

**WOMEN'S LAND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES IN THE COMMUNE OF KPOMASSE  
IN SOUTHWESTERN BENIN**

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**ABSTRACT**

In Benin, rural women face persistent barriers to accessing and controlling land resources despite legal reforms aimed at securing land rights. This study analyzes the land resilience strategies developed by women in Kpomassè commune to cope with land insecurity and maintain access to farmland. The methodology combined qualitative and quantitative surveys conducted with 327 farming households and 10 key informants. Analytical tools included the SWOT model and the MACTOR method to assess actor dynamics. Results show that, in response to patriarchal norms and economic constraints, women adopt multiple resilience strategies: reliance on verbal land agreements secured by community witnesses, matrimonial alliances, collective land leasing, income diversification, and participation in women's associations. These adaptive strategies reveal a social response to cultural and institutional barriers but remain limited without legal recognition and institutional support. The study calls for a more inclusive land governance framework integrating gender-sensitive approaches and simplified land formalization mechanisms to strengthen women's land resilience.

**Keywords:** Land resilience, rural women, land access, adaptive strategies, Kpomassè, Benin.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Land has historically been a major issue in global socio-economic development, particularly in West Africa, where land remains the main source of subsistence and an essential factor of production (Tchaou, 2014). However, access to and control of this vital resource is structurally unequal. The social organization, largely dominated by the patriarchal system, traditionally relegates women to a precarious land tenure status, dependent on the men in their families (Kanji, 1997). This paradox is critical: although women provide 60 to 80% of food production on the continent (Njobe, 2015), they are often deprived of real and secure property rights. As J. Nyerere summarizes, African women "toil all their lives on land that they do not own to produce what they do not control" (Diop and Touré, 2012).

In this context, Benin is no exception to this duality. Despite the State's commitment to reforms aimed at land tenure equity (FAO, 2008), formal law (in particular the 2013 Land and Property Code) comes up against the pervasiveness of customary practices. The exclusion of daughters from inheritance in favor of male heirs, the complexity of registration procedures, and economic

barriers (low incomes and limited access to credit) maintain high land tenure insecurity for women, which is essential for household food security.

The Commune of Kpomassè, located in the southwest of Benin, is a territory emblematic of this tension. Subject to increasing land pressure due to urbanization and the commodification of land, it illustrates the impasse of women in the face of the non-application of progressive laws and the resistance of traditional norms. Faced with this structural and persistent vulnerability, the women of Kpomassè are not passive victims; They are developing endogenous resilience, adaptation and circumvention strategies to improve their access to land and secure their economic activities.

The objective of this article is to analyze these coping mechanisms. The central research question is: What are the local strategies implemented by women to circumvent socio-cultural and economic obstacles and improve their access to and security of land tenure in the commune of Kpomassè?

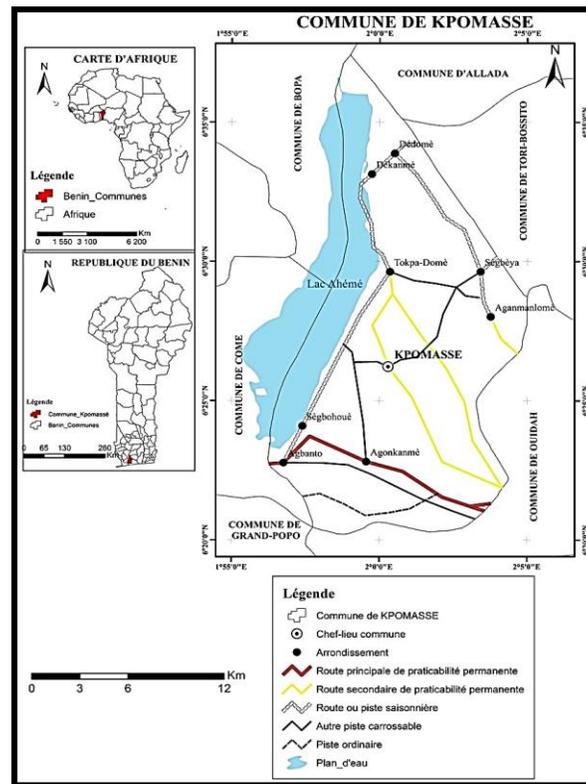
This article is structured in three main parts. After the presentation of the theoretical framework and methodology, the results detail the resilience strategies identified and assess their limits in the face of structural barriers. Finally, the discussion and conclusion offer key lessons and concrete recommendations to transform these survival strategies into levers of sustainable land inclusion.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Study environment**

