

DRIVERS OF GENDER DISPARITY AMONG BENEFICIARIES OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

In spite of visible efforts, gender disparity still persists in development projects worldwide, with negative impacts on women's participation, project outcomes, and sustainability. The growing literature on determinants of gender disparity in development projects is driven mainly by an individual projects agenda that does not generate knowledge of relevance for broad-based policy making at regional, national or international levels. This study explores gender disparity determinants among beneficiaries of development projects in Mezam division in the North West region of Cameroon. Primary data was collected from 450 beneficiaries of six randomly selected development projects in Mezam division, using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, and a weighted linear regression model to identify determinants of gender disparity. 55% (250 individuals) were male, while 45% (200 individuals) were female. Statistically significant gender disparity was observed between respondents across various socio-economic variables, particularly, age, access to land, access to income, employment status, household wealth, access to credit, access to technology, and access to healthcare. The regression model identified household size, land ownership, financial status, access to information and communication technology (ICT), and exposure to crises as key drivers of gender disparity. Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of gender mainstreaming as a key approach to addressing gender disparity among development projects in Cameroon. This can pave the way for promoting gender equality and inclusivity, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of development outcomes for men and women project beneficiaries in Cameroon.

Keywords: Gender disparity, Drivers, beneficiaries, development projects

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gender, differences between men and women which are not biologically but socially or culturally determined have occupied a central place in discourses across the social sciences for over a decade now (Evans, 2013). Gender has been used to explain differences between men and women for instance with respect to access to jobs (Ranabahu & Tanima, 2022), access to, and control of resources (Umeh, 2024), participation in decision making (Smith & Sinkford, 2022), food security (Balgah, 2016), and differences in project participation and outcomes

(Gandhi, & Sharma, 2024). A number of gender theories have been developed to explain why gender gaps exist. Among these are the Patriarchy Theory, which underscores the role of patriarchal systems in upholding male dominance and female subordination (Goldberg, 1989), the Social Construction Theory which posits that gender roles and identities are socially constructed rather than biologically determined (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998), and the Feminist Theory, which critically examines and challenges patriarchal structures as key speedbreaks in processes and efforts advocating for gender equality and women's rights (Crompton, 1989).

In spite of visible efforts, gender disparity continues to persist in many sectors of society. Smith and Sinkford (2022) contend that the political arena often reflects and reinforces gender disparity through unequal representation, limited participation, and institutional biases, restricting women's ability to voice their concerns and influence policy decisions. Rigid gender roles perpetuated by patriarchal systems and cultural norms consistently marginalize women and limit their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes (Umeh, 2024). Women still encounter barriers in accessing education, employment, and financial resources, this hinders their economic empowerment and independence (Ranabahu & Tanima, 2022).

A slow but growing effort exists in understanding gender disparity in the context of development projects. In fact, the persistence of gender disparity and its capacity to undermine inclusive and sustainable development, growth and prosperity across the diverse development projects in Africa has been reported in recent studies (Tihnje, et al., 2023; Ngwa & Fuhsoh, 2024; Rwigema, 2024). For instance, Ngwa and Fuhsoh (2024) show that women disproportionately benefitted from the Grassroots Participatory rural development project (GP DERUDEPII) in the North West region of Cameroon. Tihnje, et al. (2023) contend that gender disparity dictates access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making within development projects irrespective of whether beneficiaries are located in urban or rural areas. This disparity, driven by factors such as norms, and cultural institutions act as significant barriers to achieving gender equality, thereby perpetuating poverty cycles and marginalization especially among women (François & Pehter, 2022).

Interest in gender disparity has groomed an emerging literature on what drives and perpetuates it. Research by Onyinyechukwu (2023) sheds light on gender disparity within rice productivity organizations in Nigeria, highlighting how unequal access to essential resources such as land, inputs, and labour contributes to productivity differences and impedes women's economic empowerment through agriculture. Similarly, Koburtay et al. (2020) delve into the implications of religion, culture, and legislation on workplace gender equality, with a focus in Jordan. Their research illuminated how cultural and religious norms often constrain women's employment opportunities due to assigned household responsibilities. Luqman et al. (2017) investigates factors contributing to gender disparity within rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan, identifying socio-economic factors such as low family income and educational levels as significant barriers limiting girls' access to education. Dea (2016) examines the challenges and causes of gender disparity, emphasizing the role of policy gaps and funding constraints in perpetuating gender inequality in Ethiopia.

