

From Farms to Markets: Women in the Commercialization of Leafy Vegetables in the Bamenda Urban Sphere, 1987-2016

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Abstract

Original Research Article

In the Bamenda urban sphere, leafy vegetable commercialization emerged as one an activity through which women responded to economic hardship, unemployment, and increasing household responsibilities, particularly from the late 1980s following the economic crisis and structural adjustment policies in Cameroon. In this regard, this study investigates women in the commercialization of leafy vegetables in the Bamenda urban sphere from 1987–2016. To this objective, the paper argues that, from 1987-2016; women in Bamenda employed highly adaptable and convenient methods for the commercialization of leafy vegetables within the Bamenda urban sphere and beyond, across time and space. The argument raised in the paper was built from both primary and secondary sources, interpreted mostly qualitatively. The methodology is purely historical. The key finding is that; Bamenda women actively participated in the commercialization of leafy vegetables, with local markets serving as the most prominent and accessible avenue for sales.

Keywords: Women, Leafy Vegetables, Vegetables, Cultivation, Production, Bamenda, and Commercialization.

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INTRODUCTION

Urban agriculture has increasingly become a defining feature of African cities, serving as both a livelihood strategy and a response to food insecurity. In cities such as Bamenda, the cultivation and commercialization of leafy vegetables such as huckleberry (njama njama), bitter leaf, leeks, cabbage and others emerged as a critical economic activity dominated by women. These activities occurred within what scholars describe as the informal economy, where production and distribution systems operated outside formal regulatory frameworks but remained essential to urban survival. [1] Certainly, in many parts of the world, urban agriculture gained recognition as a sustainable practice that supported food systems, improved nutrition, and contributed to local economies. In this connection, women played important roles in these activities, particularly through commercialization. [2]

Notably, in both developed and developing countries, women's involvement in leafy vegetable cultivation brought about economic empowerment, and improved their economic status and independence. According to United Nations (UN) Women, vegetable cultivation by women created employment opportunities and contributed to poverty reduction. Likewise, the World Health Organization (WHO) also noted that vegetable cultivation ensured a steady supply of fresh and nutritious produce, thereby improving food security and nutrition. Similarly, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) maintained that women's involvement in vegetable cultivation promoted dietary diversity, which was essential for maintaining good health. [3]

Today, recent studies on urban agriculture highlight its importance in enhancing food security and generating income for low-income households. Mougeot

¹ Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1973): 61–89.

²Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana", 61.

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "The Role of Women in Agriculture", *FAO* (2017): 5.

argued that urban agriculture was not merely a survival strategy but an integral component of urban economic systems. [4] Similarly, Foeken's work in East Africa demonstrated that urban farming enabled households to cope with rising food prices and unemployment. [5] In Cameroon, research showed that urban agriculture played a vital role in cities like Yaoundé, Douala, and Bamenda, where rapid urbanization increased dependence on locally produced food. [6]

Within this framework, women emerged as key actors not only in production but also in the commercialization of agricultural produce. Apparently, the marketing of leafy vegetables in Bamenda indicated a network of distribution channels that combined traditional and modern practices especially with the coming of online marketing. Scholars such as Ellis emphasized that rural and urban livelihoods were increasingly diversified, with individuals engaging in multiple income-generating activities. Women vegetable farmers exemplified this diversification through their participation in various sales systems.

Generally speaking, it has been noted that a number of factors led Bamenda women to engage in leafy vegetable production and commercialization, one of which was hardship, often caused by teenage pregnancy, single motherhood, widowhood, polygamy, divorce, and forced migration. [7] Commenting on divorce as a factor contributing to poverty among women, a 2010 article in the *Awake Journal* noted that:

...the breakup of a marriage often deals a devastating financial blow to women. In fact, a seven-year European study revealed that while the income of men increased by 11 percent after divorce, women's income decreased by 17 percent. It is difficult for some women because they must care for their children, find employment, and cope with the emotional trauma of divorce. [8]

This situation as cited in the journal evidently made things worse for such women. Also, another reason for Bamenda women's involvement in leafy vegetable cultivation and sales was the quick maturity of the produce usually under three months. A third reason was the ease of marketing the produce as sales could be

conducted directly on farms, through door-to-door distribution or home purchase, at local markets, and more recently through online platforms and other convenient channels. A fourth reason was related to access to land for cultivation from others. Recalling the case of Santa and with particular reference to market gardening, Khan Valorine indicates that:

...land acquisition did not favor many women, but women easily engaged in market gardening because they could rely on land belonging to brothers who were away from Santa. Women also obtained land through gifts from friends or strangers as appreciation for services rendered, and sometimes through temporary rental arrangements. [9]

A fifth and very important reason was the economic and political crises of the 1980s, 1990s, 2008 and 2016. These crises compelled many women to step out of their traditional domestic roles and work harder to ensure survival. [10] Despite these motivations, the participation of Bamenda women in leafy vegetable cultivation faced numerous challenges.