The commune of Kpomassè is located in the southwest of the Atlantic Department, it is located between 6°20'20" and 6°37'59" north latitude and between 1°56'32" and 2°5'18" east longitude. It is one of the five (05) municipalities of the Intercommunal Eco-Development Zone (ZIED). It is bordered to the north by the commune of Allada, to the south by the commune of Ouidah, to the west by the communes of Comè and Bopa with a natural border composed of Lake Ahémé and a tributary of the Couffo River and to the east by the communes of Tori Bossito and Ouidah. The figure shows the map of the geographical location of the commune of Kpomassè.

Figure 1: Map of the geographical location of the municipality of Kpomassè



Source: IGN Topographic Base, 1992

## 2.2 Data and Method

In the framework of this research, a mixed methodological approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze in depth women's land resilience strategies in the face of structural and cultural obstacles in the commune of Kpomassè. Indeed, the data used are those of the demographic (1990 to 2020), socio-economic, agricultural and legal-administrative data. In order to collect as much reliable data and information as possible, several techniques were used, including direct observation. Also, focus groups of 6 to 10 people were used to compare and complete the information collected using the questionnaires. Thus, the information collected from the people selected for the survey is processed by Word 2016 for texts, Excel 2016 for tables and figures, Arc-view 3.2 for maps. The SWOT and MACTOR models were used for the analysis and interpretation of these results.

### 2.2.1 Determining the sample size

The choice of persons concerned by the survey is based on the principled choice method based on the survey. The target is mainly agricultural households, the state service of the town hall and the agents of the SCDA Kpomassè, women landowners, customary chiefs and village chiefs. Three criteria determined the choice of the persons concerned by the survey:

- be a farmer and have at least 5 years' experience;
- being an actor who deals with land issues;
- be a customary actor.

The formula of D. Schwartz (2005, p. 25)<sup>9</sup> was used to determine the sample size of each site.

$$N_i = \frac{N \times Z^2 \times P(1 - P)}{-[(Z^2 \times P(1 - P)) + N(E^2)]}$$

- Ni = sample size
- N= Target population size of selected sites is 21,094 (sum of population numbers per district)
- Z= confidence level 96 or 1.96
- P = estimated standard proportion 30 or 0.03
- E= maximum error tolerance is 5 or 0.05

The application of this statistical formula makes it possible to have as the sample size

$$N_i = 327.$$

The number of people is chosen in each borough according to the quota formula

$$N = \frac{xixZ}{x}$$

Where

N= the number of people surveyed per district

Xi= the total number of persons per district

Z= the total number of respondents in the five districts

X= the total number of people in the six arrondissements

**Table 1: Distribution of the sample by arrondissement**

Common	Boroughs	Population size	Sample size
Kpomassè	Agonkanmè,	4 422	68
	Aganmanlomè,	3 591	56
	Dékanmè	5 154	80
	Sègbeya	3 119	48
	Tokpa-domè	4 808	75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>28 707</b>	<b>327</b>

**Source:** INSAE / INStAD 2013 data processing, September 2024

In short, 327 people, spread over five districts, are selected for the investigation. Also, 10 resource persons have been selected for the survey as part of this study. These resource persons were identified by their function and their role in the development of the commune of Kpomassè.