Development projects continue to provide a way out for the very poor in Africa. To illustrate this, between 2014 and 2017, development organizations injected approximately US\$ 139

billion through development initiatives in Africa, enhancing the livelihoods of almost 30% of people caught in poverty traps hitherto fore (Ngansah et al., 2024). Unfortunately, disparity between men and women generally lead men to benefit more from development projects than women (Balgah et al., 2019). The growing literature on the topic has not sufficiently considered what disparity exists among project beneficiaries, which factors drive or perpetuate disparities between men and women, and how these factors influence access to services, resources and opportunities offered by development projects in Africa. Existing studies that are generally adhoc and focus on individual development projects do not generate knowledge of relevance to broad-based policy making at regional, national or international levels. We reduce this knowledge gap by assessing the drivers of gender disparity from multiple case study development projects in the North West region in Cameroon. The central research questions driving this research are:

1. What disparity exists between men and women beneficiaries of development projects in Mezam division of the North West region of Cameroon?
2. Which factors are responsible for the persistence of gender disparity among beneficiaries across development projects in Mezam division of the North West region of Cameroon?

As our study will demonstrate, age, access to land, access to income, employment status, household wealth, access to credit, access to technology, and access to healthcare are significantly different between men and women beneficiaries in the study area. Household size, land ownership, financial status, access to information and communication technology (ICT), and exposure to crises are key drivers of disparity between men and women beneficiaries of development projects in the study site.

This study makes a number of contributions. Firstly, it adds to the slow-growing literature on gender disparity on development projects. Secondly, by including beneficiaries across multiple development projects, the study begins the process of identifying robust determinants which can eventually inform development partners and policy makers to take informed decisions to curb gender disparity and nurture gender equality in development projects in African contexts.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section succinctly reviews the literature on drivers of gender disparity with a thrust on development projects. This will be followed by the methodology section. The results are presented and discussed in section four. Section five concludes.

1.1 Determinants of Gender disparity

This literature review provides a summary of the primary drivers of gender disparity, encompassing demographic, socio-cultural, policy, and institutional determinants. These factors significantly influence the opportunities and outcomes experienced by men and women, shaping patterns of disparity.

Demographic determinants such as age, education level, geographic location, marital status, and household composition are key in perpetuating gender disparity (Luqman et al., 2017; Huang & Tan, 2024). For example, older women residing in rural areas often face heightened economic vulnerabilities due to limited access to social services and support networks

compared to their younger counterparts (Luqman et al. 2017). Huang & Tan (2024), further demonstrate how disparity in educational attainment restrict women's economic empowerment and participation in decision-making processes, emphasizing the critical role of education in addressing gender inequality.

Socio-cultural factors are central to gender disparity in many African countries. These factors illuminate the influence of societal norms, values, and traditions on gender roles and expectations (Akram-Lodhi & Komba, 2018; Ghafoor, 2023). Patriarchal norms often reinforce traditional gender roles, restricting women's mobility and economic opportunities. Cultural beliefs about gender-appropriate roles can also limit access to education, employment, and decision-making power for women, perpetuating disparity across various dimensions of life (Ghafoor, 2023),

Policy interventions emerge as pivotal tools for mitigating gender disparity, as highlighted by Hayati et al. (2017) and Wanmbu (2022). Gender-sensitive policies in education, healthcare, employment, and political representation can promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women. For instance, affirmative action policies and gender quotas in political representation have shown promising progress towards achieving gender parity in leadership roles, emphasizing the transformative potential of policy frameworks in addressing systemic inequalities (Hayati et al. 2017).