As a highlight to this study, we intend to examine women in the commercialization of leafy vegetables in the Bamenda urban sphere. To this end, the paper argues that, from 1987-2016; women in Bamenda employed highly adaptable and convenient methods for the commercialization of leafy vegetables within the Bamenda urban sphere and beyond, across time and space. To make this argument self-evident, the paper examines direct vegetable farm sales, home-based purchase and sale of vegetables, local market sales, external markets as well as online and telephone marketing. These themes will guide the discussion of the paper. Let us begin with farm sales.

Direct Vegetable Farm Sales

Right from the 1980s and beneath, one foundational platform that endured in the commercialization of leafy vegetables by Bamenda women was direct vegetable farm sales. In this business, the most frequently sold leafy vegetables at farms was huckleberry. Even so, entire farms, parts of farms or a prescribed quantity for leafy vegetables like leeks, celery

⁴Luc J.A. Agropolis Mougeot, *The Social, Political and Environmental Dimensions of Urban Agriculture* (London: Earthscan, 2005), 3.

⁵Dick Foeken, "Urban Agriculture in East Africa," *African Studies Review* 49, no. 3 (2006): 1–21.

⁶Guy Ndzié, "Urban Agriculture and Food Security in Cameroon," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 14, no. 5 (2012): 45–60.

⁷Roselyn Buego, 45 years, Gender activists, interview by Sivia Mersie, Upstation Bamenda, 2nd December, 2025.

⁸Jehovah Witnesses, "Is Divorce the Answer?" *Awake Journal* (2010), <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201002/four-things-about-divorce>, accessed online, 23rd January 2025.

⁹Valorine Khan, "Women in Market Gardening in Santa Sub-Division, 1986-2016: A Historical Survey" (MA Dissertation in History, The University of Bamenda, 2021), 4.

¹⁰Hans Abireche Utengo, 43 years, Divisional Delegate of Agriculture and Rural Development Mezam, Office of the Divisional Delegation, interview by Sivia Mersie, Old Town, 26th June, 2025.

etc. was sometimes sold from the farms. [11] Buyers went to these farms with their measuring tools be it a tape, bag, buckets or merely from eye observation to purchase these leafy greens. [12] In fact, according to Hinrichs direct farm sales of vegetables became an important feature of both rural and urban economies in farming communities of Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America, where vegetable production served both subsistence and commercial purposes. [13] In the Bamenda urban sphere, the phenomenon gained grounds especially due to improvement on farm to market roads connecting the town with its peripheries. [14] As early as the 1980s, the primary reasons for leafy vegetable farm sales amongst others were to: reduce intermediaries or middlemen, lowered costs of purchase and that of sales, and to ensure quick deliveries. [15]

Predominantly, direct vegetable farm sales for vegetables like huckleberry, waterleaf, green, leeks, lettuce and others gave certain advantages for both the sellers and the farmers. When farmers sold directly, it reduced transportation cost, and additionally limited risks of transporting these perishable goods on the part of the farmers. Sherika Joyce Kinyuy comments that:

I had customers who followed me right to the farm, when I sold from the farm, it reduced the load to have been carried and consequently reduced transportation cost since the buyers were responsible for their movement to and from the farms. Whenever I had such customers to follow me to the farm, I was very happy because it helped me gain time as a student that

often battled with school time and vegetable cultivation. [16] This system of farm sales was very advantageous to me especially when I wrote my General Certificate of education exams in 2015.

Aside from the transportation factor and the associated risks, farm sales of vegetables within the Bamenda urban area provided immediate cash flow as those purchasing had to pay on hand without a possibility for any later compensations in case the produce became bad as a result of other factors. This cash on hand reduced reliance on credit besides the complications that often occurred due to purchases for differed payments. It gave the producer surety and greater convenience. [17]

A third reason for the survival of this commercialization method was mainly that buyers and consumers enjoyed the freshness and nutrients in the just harvested leafy vegetables. [18] Utengo sustained that when vegetables were harvested and sold almost immediately, it helped it retained high nutritional quality. [19] In fact, scientific studies indicated that the nutritional value of vegetables such as huckleberry, spinach, waterleaf and lettuce declined when stored for long periods under refrigeration or during transportation across long distances. [20] Also, many consumers went directly to buy in the farms in order to ensure trust and to purchase the right quality, this was more serious within the context of the over use of fertilizers, in the production of vegetables with often health challenges [21] Picture 1 demonstrates the commercialization of huckleberry on a farm in Mbellewa.