### 2.2.2 Data processing

The approach consists first of all of a manual analysis of the questionnaires and interview guides administered to the target populations in the field. Two methods of data processing have been adopted:

- the qualitative data from the analysis were used as a support for the analysis and commentary of the results following a thematic grouping;
- The quantitative data collected were subject to computer processing.

Various word and data processing software were used. These are: Microsoft Word 2016 for word processing, Microsoft Excel 2016 for tables and making figures (histograms) and finally Microsoft Office Picture Manager for photos.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Typology of land resilience strategies

Faced with socio-cultural, economic, and institutional obstacles, the women of Kpomassè deploy various strategies to access land and secure their land rights, adapted to urban and rural contexts.

#### 3.2 Loans and Rentals: Impact of Verbal and Written Contracts on Women's Land Security

Land loans and leases are temporary modes of access to land, particularly prevalent in Kpomassè commune, where agricultural and residential land are often made available through informal or formal arrangements. These mechanisms allow some households, especially women, to access land without owning it, but their impact on land tenure security varies depending on the nature of the contracts, whether verbal or written.

In the commune of Kpomassè, loans and rentals are common modes of access, accounting for 27% of the land arrangements in the sample. The loans, often free and based on family or community relationships, are mainly for agricultural land. Rentals, involving payment in cash or in kind. Surveys show that women are over-represented among the beneficiaries of these arrangements: 63% of loan and rental beneficiaries are women and 37% are men. Table 1 shows the distribution of loans and rentals by type.

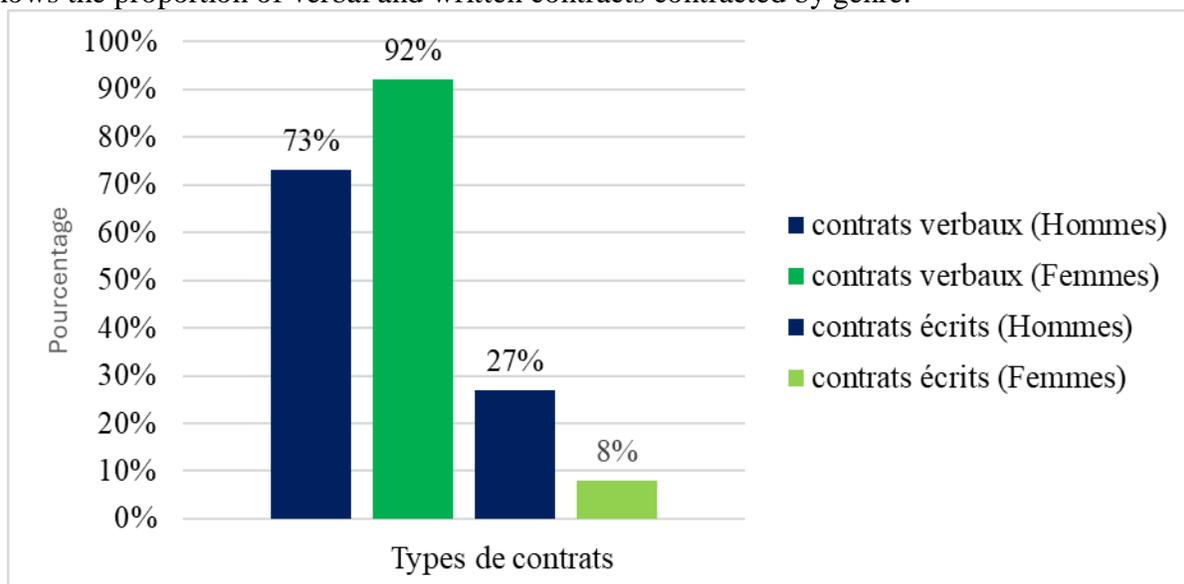
**Table 2: Distribution of loans and rentals by type**

Boroughs	Loans and Rentals (Women)	Loans and Rentals (Men)
Agonkanmè,	14 %	09 %
Aganmanlomè	16 %	09 %
Dékanmè	18 %	10 %
Sègbeya	07 %	04 %
Tokpa-domè	08 %	05 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>63 %</b>	<b>37 %</b>