The role of institutions, organizational structures and practices in perpetuating gender disparity has been strongly emphasized in the topical literature (Gebu & Demeke, 2015; Dea, 2016; Onditi & Odera, 2018; Asadbek, 2023). Biased recruitment, hiring, and resource allocation practices within institutions contribute to unequal opportunities for career advancement and leadership roles (Onditi & Odera, 2018). Addressing these institutional barriers requires proactive measures such as implementing inclusive policies and fostering diverse leadership to create equitable and inclusive environments for all genders (Asadbek, 2023).

Overall, there are many factors that perpetuate gender disparity. However, a dearth of multiple case studies renders the results of individual studies of little relevance to broad based gender policy making. We narrow this void by analyzing the determinants of gender disparity across multiple development projects in the North West region of Cameroon.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Context of study

This study focused on the Mezam division in the North West region of Cameroon. In spite of its rich agricultural potential, the region is still facing challenges in achieving food self-sufficiency. With a diverse population of 524,127 inhabitants, the division encompasses both urban and rural areas, offering a varied landscape for studying development dynamics. Its administrative significance, with Bamenda as the divisional headquarters, facilitates access to data and resources. The division benefits from well-developed infrastructure, enhancing accessibility for research purposes.

Mezam division has seen a rise in development projects aimed at socioeconomic growth, engaging various demographics through initiatives like GP-DERUDEP II, DPAVC, and AEP-

Youth (Ngangsah et al., 2024). These projects, supported by entities such as the World Bank and Islamic Development Bank target infrastructure, agriculture, education, healthcare, and justice (Egoh, 2019; Awazi & Balgah, 2024). They address local labour needs, particularly for youth and women, by providing employment and skills training, empowering them for active participation in development. Overall, these projects contribute significantly to Mezam's development, enhancing livelihoods, empowering vulnerable groups, and fostering sustainable growth.

The choice of Mezam Division was based on a number of considerations. First it is the most important hub for development projects in the North West region. According to Ngangsah et al. (2024), there are 52 registered NGOs in Mezam division alone. This does not include the hundreds of associations, community service organizations and common initiative groups that are active in the study site. This large number provides the team with the opportunity to include men and women beneficiaries from multiple development projects in one study. Secondly, concentration of development organizations allows us to study multiple cases at the same time. Thirdly, Mezam division is the safest division in the North West region, since the outbreak of the socio-political crisis in the North West and South West ('anglophone') regions in Cameroon (Bang & Balgah, 2022); this provides motivation for this empirical data collection.

2.2 Population and Sampling

The study's population primarily comprises men and women beneficiaries from various development projects. It encompasses not only those who directly received project services and interventions but also extends to stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation phases. This broader group includes project managers, government officials, community leaders, and representatives from development projects.

The study utilized a multi-stage sampling approach to ensure comprehensive coverage and robustness of findings. Initially, Mezam was purposefully selected as the primary sampling unit due to its representativeness and significant community involvement. This choice made it an apt case for examining gender disparity in development projects and their impact on socio-economic challenges within the Mezam Division (Shillie et al., 2024). Subsequently, 52 registered development projects were purposively chosen to maintain data quality, reliability, and credibility. This decision was meant to limit the study to recognized and established organizations operating in the development sector in the study area.

Secondly, the random sampling method was utilized to select development projects. This involved assigning a unique number from 1 to 52 to each of the registered development projects. To randomly select six specific projects for evaluation, a child was asked to choose six organizations sequentially, ensuring that each selection was made without replacement. This approach ensured that the sample of projects chosen for analysis represented a diverse subset of the total registered projects, maintaining randomness and minimizing bias in the selection process. The selected development projects were ACEFA, AFOP, PADFA, PIDMA, SUDAHSER, and PROALCAM. This methodological approach ensured a fair and unbiased selection, allowing for the collection of reliable and actionable insights from these chosen organizations within the Mezam division.