¹¹ Happiness Mankah, 40 years, one time business dealer in celery and leeks, interview by Sivia Mersie, Cow Street, 26th December, 2025.

¹² Interview with Happiness Mankah.

¹³Clare C. Hinrichs, "Embeddedness and Local Food Systems: Notes on Two Types of Direct Agricultural Market," *Journal of Rural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2000): 296.

¹⁴ Aloysuis Tambe, 70 years, retired Agricultural officer, interview by Sivia Mersie, Ntamuche, 15th December 2023.

¹⁵ Emerencia V. Akembong, vegetable retailer, interview by Sivia Mersie, Food Market Bamenda, 4th April 2024.

¹⁶ Joyce Sherika Kinyuy, Student Teacher and vegetable farmer, interview by Sivia Mersie, Mile Five, 9th March, 2025.

¹⁷ Interview with Happiness Mankah.

¹⁸ Cecilia Buinda, 50 years, regular vegetable consumer, interview by Sivia Mersie, Foncha Street, 4th June 2025.

¹⁹ Hans Abireche Utengo, 43 years, Divisional Delegate of Agriculture and Rural Development Mezam, Office of the Divisional Delegation, interview by Sivia Mersie, Old Town, 26th June, 2025.

²⁰ Joy C. Rickman, Diane M. Barrett, and Christine M. Bruhn, "Nutritional Comparison of Fresh, Frozen and Canned Fruits and Vegetables. Part 1. Vitamins C and B and Phenolic Compounds," *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* 87, No. 6 (2007): 930–44.

²¹ Grace Fru Mambo, 44 years, Sub Divisional Delegate for Agriculture and Rural Development Bamenda II, Office of the Divisional Delegation, interview by Sivia Mersie, Old Town, 26th June, 2025.



Picture 1: Selling of vegetables in the farm at Mbellewa, Mile 4 Nkwen, 2016
Source: Personal Album Mankah Evelyn, 2016.

As evident on picture 1, the commercialization of leafy vegetables was extended to the farm, where clients went directly to make purchases. The reason for the existence of such a commercialization method has already been established. Also, another means of commercialization of leafy vegetables was home-based purchase and sales of leafy vegetables which is considered next.

Home-based Purchase and Sales of leafy Vegetables

Within the Bamenda Urban sphere, a number of women purchased and sold leafy vegetable related produces from their homes and that of others. Some of these vegetables were cultivated just at the compound premise, but also, some were cultivated by these women in far off farms. Their buyers were the local people or even strangers who stumbled on these goods. This segment therefore presents the commercialization of vegetables at home from these double sources and with the advantages that presented itself for the sellers and buyers.

As a result of the economic and political crises of the 1980s, 1990s, 2008 and 2016, a majority of Bamenda women, engaged in leafy vegetable commercialization from home as they sold to neighbors, passers-by, or local consumers. [22] In Bamenda, house sales were generally practiced by peasant or subsistence farmers, especially women, who sold surplus harvests for income generation. Therefore, many households especially those of widowed women integrated vegetable agriculture with other livelihood activities. Yuh Rhoda

Ngong narrates how she got in to vegetable commercialization and how her sales were made:

Married and just 8years after, I became a mother of 3 children. In just under those 8 years my husband slept in the cold hands of dead when we had our third child. I was left alone to care for our children. Despite my severe challenges, I found ways to survive and provide for my family. I started engaging in household production, growing vegetables in my extended backyard plot and working a small garden. Although I sometimes sold these vegetables in my local market, one constant method of selling was in the house. People knew that if you want ever fresh leafy vegetables, like huckleberry, lettuce, cabbage, *okonghabong*, mami Rhoda as I was often called got you covered. By selling these vegetables daily, I was sure of a constant means of living and I could save up to sponsor my three kids. For me, the sales of vegetables from home were a soft way of making money. [23]

The experience of Yuh indicates the opportunities that Bamenda women found in producing and commercializing vegetables at the greatest convenience of their homes. In Bamenda and especially within the late 1990s and to a lesser extent in recent past, leafy vegetables were harvested daily or weekly and displayed in front of the house for neighbors and community members to purchase. Sometimes, buyers placed direct orders to vegetable producing households for regular supplies. These practices were common in quarters far off from the food market, or other nearby

²² Rhoda Ngong Yuh, 45 years, vegetable producer and home seller, interview by Sivia Mersie, Ntahseng, 23rd April 2025.

