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# Proceedings of the International Forum on Grasscutter



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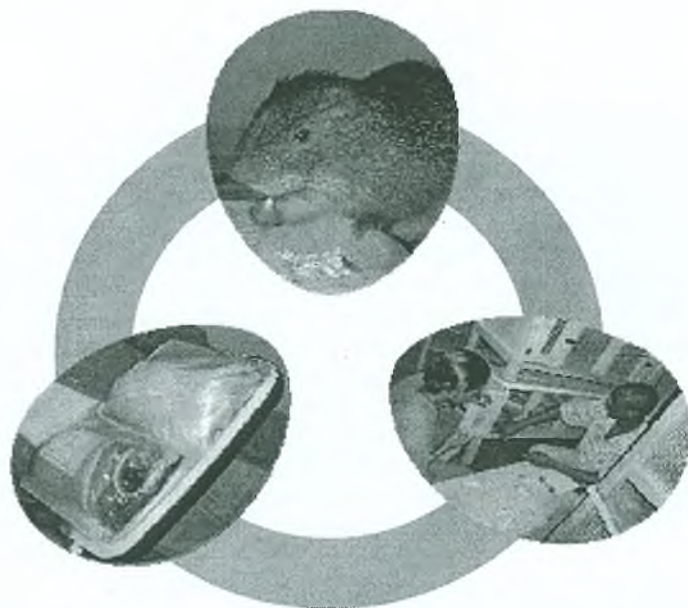


MAEP

# Proceedings of the International Forum on Grasscutter

Theme: Promoting Grasscutter as a business in West  
Africa

La Promotion de L'aulacodiculture  
Comme Activite en Afrique de l'Ouest



Institute of Local Government Studies Ghana  
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## 7.13 Gender

### **Presentation 1: Performance of Women Grasscutter Farmers in the Northern Region of Ghana**

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#### **Abstract**

The study was conducted in 2005 in the Tamale, Damango, Tolon-Kumbungu and Yendi districts of the Northern Region of Ghana. Ninety-eight (98) semi-structured questionnaire were administered to women groups involved in grasscutter production under the FAO/MoFA Grasscutter pilot project. Questionnaires were administered to (a) four active women groups with 60 grasscutter to assess the performance of the animals; (b) inactive members to identify reasons for their inactivity and (c) groups that lost their animals, to identify the causes of mortalities. Dry season feeding, handling problems coccidiosis and lameness were problems that discouraged the women groups from raising grasscutter in the study areas. Generally, women grasscutter farmers were slow in learning to manage their animals well. Those who lost their animals initially have expressed interest in acquiring new stock after learning of the gains made by leaders who maintained their animals if stakeholders would provide training and veterinary services when needed to the women.

#### **Introduction**

The national economic survey of the 1960s repeatedly reported that the country's main sources of meat for consumption was imported livestock supplemented with bush meat from the wild (Ghana Government, 1968). Ghana's main sources of animal protein are fish, livestock and bush meat (Ntiamoah-Baidu, 1998). Conventional livestock is not sufficient to meet the national meat requirement of about 200,000 tonnes per year. There is need to develop other sources of acceptable sources meat in addition to the conventional livestock.

Ghanaians relish grasscutter meat and consider it a delicacy. The demand for grasscutter meat both locally and for export has been steadily increasing (ADBC, 2002). This situation has resulted in high increase in the prices of grasscutter meat, which until recently was tapped from the wild through trapping and hunting (Owusu and Zschekel, 2000). To make grasscutter meat affordable to a large majority of the populace there is need to intensify domestication of the grasscutter in urban and rural areas. Grasscutter farming is virtually new in northern Ghana. Attempts were made to assist some women groups in the Upper West and Upper East regions to farm grasscutter with sponsorship package from the Pan African Rinderpest Campaign (PARC) project (PARC II, 1993). This project failed because of lack of improved breeding stock and technical know-how of the groups selected in grasscutter farming.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) started pilot projects in grasscutter production between 2002 to 2003 in the northern region. Under this project two women farmer groups each from four selected districts of the northern region were provided with a colony of grasscutter breeding stock (1 male and 4 females) and cages in the study areas.