Thirdly, to ensure a balanced representation of both men and women beneficiaries in our sample, the study initially categorized beneficiaries in each selected organization into distinct strata based on gender. A comprehensive list of registered beneficiaries was sourced from each organization's human resource department. Within each selected development project, beneficiaries were grouped according to their gender, resulting in a total population of 1000 males and 800 females for our study. This stratified approach enabled a more targeted sampling of both men and women project beneficiaries, and subsequent analysis of gender disparity between them.

To determine the sample size, a proportional allocation method based on the proportion of beneficiaries in each gender stratum (men and women) within each development project was applied. Cochran (1977) emphasizes the importance of proportionate sampling in achieving representativeness and minimizing sampling bias, making it a preferred approach for the study. The total population comprised 1000 males and 800 females across six development projects. We calculated a sampling fraction of 1/4 (equivalent to a proportion of 0.25) using Cochran's formula for sample size determination for proportions, where the sampling fraction is the ratio of the sample size (n) to the size of the stratum (N) (Cochran, 1942).

It is denoted by f and is calculated as follows:

$$f = n/N \dots\dots\dots (Eq.1)$$

Where:

- f = sampling fraction
- n = sample size (number of units selected for the sample)
- N = total population size

The sampling fraction f represents the ratio of the sample size n to the total population size N. It quantifies the proportion of the population that is included in the sample.

Subsequently, we calculated the sample size for each gender within each project based on this sampling fraction. The total sample size across all projects was determined to be 250 for male and 200 for female beneficiaries, aligning precisely with the actual gender distribution in the population. This approach ensures a representative and proportional sample from each development project, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table1: Sampling technique and size

Development Projects	Registered Beneficiaries by Gender		Total beneficiaries of each project	Targeted Beneficiaries by Gender		Total sample size of each project
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
ACEFA	220	180	400	55	45	100
PIDMA	200	160	360	50	40	90
PADFA	180	140	320	45	35	80
AFOP	140	120	260	35	30	65

SUDAHSER	140	100	240	35	25	60
PROALCAM	120	100	220	30	25	55
Total	1000	800	1800	250	200	450

Source: Author construct

2.3 Data collection

Primary data collection involved administering a structured questionnaire comprising five sections carefully designed to address four research objectives set for the entire (PhD) studies. Structured into five sections (labelled A – E), the questionnaire aimed to gather comprehensive data essential for analysing gender disparity, participation patterns, and livelihood outcomes within development projects.

Section A focused on collecting socio-economic characteristics of the sampled population, Section B explored the drivers of gender disparity, this section was informed by empirical literature to ensure relevant dimensions of gender disparity were covered. The questionnaire also included Sections C, D, and E, which delved into factors influencing participation decisions, livelihood outcomes, and the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies within development projects.

By concentrating on Sections A and B of the questionnaire, this article aims to offer insights into the socio-economic characteristics associated with gender disparity and elucidate the underlying factors shaping gender disparity within development projects in the study site. This focused approach facilitates a thorough analysis of critical variables essential for understanding and addressing gender disparity in development contexts. The selection of variables was guided by research objectives and an in-depth literature review to capture factors influencing gender disparity effectively.

To ensure questionnaire clarity and effectiveness, a pre-test was conducted to assess its coherence and data-gathering capabilities. Pretesting helped identify and resolve ambiguities or confusing elements. Adjustments were made based on feedback from pre-test participants to refine the questionnaire for clarity and reliability, before wider administration.

Trained undergraduate students administered the finalized questionnaires. These enumerators received training to ensure uniformity in data collection, understand research objectives, and handle ethical considerations. Questionnaires were administered in convenient locations for respondents, such as community centers, project offices, and beneficiaries' households. The data collection phase spanned from May 24th to December 18th, 2023.

For secondary data, a systematic literature search was conducted to gather relevant articles, reports, and studies related to the research topic. This involved accessing academic databases (PubMed, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus) and institutional repositories. The comprehensive literature review helped identify existing knowledge, research gaps, theoretical frameworks and drivers of relevance to the study on gender disparity in development projects.