²³ Interview with Rhoda Ngong Yuh.

markets like Ntamuche, Alahlie, Ntambang and others. [24]

A reason that made home vegetable sales possible was because of the benefits that buyers enjoyed and key to it was convenience. At the time, purchasing vegetables from a neighbor or a farmer's house saved time and transport costs. Consumers could buy vegetables on their way home, late in the evening, or early in the morning without having to go to the distant farm, food market or other market areas like, Mobile Nkwen, below Foncha and the distant food markets.²⁵ This method of sales was particularly useful for workers and households who faced time constraints. [26]

Also, the sales of vegetables by demand at home levels by women in Bamenda, was prosperous because it gave families the opportunities to accessed freshly harvested vegetables at all times. Since vegetables were often picked in small quantities for sale on the same day or harvested upon instant demands, buyers benefited from produce that had not been stored for long. The justification for the easy purchase and sales of vegetables

through this means is provided in part by Onyango et al, who opined that freshness is one of the most important attributes consumers considered when purchasing vegetables. [27]

The lucrative and thriving nature of these means of sales in Bamenda, was partly due to the convenience it gave to the girl child or women. It was possible for them to engage in cooking activities, washing of dresses, dishes or being involved in compound care and still meet up with sales. Even nursing mothers who sold leafy vegetables either by buying from farms and selling home or owning a piece of land and working it at home had the possibility of multi-tasking. Furthermore, it helped them avoid taxes and also the payment of market spaces, tickets or rental stalls. To that effect, tax avoidance in a way, increased their income and savings and permitted them pay fees, buy books, and sew uniforms for their children. Similarly, transportation cost was avoided and all other factors therein. Picture 2 shows a harvested vegetables meant for home sales at a family compound in Menteh.



Picture 21: Harvested vegetables for home sales in Menteh, Mile 4 Nkwen, 2015
Source: Personal Album Linda Bih, 2015.

Generally, buying from home reduced market distance for the buyers and the sellers. It gave the surety of purchase and even when they weren't any favorable bargain, the supposed seller did not have to carry the goods back home or pay to keep in a warehouse. As mentioned already, the tendency of selling home was that they were usually a fair bargain and for the convenience of it. Next to be handled is local market sales as a means

of women commercialization of leafy vegetables in Bamenda.

Local Market Sales

Local markets have historically played a central role in food distribution systems across the world and remain the primary source of fresh produce for urban and rural communities. [28] In Cameroon, for example,

²⁴ Cornelius Mubang, 65 years, retired civil servant and longtime Bamenda resident, interview by Sivia Mersie, Centerpole Junction, 12th March 2025.

²⁵ Lizette Fonwui, 47 years, teacher, interview by Sivia Mersie, St Paul Junction Bamenda, 23rd June, 2025.

²⁶ Interview with Lizette Fonwui.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ David Tschirley et al, "The Rise of a Middle Class in East and Southern Africa: Implications for Food System Transformation," *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (2015): 628-46.

periodic and daily markets such as those in Bamenda, Douala, and Yaoundé were known for their vibrant sales of vegetables like huckleberry, green spices, cabbage, spinach and others.

Often, vegetables sold in local markets in Bamenda came from both nearby farms within the town premise, household farms and from distant areas like: Babanki Tungo, Kedjom Keku, Bamessing (Ndop). The most distant source of vegetables for local markets in Bamenda was from Nso. [29] These vegetables were transported to the markets by traders or directly by farmers using motorcycles and public transportation vehicles. [30] These markets were often characterized by informal trading arrangements, bargaining, and close social interactions between buyers and sellers. [31] The two different means of women sales of vegetable discussed earlier were often freed from certain laws guiding sales and purchases. But the situation was very different when it connected to sales of vegetables in the local markets of Nkwen, food market, below Foncha and a few other market places.

Some of the rules were in place right from the inception and existence of leafy vegetable sales in these markets but others came as a result of changing circumstances and market realities. In the case of the Nkwen market, when the market went operational, the union for vegetable sellers did not immediately begin. At that time, women sold vegetables especially huckleberry at any time it was available and paid only council tickets to obtain space. [32] But as the years progressed, a Njamajama women's union was formed around the late 1990s.

Due to the formation of the union, it was then resolved that for any woman to sell vegetables in the Nkwen market, the person was supposed to have been a registered member of the union. The amount paid for registration in the late 1990s upon its existence was 500 frs, by the year 2000s it rose to 1000 and by 2020 it had climbed to 2000frs CFA. [33] Once these amounts were paid as registration, members were not later required to pay any other registrations yearly. By that, any woman selling in the market was bound to have registered in the union. Failure to do so, the legislations restricted the non-registered seller from being supplied vegetables by whole sellers and in cases where the persons insisted and brought vegetable from elsewhere it was physically confiscated. [34]

²⁹ Umaru Issa, 45 years, Loader at Amour Mezam Company Limited, interview by Sivia Mersie, Foncha Junction, 4th July, 2025.