To promote grasscutter production in the Northern region it is worthwhile to ascertain the achievements and problems encountered by these pioneer grasscutter women groups who are still involved in the rearing of the animals. This will help equip all stakeholders and other farmers interested in entering into this venture boldly. The essence of this study was to assess the performance of grasscutter raised by women groups in the Northern Region of Ghana.

## Materials and Methods

### The study area

The study was conducted in 4 districts in the Tamale, Damango, Yendi, and Tolon-Kumbungu of the Northern region of Ghana. The locations are in the Guinea Savannah zone with unimodal rainfall pattern occurring between May and October annually followed by dry season from November. Rainfall from 2003 to 2005 for the region ranged between 102.4mm and 160.7 mm (Regional Meteorological Services Department, Tamale, 2005).

### Study population

Four women grasscutter groups in four districts were used for this study. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured questionnaires and discussions with the groups formed under the MOFA/FAO Grasscutter Project in the region. A total of 98 questionnaires were administered. Five (5) questionnaires were administered to active members of the groups to identify the performance of grasscutter; Seventy-four (74) questionnaires were administered to the inactive members of the groups to identify reasons for their inactivity and nineteen (19) questionnaires to members whose animals died to find out the causes of mortalities. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

## Results and Discussion

### Grasscutter women Groups

Table 1 shows the number of women groups formed by the FAO/MoFA grasscutter project in the selected districts comprising four active grasscutter women groups aged between 40 to 60 years and two inactive groups who lost all their animals. One group in Damango lost their animals through injuries during the first week of supply of the animals. Tolon-Kunbungu group lost their animals because of lack of interest of members and difficulty in management.

**Table 1: Number of women groups formed by The FAO/MoFA Project.**

Districts	Active Group	Inactive Group	Total
Tamale	2	-	2
Yendi	1	-	1
Damango	1	1	2
Tolon-Kumbungu	1	1	2
Total	5	2	7

All the groups started in 2002 with a colony (1 male and 4 females) of grasscutter, however the group in Yendi started with ten (10) animals (8 females and 2 males) after two groups formed initially were merged. A total of 40 animals (32 females and 8 males) were supplied to all the women groups. All active groups except those in Yendi had their number of animals increased by over 100% (Table 2).

### Inactive group members

Table 4 shows the age distribution of the members belonging to grasscutter women's group still having their animals but do not participate actively in the rearing of grasscutter. Majority (51.4%) of the women fell in the age group of between 21 to 30 years, whereas others were up to 55 years of age.

### Stock Numbers

Table 2 shows the current number of animals kept by the active groups.

**Table 2: Number of Grasscutter kept by Active Women Groups**

Districts	No. of groups	Initial No.	Total	% Increase
Tamale	2	10	24	140
Damango	1	5	10	100

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Yendi	1	10	11	10
Tolon-Kumbungu	1	5	15	200

One group in Damango and another in Tolon-Kunbungu were inactive because they had lost all their animals

**Performance of Grasscutter**

All the groups responded that grasscutter growth was faster in the wet season than the dry season. This was attributed to availability of feed. The reasons given for poor growth of grasscutter in the dry season were feed inadequacy both in quantity and quality. The groups indicated that there were big-sized offspring in the dry season. Small-sized offspring were produced in the wet season. In the dry season offspring with high birth weights were produced. Litters with high birth weights were observed in association with gestation with abundant or good feeding.

On the other hand the groups in Damango and Tamale indicated that weak and lightweight offspring were produced at birth. They this attributed to poor feeding of dams during pregnancy. The groups in Yendi and Tamale also confirmed that their grasscutter gave birth to heavier offspring in the dry than in the wet season. These two groups attributed the heavier weights to proper feeding of dams during pregnancy.

**Feeding of Grasscutter**

All the groups fed their animals three times daily. Most of the groups provided fresh and dried grasses (e.g. Gamba grass, Guinea grass), kitchen left over (Yam and Cassava peels), crop residues (e.g. groundnut tops, rice straw) and concentrates (Maize) to the grasscutter. This agrees with similar reports by Reinhard and Lassissi (1991). The group in Yendi provided rice bran and common salt their animals. Grasscutter preferred crops residues, kitchen leftovers, dried grasses and concentrates in the dry season as previously suggested (Yeboah, and Adamu, 1995; Addo, 1998). Preference of this feedstuff was very high. This feedstuff was readily available and cheap in the dry season as observed by the farmers. Fresh grasses were fed in the wet season due to its availability. All the groups practiced restricted feeding in the dry season because of feed shortage resulting from bushfires and competition with ruminants in the communities. Adequate feed was offered to grasscutter in the wet season because of the abundance of feed.