This section presents a descriptive analysis of gender disparity among beneficiaries in development projects. The data reveals a notable gender gap in project participation, with a higher percentage of male participants (55.6%) compared to female participants (44.4%) across sampled projects. Within agricultural projects, both genders demonstrate significant involvement, although males are slightly more represented (44.7%) than females (38.3%) in this sector. Conversely, rural development projects exhibit lower overall participation rates, with males constituting (10.89%) of the total sample and females constituting (6.22%). This disparity in participation aligns with the observation that over 70% of individuals in the study area rely on agriculture for their livelihoods (Balgah et al., 2023), which may influence the lower engagement levels in rural development initiatives. These findings highlight the presence of gender disparity in project participation within the study site, with males generally having higher representation than females across different project types.

Table 2: Differences between project beneficiaries by gender

Variables	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	t-distribution
Age	Male	35.5	10.2	$p = 0.038$
	Female	32.8	9.5	$t = 2.1$
Experience	Male	8.3	5.1	$p = 0.135$
	Female	7.6	4.3	$t = 1.5$
Household Size	Male	4.2	2.3	$p = 0.422$
	Female	4.1	2.2	$t = 0.8$
Access to Land	Male	75.4	8.5	$p = 0.002$
	Female	65.7	7.8	$t = 3.6$
Access to Income	Male	70.1	10.3	$p = 0.025$
	Female	60.5	9.2	$t = 2.3$
Access to Education	Male	82.7	7.4	$p = 0.282$
	Female	78.2	8.1	$t = 1.1$
Employment Status	Male	80.5	6.4	$p = 0.001$
	Female	70.3	7.6	$t = 3.9$
Household Wealth	Male	65.8	9.7	$p = 0.006$
	Female	55.6	8.4	$t = 3.0$
Access to Credit	Male	72.4	7.6	$p = 0.018$
	Female	62.8	8.9	$t = 2.5$
Access to Technology	Male	78.9	6.9	$p = 0.001$
	Female	68.5	7.3	$t = 4.2$
Access to Healthcare	Male	88.2	5.5	$p = 0.004$
	Female	82.4	6.2	$t = 2.9$
Gender Norms	Male	48.6	4.7	$p = 0.551$
	Female	52.3	5.4	$t = -0.6$

Source: field survey, 2023

As indicated in Table 2, there is a statistically significant difference in age between men and women beneficiaries of development projects in the study area ($p = 0.038$). We therefore expect age to be a key driver for gender disparity in the study site. Other key differences between men

and women beneficiaries include Access to Land ($p= 0.002$), Access to Income ($p= 0.025$), Employment Status ($p= 0.001$), Household Wealth ($p= 0.006$), Access to Credit ($p= 0.018$), Access to Technology ($p= 0.001$) and Access to Healthcare ($p= 0.004$).

Interestingly no statistically significant differences were observed between men and women beneficiaries of development projects in Mezam division, with respect to experience ($p= 0.135$), household size ($p = 0.422$), and gender norms ($p = 0.551$). It then becomes interesting to identify drivers for gender disparity in development projects in the study site.

3.2 Drivers of Gender disparity

The results of the weighted least square model applied to identify determinants of gender disparity are presented in Table 3. 12 explanatory variables were used in the analysis. Our analysis reveals that the model specified is reliable, as the Nagelkerke (R²) reveals that the independent variables explain 74.62% of the variation in gender disparity in our sample.

The regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Drivers of gender disparity and by Gender of respondents