**Source:** Field surveys, January 2025

Table 1 shows that women (63%) are more dependent on loans and rentals than men (37%). The majority of these arrangements are based on verbal contracts, particularly in rural areas. These verbal contracts dominate loan and rental arrangements in 83% of the cases recorded. These agreements, often concluded with family members, heads of households, or neighbors, are based on trust and social relationships. However, they offer limited land tenure security, especially for women. Surveys reveal that 33% of women beneficiaries of loans or rentals

reported cases of insecurity, such as sudden evictions or disputes with landlords. Verbal contracts are particularly precarious for women because of their dependence on the decisions of owners, who are often male. The women surveyed reported that their access to land depended on the goodwill of the lender, without legal guarantees. This precariousness limits their ability to invest in land, for example, in agricultural improvements or to plan for the long term. Figure 1 shows the proportion of verbal and written contracts contracted by genre.



**Figure 1:** Proportion of verbal and written contracts entered into by genre

Source : Field surveys, January 2024

The analysis of Figure 1 shows that women (92%) are more dependent on verbal contracts than men (73%) and that they have fewer written contracts (8%) than men (27%), which accentuates their fundamental vulnerability compared to men.

Written contracts, although rare, offer better land tenure security, as they are generally supervised by local authorities, more specifically the chiefs, neighbourhoods or delegates, and specify the rights and obligations of the parties. Barriers to the adoption of written contracts include several. The drafting of a written contract implies that the contracting parties know how to read and write, which is not the case for 85% of the women surveyed. This is a major obstacle. Only 23% of the women surveyed were aware of the possibility of formalising a written contract to secure their access. It should be noted that landowners, the vast majority of whom are male, are less inclined to conclude written contracts with women, who are perceived as less solvent or less legitimate.

### 3.3 Access via the land market: opportunities and limitations

In the study environment, the land market represents a route to land for women, thus offering opportunities for acquisition by purchase, but facing structural limitations related to high costs, gender discrimination, and institutional barriers.

The land market in the commune of Kpomassè has intensified since the 2010s, as a result of urbanization, land monetization, and land reforms. Transactions often involve intermediaries

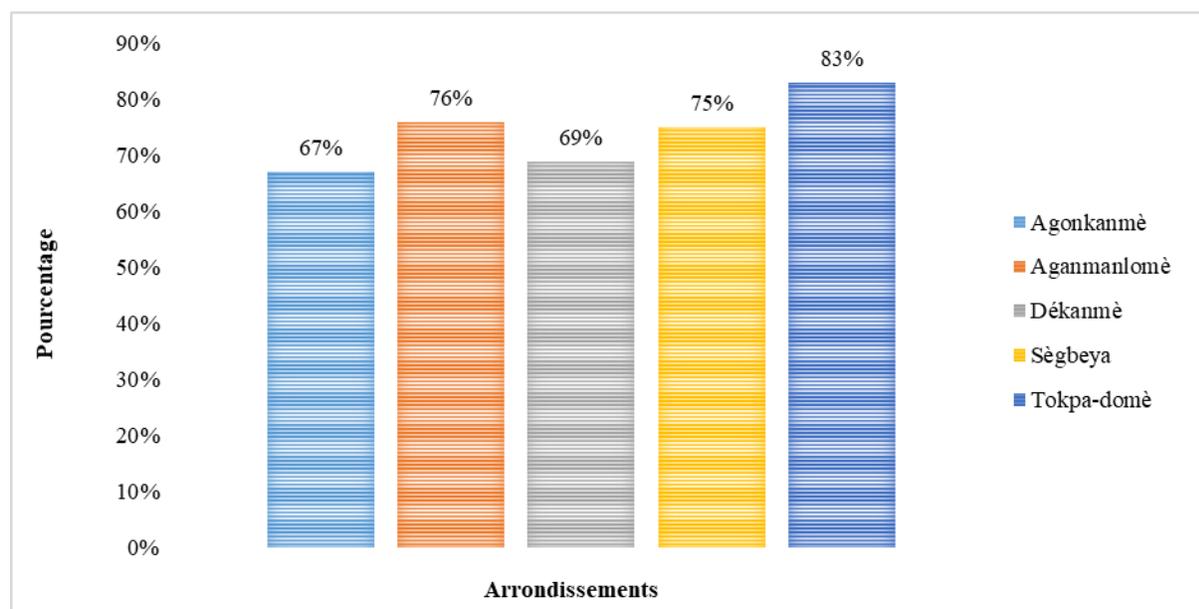
who are either real estate agents, canvassers or heads of families. Land transactions require land certificates or customary certificates, limiting women's access.