³⁰ Interview with Umaru Issa.

³¹ Idem.

³² Helen Tang, 56 years, President of Njamajama women Nkwen market, interview by Sivia Mersie, Mobil Nkwen Market, 3rd July, 2025.

³³ Interview with Helen Tang.

Also, one of the laws for vegetable sales within the Nkwen local market was that vegetables (mostly huckleberry) that arrived in the morning of any particular day was not to be opened for sales until about 4 pm in the evening of that same day. [35] This policy allowed that vegetables that arrived the previous day should first be sold before the most current one; otherwise, the tendency was that buyers bought the freshest ones, allowing the previously available leafy vegetables which could possibly get rotten and caused untold losses. [36]

Subsequently, in 2001, another law came up in a bit to protect women leafy vegetable retailers due to the shocks they experienced in the instance where a particular bag or bags of leafy vegetables supplied to them by the wholesaler was bad. It was lawed that in such a case, the retailer was supposed to contact the supplier before selling and together they evaluated the extent of the damage and came to an agreement as to the new price expected from the retailer by the wholesaler. This 2001 law helped leafy vegetable women traders to limit arguments and potential conflicts. [37] This was possible only for vegetables supplied to retailers by wholesalers that functioned within the markets and who were often on standby to verify. Otherwise, if the wholesaler was not a stable supplier in that market, it was likely not to be a problem as the retailer immediately carried the burden or considered other ways of personally resolving the matter. [38]

Again, another policy was that leafy vegetable women dealers in the Nkwen market were not allowed to sell vegetables outside of the market premises. They were therefore required to stay within the market in sheds at the vegetable line. To this, women that were seen selling vegetables outside the market were called to order. The specification and insistence for selling only in the market was to enable all to have had the equal opportunity to sell without letting those selling from the gates or roads to have more advantages because of the increased chances to meet or target potential clients on their way in to the market. In this case, defaulters paid 5000 frs CFA as fee.

Also, quarreling and fighting were sanctioned by particular union ordinances. For example, it was stated that any quarreling that escalated in to mentioning a member's personal issues like marital affairs or other issues were fined to the tune of 5,000 FRS and fighting

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ It should be noted that after the 2000s with increase cultivation, leafy vegetables were received twice a day at the Nkwen market, in the morning and in the evening of each breaking day.

³⁶ Interview with Helen Tang.

³⁷ Idem.

³⁸ Idem.

fined at 10,000 FRS CFA or a carton of Savon was demanded as fine for defaulters. Failures to respect these fines, members were not allowed to continue selling and you were also not supplied with vegetables. And to this, it made the laws to have been effective. These union laws helped to limit disorder and made local markets ideal grounds for selling of vegetables especially within the Nkwen area. [39] It also ensured price stabilization as it fought against all market defaulters thereby, giving everyone the equal chance to thrive within the sector. [40]

In the context of local market sales, it was agreed that selling inside the market was to begin around 9am. Sales were done only inside the market until around 4pm. After 4pm it was believed that most if not all would have sold sufficiently to potential and available buyers. Therefore, from that time some retailers could move about to finish selling the remaining chunks of their vegetables. To have made the unions decisions effective, its executive members met every two weeks to discuss latest issues and when there was an emergency, meetings were scheduled to handle these emergencies. [41]

In the different markets, vegetables were not only sold in the form in which they came from the house or farms, but they were also selected by retailers to capture particular customers. Louisa Nyuyso narrates how it worked and says:

I sold huckleberry in all forms picked or unpicked. However, I preferred selling selected huckleberry because of the benefits in that line of vegetable sales. When I sold picked ones, I gained more than 50% when compared to selling without selecting. My customers were mostly men who found it boring picking vegetables and considered it not as a man's thing. With many women being involved in the world of work, demands for selected vegetables also increased over the years. Although the tasks of selecting vegetables was difficult, the pay was attractive. This opportunity to select vegetables for sale was mostly in the local markets than at homes. Because while at the market I had sufficient time to select the vegetables when they were no customers. Also, I sold *Okonghabong* and, for some persons I sliced it before selling. All went with increased payments. [42]

³⁹ Idem.

⁴⁰ Idem.

⁴¹ Honorine Tumbang, 45 years, secretary of NjamaJama women union with more than 22 years of vegetable sales within the Nkwen local market, interview by Sivia Mersie, Mobil Nkwen 3rd July, 2025.

⁴² Interview with Louisa Nyuyso.

⁴³ Green spices were a combination of leafy greens like cutimanjo, pesi, leeks etc. There were often used by women roasting fish and other delicacies.