Variable	Overall	Gender	
		Male	Female
<i>Drivers of gender disparities</i>			
Access to ICTs (1=yes, 0 otherwise)	0.2055* (1.76)	0.0743 (0.45)	0.3053* (1.74)
Financial status (1= rich)	0.5181*** (2.67)	0.4613* (1.68)	0.6222** (2.13)
Exposure to crisis (1=yes, 0 otherwise)	0.4249** (4.15)	0.4313*** (3.06)	0.4231** (2.54)
Location of residence (1= Urban)	0.2233** (2.16)	-.0536 (0.38)	0.4316*** (2.69)
Age of beneficiary (in years)	-0.2747* (1.84)	-.3433* (-1.76)	-0.2303 (0.91)
Size of farm land (1= >5 hectares)	0.5737** (2.22)	0.8569** (2.18)	0.4375 (1.21)
Land tenure system (1= ownership, 0 otherwise)	0.1811* (1.74)	0.2188* (1.68)	0.1793* (1.65)
Access to Healthcare (1= yes, 0 otherwise)	0.0392 (0.32)	0.0237 (0.14)	.1028 (0.54)
Employment Status (1 = yes, 0 otherwise)	0.0496 (0.48)	0.0096 (0.07)	0.1021 (0.61)
Household Size (1= >10 persons)	0.3393** (2.03)	0.4541** (1.99)	0.2089* (1.78)
Gender roles (1 = yes, 0 otherwise)	-0.2881** (2.55)	0.2536 (1.39)	0.3357** (2.24)
constant	0.4099** (2.41)	0.3847* (1.66)	0.4370* (1.67)

R-squared	0.7462	0.1304	0.1936
F-Statistics	15.43[11,349; 0.0000]	12.56[11,18]	13.25[11, 149]
Total Observations	450	250	200

Source: field survey, 2023 N/B: Notes: ***, ** and * indicate 1%, 5% and 10% levels of significance, estimates in parentheses represent robust T statistics

Based on the findings presented in Table 3, several significant drivers of gender disparity in development projects in Mezam have been identified at a 5% significance level. Exposure to crises significantly influences gender disparities, with this significance observed at the 5% level. The marginal effect is calculated at 0.4249 suggesting a pronounced exacerbation of gender disparities during crises, which particularly impacts the vulnerability of women and girls. Likewise, the location of residence emerges as statistically significant at the 5% level. Beneficiaries residing in urban areas experience a 0.2233 increase in disparity, highlighting a correlation between urban living and elevated disparity levels.

The size of farmland also demonstrates significance at the 5% level, coupled with a marginal effect of 0.5737. This underscores the role of land size in influencing gender disparity within agricultural development projects especially among male's respondents. Additionally, household size is statistically significant at the 5% level, with a marginal effect of 0.3393. This suggests that household composition plays a significant role in gender disparities within development projects favouring male's respondents.

In summary, factors such as land ownership (10% level), financial status (1% level), and access to ICT (10% level) have a significant impact on gender disparities in development projects in Mezam. However, employment status and gender roles, while showing some influence, are statistically insignificant. This may be attributed to limitations in the primary data sources used in studies focusing on gender disparities. Further research is essential to deepen our understanding and inform effective interventions to address these disparities.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Gender disparity among beneficiaries of development projects

The significant differences observed in socio-economic factors between men and women beneficiaries within development projects shed light on the underlying challenges contributing to gender disparity. Age emerged as a notable driver of gender disparity, with a statistically significant difference between men and women participants ($p = 0.038$). This finding suggests that age-related factors influence the opportunities and outcomes experienced by beneficiaries within these projects. Recognizing age as a driver of gender disparity underscores the importance of tailored interventions to address age-specific barriers faced by women, such as providing skills training and improving technology access, to promote more equitable development outcomes, consistent with the contentions of Asadbek (2023).

Furthermore, disparity in Access to Land ($p = 0.002$) highlight obstacles faced by female beneficiaries in accessing and owning land, crucial for agricultural livelihoods. This disparity

could be influenced by cultural norms, legal barriers, or inheritance practices favouring male land ownership, which restricts women's engagement in agricultural activities, limits economic opportunities, and perpetuates gender inequity in rural settings. These implications align with previous research by Onyinyechukwu (2023).

Additionally, unequal Access to Income ($p = 0.025$) reveals fewer income-earning opportunities for female beneficiaries compared to males, likely driven by gender-based discrimination in employment and unequal distribution of economic resources. This disparity contributes to economic dependence among female beneficiaries and reinforces gender inequality within the workforce of development projects, consistent with insights from Dea (2016).