The land market in Kpomassè, although offering purchasing opportunities for women, remains hampered by prohibitive costs, gender discrimination, and administrative barriers, in particular.

### 3.4 Collective mobilization: the role of women's groups

Women's groups in the commune of Kpomassè play a crucial role in the collective mobilization of women to access land and secure their land rights, bypassing socio-cultural, economic, and institutional obstacles. These organizations provide spaces for solidarity, training and negotiation, but their impact is limited by insufficient resources.

In the commune of Kpomassè, women's groups bring together women around agricultural, commercial or collective savings objectives. 75% of the women surveyed are members of at least one women's group. These groups negotiate with the help of NGOs with the authorities for collective plots. They also focus on microcredits and agricultural training. Figure 2 shows the percentage of women members of women's groups by arrondissement surveyed.



**Figure 2:** Percentage of women members of women's groups by district

Source: Field surveys, March 2025

From the analysis of Figure 2, it appears that the district of Tokpa-domè has the largest number of women members of women's groups (83%), followed by Aganmanlomè 76% and Sègbeya 75%. As for the districts of Agonkanmè and Dékanmè, they have 67% and 69% respectively.

Women's associations have significant impacts on women, particularly with regard to strengthening land autonomy and purchasing collective land for market gardening, thus increasing their agricultural income.

### 3.5 Dependence on customary arrangements

In the commune of Kpomassè, faced with tenacious retrograde customary norms and a weak application of land reforms, women are developing circumvention strategies, in particular

through land rentals and strategic alliances with family, community or institutional actors, to access land. These approaches allow for temporary or conditional use, but they create economic constraints and persistent land insecurity.

In the study environment, land leases and associations emerge as pragmatic responses by women to the exclusion of patrilineal customary systems and the prohibitive costs of the land market. Customary arrangements and alliances involve partnerships with male relatives, heads of households, women's associations, often in exchange for services or sharing of crops.

Research has revealed mechanisms by which women use customary arrangements and associations to access land. These are, for example, low-cost customary rentals. In this type of arrangement, the women interviewed rent land through customary arrangements on the basis of a verbal contract, sharing 15 to 30 percent of the crops. They also proceed through family alliances for conditional access to land. Women negotiated with male relatives, brothers, uncles or brothers-in-law, to obtain land lent or leased at a low price. They cultivate these family plots, but under conditions such as the ban on cash crops or agroforestry. 38% of women use leased or loaned land for subsistence farming, covering part of their households' food needs. They depend on this land for their survival. These forms of the process are not without their concerns, including the insecurity issues associated with the lack of formal contracts. 75% of women using these arrangements report land tenure insecurity due to verbal contracts or unilateral termination.

### 3.6 Strengthening Environmental Resilience

Many cooperatives, particularly in the field of market gardening, are trained in agroecology and sustainable resource management techniques. This adoption of climate-resilient practices benefits all of the community's production systems.

It is crucial to note that this resilience remains partial and fragile. It is often built on precarious access to land (verbal loans, short leases). A sudden eviction of the landowner can wipe out the economic and social capital accumulated by the cooperative in one fell swoop. The resilience generated is therefore conditional on the permanence of access to land.

