

Diversification and Differentiation; The Livelihood Experience of Men and Women in Samene

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The research for this thesis was conducted in village of Samene, Mali from 2006-2008 where I served as a Peace Corps volunteer. In Samene I became interested in understanding the livelihood experience of men and women and the critical factors that led to positive livelihood outcomes for individuals. The formal research question addressed in this thesis is how assets and access (social rules and norms) influence livelihood diversification options for men and women. The research is based on a mixed method design consisting of extensive individual and household surveying, focus groups, interviews, and participant observation.

The Livelihood

Approach is utilized to describe the assets, access restrictions and diversification strategies that comprise the livelihoods for men and women in Samene. The findings show that while diversification activities are important to both men and women, women are unable to access the more attractive high return activities that are dominated by men. Differences in the livelihood experiences between and within gendered groups are explained by looking at an individual's relationship to the critical assets, which are identified as the keys to accessing activities that lead to greater livelihood security.

Based on the research findings a new livelihood framework is advanced to show the different pathways men and women take to sustain and improve their livelihoods. This framework incorporates the concepts and processes of social differentiation, social exclusion, historical motion, power and access that were found to be critical in explaining an individual's livelihood experience in Samene.