**Dormant members of the groups**

Majority (70 %) of women who did not show interest in raising grasscutter indicated lack of interest (30%) and difficulty in management (40%) of the animals as their main reasons. The major management difficulty expressed by the women were feeding and handling of animals. Majority (54.1%) indicated that they want to reactivate their participation in the rearing of the animals whereas 44.6% of them were not interested to reactivate their participation in the rearing of grasscutter. The reasons given were that it was not easy to manage the animals. Some of the members indicated that they wanted to change to different income generating activities while others wanted to rejoin the groups in the rearing of the animals because they were regaining interest.

Table 3 shows suggestions given by the respondents to enhance grasscutter production in the districts. The suggestions made include provision of easy access to feed i.e. grasscutter commercial feed, ready market for the animals, regular visits by veterinary technical staff, empowerment of community livestock workers (CLW) in the community on the management of the animals and provision of every member with her stock.

**Table 3: Suggestions made by 74 women farmers to enhance grasscutter production in the Northern Region of Ghana**

Suggestions	%
Easy access to feed (formulated)	28.4
Market for animals	6.8

Regular visits	33.8
Enough knowledge	12.2
Provision of individuals with stock	14.9
No suggestion	4.1
Total	100

#### Mortality in grasscutter

Two groups in Tolon and Damango lost all their animals. Each of the groups begun with a colony (1 male: 4 females) of grasscutter. The Damango group lost all their animals in the first week of supply of animals. The male in the group killed all the females. The Tolon group lost all their animals in the second year. The main causes of death were poor feeding and diseases.

**Table 4: Grasscutter mortalities in the dry and wet seasons among women groups in Northern Ghana**

Group	Season	Mortality (%)
Tamale	Dry	76
	Wet	25
Damango	Dry	60
	Wet	0
Yendi	Dry	25
	Wet	25
Tolon	Dry	40
	Wet	0
Ovberall	Dry	50.3
	Wet	12.5
	Mean	31.4

It was generally observed that death of grasscutter in the dry season were higher than in the wet season. Death of grasscutter was related to feeding as the dry season when had scarcity and poor nutrient quality grass (Andani, 2005).

Table 5 shows the causes of deaths of the animals. It was indicated by the respondents that the deaths were reported to the veterinary technical officers but there was poor response in many cases. Further probe into what the women considered as "disease", roundworms, coccidiosis, inanition, fractures and "fear". These problems have been observed in earlier studies (Baptist and Mensah, 1986; Addo, 1998; Adu, 2002).

**Table 5: Causes of deaths of the animals in colonies kept by women**

Causes	Contribution to mortality (%)
Poor feeding	44
Diseases	36
Cold (pneumonia)	9
Injuries	11

Members made some suggestions that may to reduce mortality in future. Suggestions were made included the promotion of grasscutter production in the districts easy access to feed especially in the dry season to the provision of pelleted feed, storage facilities, fodder gardens where grasses and legumes could be planted and harvested for use readily.

**Table 4.11 Measures to Reduce Mortality as suggested by Women Farmers**

Suggested measures	Frequency
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Provision of individual farmer stock	4(21.1%)
Adequate knowledge - Training	2(10.5%)
Provision of Vet. Services	3(15.8%)
Regular visits -Encouragement	10(52.6%)

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study suggests that grasscutter production has a brighter future in the region. It also indicates that, farmers still need more knowledge on the rearing of the animals. Dry season feeding is a problem in the Northern Region of Ghana. Access to veterinary services and adequate training would empower women to get into grasscutter production to alleviate poverty.

It is recommended that;

- (a) Scientists should carry out research to identify the nutritional requirement of the grasscutter to train farmers on their body requirements.
- (b) Monitoring of the rearing of the animals by veterinary personnel and other technical staff must be strengthened.
- (c) Youth must be empowered to get into grasscutter production.
- (d) Research should come out with pelleted feed for grasscutter to ease dry season feed in the northern zone of Ghana.

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