This Ivorian model has aspects that could be copied in Benin. Table 3 presents the models of women's access to land and the lessons of Côte d'Ivoire for Benin.

**Table 3: Women's Models of Access to Land: Lessons from Côte d'Ivoire for Benin**

<b>Comparative Aspect</b>	<b>Context of Kpomassè (Benin)</b>	<b>Cooperative Strategies in Côte d'Ivoire</b>	<b>Opportunities for Transposition in Kpomassè</b>
<b>How to access</b>	Individual access mainly via husband or family (usufruct). Difficulty of inheritance.	Collective access via group negotiation with land chiefs for loan, rental or purchase.	Support the creation of women's agricultural cooperatives to negotiate access to unused communal or family land.
<b>Safety lever</b>	Strong dependence on the legal framework (PFR, ADC) currently being deployed.	Security through the enhancement and social recognition of the work invested.	Combine legal support (procedures for collective ADC) and technical support for development.
<b>Bargaining power</b>	Weak for an isolated woman.	Empowerment by the collective (collective	Integrate leadership and advocacy modules into

		voice, risk sharing).	existing cooperative support programs.
<b>Impact on resilience</b>	Limited at the individual level, high vulnerability.	Strengthened collective economic and social resilience.	Make cooperatives a preferred channel for social security, microcredit and training programmes in resilient practices.

**Source:** Field Survey Results, June 2025

The analysis of Table 3 shows that the Ivorian model demonstrates that collective access to land via cooperatives is a powerful catalyst for multidimensional resilience. It does not just provide income; It transforms the social position of women, making them actors of their own development and essential contributors to the resilience of their entire community. For Benin, this underscores that land tenure security should not only be a matter of legal title, but also of strengthening collective capacities and transforming gender social relations.

### 3.7 Women's management of agricultural land

The analysis of local dynamics in Kpomassè reveals that the effective management of agricultural land by women is mainly carried out within the framework of collective micro-projects. These structures enable them to compensate for individual limitations in access to land ownership and to develop an organized and rationalized management of cultivated plots.

Women in the research community, on an individual basis, mainly access land through loan or rental and purchase mechanisms. Collectively, after the surveys, 62 per cent of the plots farmed by women's groups are obtained by oral loan from land chiefs or family owners, 38 per cent by rental.

The crops grown are mainly oriented towards market gardening (75% of the groups), followed by the cultivation of short-cycle cereals (maize, tomatoes) and legumes. The choice of market gardening is explained by its rapid profitability, its adaptation to small areas and its importance for food security and the generation of regular income. Table 4 presents the modalities of access to land for women's groups in Kpomassè

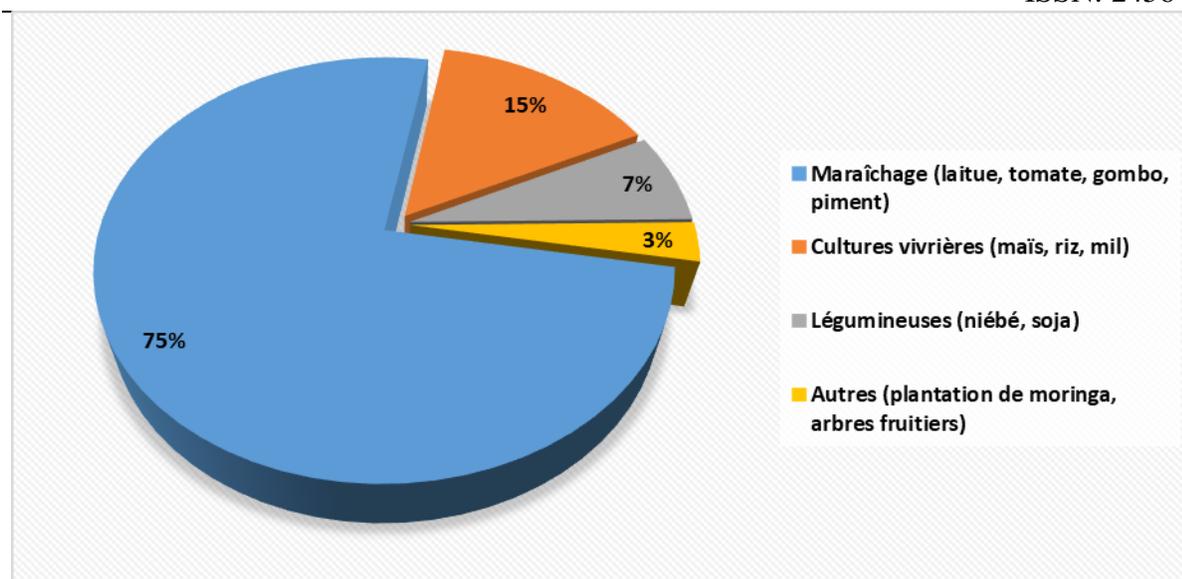
**Table 4: Access to land for women's groups in Kpomassè**