⁴⁴ Rosemary, Emongor, and Johann Kirsten. "The Impact of South African Supermarkets on Agricultural

Aside from the different aspects of policies which facilitated the commercialization of vegetables within the local markets of Bamenda, one of the greatest advantages of purchasing vegetables in local markets was the diversity of products available. In the markets of Below Foncha, food market, Mobil Nkwen, buyers could access a wide range of vegetables, these varieties were huckleberry, spinach, and green spices of all kinds [43], *Okonghabong*, bitter leaf, pumpkin leaves, cow pea and many more. The availability of such varieties in the local markets gave consumers the comfort to have chosen according to taste, nutritional preference, and prices. [44]

A factor which additionally gave local market sales an upper hand in Bamenda was the presence of multiple sellers. In this regard, buyers benefitted from bargaining power and the possibility of comparing prices before purchase. Studies indicated that vegetable prices in local markets in Bamenda were sometimes lower than in other methods of sales, partly due to over availability. Often, sales became cheaper at evenings. [45] This was because of the fear of taking it back home for which the vegetables could easily get rotten especially with the lack in sustainable storage facilities. [46]

In the local markets, leafy vegetables could be bought in small quantities thereby satisfying even the least poor person. In the past especially around the early 2000s it was possible to buy vegetables for a small quantity costing 100frs, before that era, it was even way cheaper to 25frs for a bundle of huckleberry. Buyers bought in any quantity to fit their immediate needs. Just like buying from home, this affordability ensured that even low-income households could have vegetables for cooking. [47] Local markets also became preferable because buyers benefitted from the opportunity to engage in social interactions, build trust with sellers, and maintained community ties. Emongor and Kirsten add to this by remarking that: "in many African societies, buyers preferred local markets because they could negotiate, inquire about the source of vegetables, and even establish long-term trust-based relationships with vendors". [48]

In local markets with vegetable vendors, taxes were paid to councils for sheds. In Nkwen market for

Development in the SADC: A Case Study in Zambia, Namibia and Botswana," *Agrekon* 48, No. 1 (2009): 1–23.

⁴⁵ Lydia Bong Endah, 47 years, vegetable consumer, interview by Sivia Mersie, Nkwen Market, 4th July, 2025.

⁴⁶ Joana Bukeh, 33 years, Teacher of geography, interview by Sivia Mersie, Up Station, 4th March, 2025.

⁴⁷ Interview with Honorine Tumbang.

⁴⁸ Rosemary, Emongor, and Johann Kirsten. "The Impact of South African Supermarkets on Agricultural Development in the SADC..."

example, the price per shed in 2015 was 9000frs for three months and later increased to 10000 FRS. These prices grew from smaller amounts to the current peak and were paid every 3months. [49] Despite the existence of other marketing units in Bamenda, local markets continued to

be indispensable to household food security and everyday nutrition and a major point of convergence. Picture 3 indicates of varieties of vegetables displayed in Nkwen Mobil, food market and Below Foncha markets respectively.



Picture 1: Varieties of vegetables displayed at (A) the Food Market (B) Nkwen Mobil, and (C) Below Foncha Market

Sources: Personal Albums of Helen Tang, Elizabeth Bih and Lucy Ngwe.

Evidently, picture 3 A shows a set of pumpkin leaves, while picture 3 B shows *okonghabong* and bitter leaf at the Nkwen Mobil Market. Picture 3 C also demonstrates *okonghabong* and bitter leaf. Except for below Foncha Market, Nkwen Mobil Market and Food Market operated daily, and on Saturdays these markets were full to capacity. Aside from local markets channels used by Bamenda women to have commercialized leafy vegetables, there were also local cooperatives that helped in the marketing of these vegetables within the Bamenda local area. In this regard, one well known cooperative was the Vegetable and Food Cooperative located at Commercial Avenue. Before the 2016 crisis, the

institution did a lot in marketing vegetables of all types which were not limited to leafy vegetables. Wirsy Sivi, sales manager of the Vegetables and Food Cooperative since 2014 explains how sales were done in this institution and echoes that:

People knew so much about this place and even now. With us, farmers had the advantage that we marketed their products for them when they're registered under the cooperative. All we did is that we collected 10 percent of the total sales of each farmers produce... Before the 2016 Anglophone crisis, we used to sell fresh

⁴⁹ Interview with Honorine Tumbang.

vegetables such as lettuce, huckleberry, bitter leaf and *Okonghobong*...

It is equally important to indicate that within Bamenda's context of urbanization and certain disorders especially around 2004, a type of market which resembled market sales developed. This was road side

sales of leafy vegetables. It often targeted busy road junctions and busy streets where people frequently passed by. This was witnessed especially around, Amour Mezam stretches and beneath the Bamenda Foncha Junction area. [50] On picture 4 are roadside sales of leafy vegetables around the busy Amour Mezam stretch.



