



Associated Country Women of the World

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IYWF Story Bank – Women Empowered, Benin

ACWW are pleased to share the everyday realities of working in agriculture in the Dassa-Zoumé region of Benin. 11 women farmers at ACWW Member Society, Women Empowered, shared reflections about lived experiences in the rural landscape of their region. Below is a consolidation of their stories.

Across all reflections, women at Women Empowered describe farming as a deeply rooted, family-based livelihood shaped by inherited knowledge, necessity, and resilience. Most farmers grew up in agricultural households and entered farming through parents, spouses, or relatives, making agriculture a learned way of life. While family knowledge eased adaptation challenges such as access to land, money, and labor are persistent. Land is often inherited, shared, or borrowed, with one farmer noting how limited capital makes it difficult to invest in cultivation or hire workers.

The farmers grow a mix of staple and cash crops, most notably maize, soybeans, groundnuts, cassava, beans, rice, and yams with occasional livestock production. This diversity helps support households and income generation. The women's roles on the farm are incredibly multifaceted, combining physically demanding fieldwork with marketing, sales, household management, and caregiving. Women balance agricultural labour with family responsibilities and often play a central role in selling produce and managing income.

When asked about challenges and difficult seasons, hardship is defined largely by climate variability. Drought, irregular rainfall, and untimely heavy rains frequently result in crop failure or reduced production. These challenges are heightened by crop destruction from roaming cattle, low market prices, and limited demand which can leave farmers with little return on their labour. Such seasons bring not only financial strain but also emotional distress and food insecurity.

Despite these challenges, women farmers in the Dassa Zoumé region demonstrate adaptive and sustainable practices. Key tactics include soaking seeds before planting to improve germination rates and shifting land use, where farmers move to a different plot and allow previously used land to rest and recover. These locally grounded responses to declining soil fertility and environmental stress underscore the knowledge and experience women farmers bring to local food systems.

Farming work of women in the Dassa-Zoumé region plays an important role in supporting local food access and household well-being. Overall, women farmers take pride in their work as essential to sustaining local food systems and ensuring that families communities can eat adequately. These women lead by example in demonstrating resilience and innovation to sustain their families and communities at large.