Moreover, limited Access to Credit ($p = 0.018$) for female beneficiaries hinders their ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities and achieve economic independence, possibly due to gender biases in financial institutions and loan processes. This disparity restricts women's investment in income-generating activities and economic mobility within development projects, echoing findings from Onditi & Odera (2018). Addressing these disparities through targeted interventions and policy measures is crucial for promoting gender equity and empowering women within development initiatives.

4.2 Drivers of gender disparity

The presented findings shed light on various factors influencing gender disparities in development projects. Crisis exposure significantly worsens gender disparity among beneficiaries of development projects. This is probably due to the fact that crises can disrupt traditional livelihood activities and economic opportunities, leading to greater economic insecurity for women. This can further widen the gender gap in project participation and access to development initiatives. This contention is supported by Cyril, et al (2023) who report that women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the ongoing crises in the study area and renders them more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and discrimination compared to men. Folefac and Ani (2022) reveals that the armed conflict created different forms of gender crisis that undermined both gender but weighed down the female gender more than the male gender. It recommends increased gender sensitivity and gender-based peacebuilding in Cameroon.

Similarly, the significant correlation between urban residence and a 0.2233 increase in disparity among beneficiaries highlights a key difference within development projects. Despite the perceived advantages of urban living, disparities persist due to unequal access to resources, socio-economic inequalities, and challenges associated with urbanization such as housing and healthcare disparities. These findings are consistent with research by Fernandez (2023) which similarly emphasizes the impact of urbanization and associated challenges on perpetuating gender disparity. Acknowledging and addressing the intersectional dynamics of urban living and gender disparity, development projects can adopt more inclusive and effective approaches to promote gender equity and ensure equitable outcomes for all beneficiaries.

Furthermore, the size of farm land is statistically significant at the 5% level, with a marginal effect of 0.5737, indicating its significant role in influencing gender disparity within development projects. The significance highlights the crucial role of land ownership in

exacerbating gender disparities. Larger land sizes often translate to greater barriers for women farmers due to prevailing cultural norms and limited access to resources. This disparity in land ownership not only impacts agricultural productivity and income but also perpetuates broader gender inequalities in various spheres, as supported by previous research (Akram-Lodhi & Komba, 2018).

From our findings, observed relationship between household size and gender disparities, with a marginal effect of 0.3393, highlights the influence of household composition on gender disparities. This suggests that as household size grows, gender disparities within the projects tend to increase accordingly. The importance of this finding emphasizes the need to consider household dynamics when addressing gender disparities effectively in development initiatives (Huang & Tan, 2024).

Overall, land ownership, financial status, and access to ICT significantly influence gender disparities, with financial status being the most impactful (significant at the 1% level), followed by land ownership and access to ICT (significant at the 10% level). However, employment status and gender roles, while showing some influence, are statistically insignificant. These findings underscore the critical roles of economic empowerment and technological access in addressing gender disparities.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study conducted in the Mezam division of Northwest Cameroon focused on men and women beneficiaries of development projects. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data on characteristics that differentiate beneficiaries by gender, and to identify key drivers of gender disparities within these projects. The findings revealed substantial disparity favouring male beneficiaries across various indicators such as age, access to land, income, employment status, household wealth, credit access, technology access, healthcare, and cultural norms. Key drivers of these disparities included exposure to crises, location of residence, the size of farmland, and household size within development projects.

The study recommends taking proactive steps guided by comprehensive gender analysis to promote gender equality in development projects. This involves designing gender-sensitive services that address specific needs and constraints of men and women within communities, aiming to reduce disparity. To manage drivers of gender disparity, it is crucial to identify and address negative factors like unequal resource access and discriminatory norms, while reinforcing positive drivers such as women's education and economic empowerment. This can be done for instance by mainstreaming gender in national and regional policies that guide access and control to these resources and opportunities. Conducting qualitative studies is important for understanding persistent barriers and developing effective strategies. Larger studies and systematic reviews are needed to validate these findings and inform evidence-based approaches to advancing gender equality in development initiatives.

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