Picture 42: Roadside sale of Leafy Vegetables around the busy Amour Mezam stretch
Source: Picture taken by Sivia Mersie, on Field work.

From picture 4 it is noticeable that the vegetables were sometimes selected and sold in buckets, in other instances not visible in the picture the vegetables especially huckleberry were bundled and sold from 200 FRS upward and most recently 500 francs per heap. External market sales are the second to the last theme to be considered.

External Markets

With the existence of transportation agencies in Bamenda town like Amour Mezam Express, Guaranti Express, Moghamo Express, Nso Boys Express running the Bamenda-Yaoundé axis, Bamenda-Buea-Limbe stretch and the Bamenda-Kumba highways, many women vegetable sellers transported via these agencies' leafy vegetables of all types from Bamenda which served as a transit point to the named areas. Depending on the arrangements, a bag of leafy vegetables especially huckleberry was transported from 500 frs in the early 2000s, but over the years transportation cost doubled per bag. [51] It is important to note that due to its perishable nature and other high complications, vegetables were not

registered in most agencies because of unforeseen that usually surrounded it. Aside from external market sales, there were also leafy vegetables from Bamenda sold out of Cameroon. First let us focus on external sales out of Bamenda and within Cameroon.

The main reason for sales of leafy vegetables to external markets was mostly because demands and prices were higher in these areas than in the producing areas. This is so because at the producing areas, families could work even small quantities for household consumptions thereby, limiting their market purchasing power. [52] Because of this, external markets became an important avenue to promote sales of leafy vegetables produced or originating from Bamenda and its sources. To cite why external sales were considered by some Bamenda women traders, Ngibe Prisca mentions that: If you had well trusted persons who could sell for you in other places like Douala, Yaoundé etc. it was more profitable to send to these towns. For example, I could get a bag here and sell just for 7000 Frs, whereas when I sent it over there it was around 20000 Frs. [53]

⁵⁰ Idem.

⁵¹ Engelbert Yulah, 47 years, former worker at Amour Mezam Company Limited, interview by Sivia Mersie, Banja Street, 7th August, 2025.

⁵² Relindis Ayibanda, 46 years, small scale producer of vegetable for household consumption, interview by Sivia Mersie, 4th July, 2025.

⁵³ Prisca Ngebi, 47 years, Leafy Vegetable Farmer and Treasurer of the vegetable union in Mobil Market,

Generally, the low prices in Bamenda made vegetable sellers to create an external market. They sent to towns which they considered had ready markets. This somewhat ready market was because majority of persons who formerly lived in Bamenda and later residing elsewhere especially within the context of the 2016 crisis in other towns out of Bamenda continued to prefer eating huckleberry which came from the Bamenda area. [54] Thereby fruitfully increasing and making external sales more gainful and desirous.

With external sales, Bamenda women involved in leafy vegetable commercialization had inordinate gains. In some cases, they reduced the quantities per bag and sometimes used smaller bags, a respondent note:

The bags I sent my huckleberry to be sold in Buea were not the same bags that I sold huckleberry with in Bamenda. Vegetable was sold in particular bags referred to as njamajama bags. But when sending for sales in Buea I used a “Binam” bag, it was a nine thin bag. Whenever I sent to Buea I gained a lot. Here in Bamenda, a bag could cost 2000 frs but when I sent to Buea, I did not have less than 25000 frs. So, exporting to other towns like Buea in my case was very advantageous. [55]

Another reason for the flourishing of external markets for leafy vegetables was accessed to bulk supplies. Unlike household or local market sales that were limited in scale, external markets often hosted wholesale depots so to say, where traders and retailers bought truckloads of vegetables at once. This supported larger businesses such as supermarkets, hotels, and restaurants that needed steady, and high-volume supplies. [56]

As earlier indicated, vegetables were also sent abroad to countries of Europe, the Americas, neighboring countries and the Arab Emirates. These external sales out of the country for leafy vegetables from Bamenda gave immense incomes to women involved in the trade. It is important to indicate that most of those who exported out of the country did also involve in local market sales and national sales, this is because selling externally was infrequent but it was a nice venture each time these women had the opportunity to sell out. [57] For most persons, they got connections for such sales, from relatives and friends residing in foreign countries. Since most of them hadn't the license to sell such products out

of the country, they sold indirectly and sent to these persons through their family members whenever they had someone travelling. That made too the business inconsistent although juicy. [58] The last aspect of this paper elaborates on online and telephone marketing of leafy vegetables which was a feature of the business from the mid-2000s.

