s ability to lobby. Lobbying is based on one’s relationship (either a direct relationship or through a third party) with the owner/caretaker. However, in some periurban areas where sharecropping is used as payment for cultivating land owned by individuals, landowners or caretakers prefer that men rather than women cultivate their plots because they perceive that men are able to cultivate larger plots than women, hence providing them with greater benefit.

ARDUOUS NATURE OF FARM WORK

Our study revealed that the major reason for male dominance in vegetable farming in open-spaces in urban Ghana is the arduous nature of most of the farm tasks. Cornish and Lawrence (2001), Cornish and Aidoo (2000), and Zakaria et al. (1998) reported that most tasks involved in urban and periurban agriculture are classified as male activities because of this. Table 1 shows a typical division of labour of farm tasks between men and women/children in open-space vegetable farming in urban and periurban areas. The production of vegetables is labour intensive. Land has to be cleared and prepared, followed by the raising of beds, nursing of seeds, transplanting, weeding, watering, etc. The arduous nature of farm work is illustrated in the following comments made by a typical woman farmer who had been cultivating in Accra for about 11 years:

“I started with five other women but they have all left because of the difficulty of the tasks involved. Talking about land clearing and preparation, forking of beds, spraying of chemicals etc., it takes much determination to continue cultivating. I mostly use male hired labour for land clearing and preparation. When I have not got enough money to hire labour, I do the land preparation myself, but then I’m able to cultivate only part of my plot.”

Land clearing and preparation are usually the most arduous tasks in any farming activity and are considered as male activities. Cornish and Aidoo (2000) reported that land preparation, which is carried out almost entirely by manual labour, is extremely arduous and 94% of those who do it are men. Also, most paid labour is engaged in land preparation. Whereas men could supplement their effort by providing paid labour, independent women cultivators depend entirely on male labourers (paid labour) to carry out land clearing and preparation. Women with limited financial resources seek help from male farmers. They cultivate relatively small plots that can easily be managed. In the periurban areas, women and children usually carry water over 200 metres to barrels for irrigation. They do this either as paid labour or family labour. It should be noted that the task of carrying water can also be strenuous if done repeatedly. In effect, women who would like to gain a living from urban farming lose many opportunities to do so because of the above difficulties.

In urban Ghana, the standard method of irrigation is that water has to be conveyed several times in two 15-litre watering cans sometimes for a distance of about 100 m to irrigate the crops. This is physically demanding. Therefore, the male farmers produce the more water-demanding and more profitable crops like cabbage and cauliflower, while the female farmers grow less water-demanding and less profitable crops like okra, yoyos (Corchorus sp) and alefi (Amaranthus).

Table 1: Division of farm tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks (x = usually applicable; - = less applicable)</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women/children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearing the bush</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising beds</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting and transplanting</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilising</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spraying</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual watering (conveying water from source to a medium, usually a barrel)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual watering (direct application to plants using bucket and can)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical watering (use of pump)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cornish et al. (2001)
UNWILLINGNESS TO TAKE RISKS, AND DEPENDENCY SYNDROME

Though nursery management is not arduous, it requires special knowledge and/or skills in early detection of pests/diseases and for the careful study of seedling growth. Vegetable seeds are relatively expensive and yet one could easily lose the seedlings without the necessary nursery skills and knowledge. Cornish et al. (2001) and Cornish and Lawrence (2001) reported that generally women do not have this knowledge, making nursery management a male task, occasionally assisted by women and children for watering. Our study shows that most women were reluctant to take on the risk of nursing their own seedlings. This makes it difficult for even the few women cultivating to become independent cultivators. Our interview with market vendors (mainly women) revealed that nursery management also deters women from engaging in urban vegetable farming. In their own opinions, women would not be able to master seed nursing like the men and depending on male colleagues is not reliable since the men have their own farm work to take care of.

ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Zakaria et al. (1998) reported the cost of transportation to and from the farm as an issue that deters women from cultivating (most men use bicycles, most women do not own one). These economic reasons were not reported in our study.

FEMALE DOMINANCE IN MARKETING

Women’s dominance in marketing urban farm produce is partly attributed to the Ghanaian tradition that marketing of vegetables is a woman’s job. Apart from this, most of the market women held the opinion that marketing is more profitable and less risky than farming, as in the latter case a whole season’s harvest could be lost. Both men and women involved in marketing vegetables see marketing as a quicker way to make money on a daily basis, unlike farming, which takes some months before a farmer receives income from his farm activities. In our study, some male farmers thought it wise to retail their own produce on the market to make more profit. However, most of them were held back by the prevailing tradition that men do not retail vegetables.

Our study also revealed that generally Ghanaian women prefer trading to other jobs. Maxwell (1997), cited in Obou-Mensah (1999), reported that urban retail marketing and petty trading are sectors that have long been dominated by women in West Africa, so it is not surprising that these are the most common ways for a women to earn a livelihood in Accra. In coastal West Africa, women handle 60-90% of domestic farm produce from point of origin to consumption. Women pursue marketing activities as their primary means of obtaining cash income for household expenditure. They play a major role in the marketing of vegetables. They are usually better at bargaining to obtain better prices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban open-space vegetable farming in Ghana is dominated by men mainly because of the arduous nature of most farm tasks. Traditional gender roles were also found to be a reason for male dominance in open-space irrigated vegetable farming. In Ghana, market-oriented farming is seen as belonging to men and open-space vegetable farming in this country is market oriented.

It is difficult for women to cultivate in the urban areas and they are often unable to take the necessary risks, preferring less risky activities like marketing, which is also a specialised area of urban agriculture. Women who express the need to enter farming should be provided with the facilities to do so. Credit schemes and subsidies are two possible ways of achieving this.

Finally, it is without doubt that there is gender differentiation in urban agriculture (farming and marketing of farm produce), which makes it necessary to include gender in an analysis of urban agriculture. Gender analysis is required in areas such as labour division between man and woman within and between farm and non-farm households. Also of importance is the analysis of differences in gender differentiation in the division of labour between rural and urban agriculture.

REFERENCES