How to access	Workforce	Percentage (%)	Mode Description
Oral loan	13	62%	Predominant but precarious fashion. No legal certainty. Often for a limited time.
Formalized rental	8	38%	Verbal or written leases of 1 to 3 years. Slightly more secure than the loan.
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Source:** Field survey results, June 2025.

A reading of Table 4 confirms the high level of access to land for women. The predominance of oral lending 62% constantly exposes them to the risk of eviction, especially in the event of a change of ownership or increased land pressure. Only a minority (10%) enjoy relative security through the definitive sale.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the types of crops grown by the women's groups



**Figure 3:** Distribution of types of crops grown by women's groups

**Source:** Field Survey Results, June 2025

The analysis in Figure 3 shows the strong orientation towards market gardening 75%, which is a strategy for survival and economic empowerment. It allows for short production cycles and crop rotation, thus generating regular income and improving household nutrition.

### 3.8 Awareness and advocacy

In parallel with collective economic strategies, the women of Kpomassè and the organizations that support them are carrying out awareness-raising and advocacy actions to change the mentalities and social norms that hinder their equitable access to land. While collective land management acts on the symptoms of land inequality, advocacy aims to address the structural causes, which are deeply rooted in customary practices.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The results show that women's land resilience in Kpomassè is based on an adaptive logic rather than on a structural transformation of land relations. This situation can be explained by the persistence of patriarchal norms and the duality between customary law and modern law

The strategies observed are in line with the findings of Tchaou and Akindès on the ability of rural communities to negotiate their rights in hybrid contexts. However, in Kpomassè, this resilience remains fragile: the lack of formal property documents (ADCs, rural certificates) exposes women to permanent insecurity.

Collective initiatives are a lever for resilience, as Charlier et al. have shown. and Houssou et al., but they require institutional support. Women's involvement in local land governance structures remains marginal. Strengthening their capacities in land law and access to agricultural credit appear to be key factors for empowerment.

Thus, land resilience in Kpomassè is not limited to a resistance to exclusion, but reflects a social reconstruction of the right of use, awaiting legal recognition.

**5. CONCLUSION**

The land resilience strategies observed among the women of Kpomassè demonstrate a pragmatic adaptation and capacity for action in the face of customary domination and severe economic constraints. In the absence of direct access to property or secure formal titles, women effectively develop community mechanisms (groups, agricultural cooperatives) and relational arrangements (verbal loans, negotiation of alliances) to temporarily secure access to land and ensure food and economic self-sufficiency. However, this resilience remains precarious and insufficient to dismantle structural barriers, including inheritance exclusion and lack of capital. To transform this simple resilience into a real sustainable land tenure power, it is imperative to implement concrete measures: the effective popularization of simplified formalization mechanisms (ADCs, rural land certificates) through subsidized campaigns for women, the strengthening of their participation in local land decision-making bodies, and the development of a sustained institutional dialogue between traditional chiefdoms and local land authorities. state structures to hybridize rights and ensure land equity.

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