Online and Telephone Marketing

With improvement in technology from the mid-2000s, platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, twitter (X), and even direct telephoning were potential markets forums. In fact, in the most recent past, marketing strategies and milieus gradually shifted and making use of these platforms for the commercialization of leafy vegetable produces were important. These platforms gave opportunities for extensive advertisement and it also helped vegetable farmers and retailers to expand the audience of their markets. Through these commercialization means, leafy women vegetable sellers in Bamenda communicated with clients within and out of Cameroon, and sometimes sold leafy vegetable goods for postponed payments. Such commercialization process was based on implicit trust in the hope that both the buyer and the seller would have good conscience. Although unpopular, it gradually gained grounds. Sherika Joyce Kinyuy explains how she went about using such methods:

I often called clients when vegetable was available and I also did advertise my huckleberry through my WhatsApp statuses; I did so by videoing myself during the different processes and people viewed and sometimes commented. By that it advertised my huckleberry business. At times, some viewers immediately wrote and asked that I should remind them during harvesting time. Also, at harvesting, I did feature these vegetables on my statuses. By that, many people referred me to other persons and I continually had customers. These platforms were really a veritable market outlet for me. [59]

From this experience, it becomes apparent that in this era of advancement in communication technology, marketing strategies and milieus gradually shifted grounds and making use of these platforms for the commercialization of vegetable products became unavoidable in other to remain in business. Table 1 summarizes the different modes of leafy vegetable sales in Bamenda urban sphere from 1987-2016.

interview by Sivia Mersie, Market premise Mobil Nkwen, 4th July, 2025.

⁵⁴ Interview with Joyce Sherika Kinyuy.

⁵⁵ Idem.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Minot, “Staple Food Prices in Sub-Saharan Africa” *Africa Agriculture Status Report*, No. 2 (2010): 73–88.

⁵⁷ Evelyn Meyer, 45 years, former vegetable farmer and current vegetable seller, interview by Sivia Mersie, Nkwen Market, 24th June, 2024.

⁵⁹ Interview with Joyce Kinyuy Sherika

Table 1: Modes of Leafy Vegetable Sales in Bamenda Urban Sphere, 1987-2016

Mode of Vegetable Sales	Description	Popularity
Local market sales	Selling vegetables directly to consumers at local markets in Bamenda.	Most Popular
Direct vegetable farm sales	Consumers buy vegetables directly from the farm where they are grown.	High
Home purchase and sales of vegetables	Vegetables sold directly to neighbors or buyers at home from mostly fragmented leafy vegetable plots near home.	Moderate
External market sales	Vegetables cultivated in Bamenda and transported and sold in markets outside Bamenda.	Low
Internet and telephone marketing	Vegetables sold through phone orders or online platforms.	Least popular

Source: Field work collection by Sivia Mersie, 2023-2026.

Table 1 shows the main methods women in Bamenda used to commercialize leafy vegetables between 1987 and 2016. From the table, local market sales were the most common because local markets offered high visibility and frequent buyers, making it easier to sell larger quantities. Direct farm sales followed closely, as buyers sometimes preferred fresh vegetables straight from the farm. Home purchase and sales catered to smaller, nearby buyers, offering convenience but limited volume. External market sales involved more effort and transportation costs, making it less common. Finally, Internet and telephone marketing was the least used, likely due to limited access to technology and low adoption during that period.

It is also important to highlight that; online marketing also facilitated this economic sector especially during period of extended lockdown (ghost towns) in the town. Since the rebirth of multi-party politics, post-election violence of the early 1990s and other moments of public disturbances leading up to the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, women in the leafy vegetable sector experienced a lot of farming and market disruptions. The damages caused on the crops in the farms and what had been harvested and packaged for transportation to urban centers was enormous. This left to significant losses and sometimes, many farmers never recovered from these shocks. [60] However, in such instances, during weekends people could go about their activities, these leeway period allowed women to go to the farm, harvest and sell, but they were a lot of spoilage as leafy vegetable goods were sold at a cheaper rate. [61]

CONCLUSION

This paper had as main focus to examine women in the commercialization of leafy vegetables in the Bamenda urban sphere. The paper was motivated by the necessity to emphasize on the resilience and adaptability of Bamenda women in the trade. To have expounded on the theme, the paper was divided in to five parts. The first interest was to look at direct vegetable farm sales. The second part dealt with home purchase

and sales of vegetables, the third aspect looked at local market sales. The fourth examined external markets and while the fifth and final theme focused on online and telephone marketing of leafy vegetables. From the themes considered, the paper overridingly reveals that; Bamenda women actively participated in the commercialization of leafy vegetables, with local markets serving as the most prominent and accessible avenue for sales. Generations after generations of leafy vegetable women in Bamenda, considered their engagement in the commercialization of these products as a goldmine that assured their daily and long-term sustenance.

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