

# **Empowerment of Rural Women and Schooling of Children: Case of Sanégorifla in Sinfra (Ivory Coast)**

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## **Summary**

In the face of social gender inequalities, the empowerment of women reconfigures sexual roles and drives social change. This research is conducted with women in rural areas in Sanégorifla (Ivory Coast). The aim is to analyze the influence of the empowerment of women on the schooling of children. The study refers to the dynamic theory of BALANDIER Georges (1971). This quantitative research reveals higher schooling and the considerable involvement of the mother in the schooling of children when the woman is the head of the household compared to those where man is the head of the household. The economic autonomy of women therefore allows them to be a key player in sustainable development in their family and for the country.

**Keywords:** schooling, empowerment, education, woman, household.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

According to UN Women, women's access to decent employment contributes to improving their capacity for action and the patterns of distribution of family responsibilities within households. It also allows households to no longer live in economic precariousness (OXFAM, 2017). In most developed countries, girls and women are better educated, have a longer life expectancy, better jobs and acquire more rights to propel their social development (REVENGA et al, 2012). The United Nations defines the autonomy of women based on five main criteria. These are the sense of dignity, the right to make and determine one's choices, the right to have access to resources and opportunities, the right to have control over one's life, both internally and externally of household, and the ability to influence social change in order to create a harmonious social living environment. It is therefore on this basis that promoting the economic empowerment of women is above all promoting the full participation of women in the future of their society in order to promote sustainable development. The empowerment of women in short will enable them to have the capacity to generate sufficient resources, in a sustainable manner, in order to be able to meet their needs and those of their dependents. While ensuring their autonomy and their blooming within their family and the community, the autonomous woman also has the ability to save to reinvest in her economic activities and deal with emergency situations (VALLÉE, 2011).

Yet globally in the world, the improvement of the status of women is struggling to materialize. In fact, 70% of the 1.2 billion people who live on less than one dollar per day are women. Although they make up 43% of the global agricultural workforce, they own three times less land. Two-thirds of illiterate adults are women. In addition, they are responsible for 58% of all unpaid work. In developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, women usually work 12 to 13 hours more per week than men. Up to 45% of the poorest women have no say in decisions about how their own income is spent (SACO, 2013).

Particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, since 1995 the State has ratified all the international provisions and conventions relating to the elimination of discrimination against women. Paradoxically, two decades later, the situation remain the same: the living conditions of Ivorian women have hardly improved. On the contrary, they have deteriorated. According to a 2013 World Bank report, 75% of Ivorian women live below the poverty line. Moreover, studies show that female-headed households are on average economically disadvantaged. They find themselves in a more precarious situation than those whose men are heads of households (BLE, 2016).

However, women heads of household invest more than men in the needs of their children. Indeed, in several African countries, women, although they themselves have been, on the whole, victims of under-education; they perceive better than men the importance of education for the future of their children (PILON, 1996). We were able to observe that despite the widespread illiteracy of women heads of households in the district of Sanégorigla (Côte d'Ivoire); almost all of their children go to school (exploratory survey, 2019). The

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question that arises is how does the economic empowerment of women significantly influence the schooling of children?

It will specifically be a question of showing the sociological profile of women heads of households in Sanégorifla. In addition, this study will focus on identifying the social representations that these women have of school and finally describing their contribution to the process of schooling their children. The general objective of this study is to analyze the impact of the empowerment of women on the schooling of children.

According to BALANDIER Georges (1971) dynamism is an irreversible process. *'We forget that every society is constantly threatened by non-reproduction; That its structures in themselves, in their relationships, are loaded with events, some of which leave it within its limits of variation, others of which prepare the conditions for its transformation'* (BALANDIER Georges, 1971:91) With reference to the theory dynamic of BALANDIER (1971) The economic empowerment of women contributes to the transformation of discriminatory social practices. Indeed, when women engage more substantially in activities through the production of resources and increased economic opportunities, they challenge and reconfigure unequal gender roles and create new social norms. In addition, the ability of women to act as heads of households, a role assigned to men in traditional societies, is a sign of social metamorphosis. This social configuration places them as agents in the decision-making processes in the household. The instrumentalization will allow them capital endowments through the prioritization of the schooling of children in the household. According to BALANDIER (1971) all human societies undergo dynamisms linked to surrounding factors. It is these changes that create social mutations. Also, it is good to remember that they are of two orders, namely the internal dynamics and the external factors. Regarding the internal dynamic, it is this that drives the transformation. Therefore it is the system that submits society to change, it is the essence, the agent of change. This agent of contradiction thus kicks off the acceleration of social change; Balandier calls it dynamic from within. As for the external factors, they are the consequences of the internal dynamics. In the context of this research, the internal dynamic is presented as the empowerment of women. It is this empowerment of women that will involve the schooling of children. The external dynamic is therefore the schooling of children, which is linked to the empowerment of women.

## **I-METHODOLOGY**

### **I-1 Choice of locality**

The choice of the village of Sanégorifla as the location for the study was made on the basis of several motivations. Indeed, the natives of this constituency are of guru ethnicity. In Côte d'Ivoire, women (Gouro) are recognized by state institutions as pioneers of women's economic empowerment. Sanégorifla comes from the prefecture of Sinfra. In this locality, women are references in terms of growing and selling food. They are mainly organized in cooperatives, a lever for community development (SEHI BI, 2010). These peculiarities of the social field allowed us to have information on the condition of autonomous women in rural areas and the impact of this empowerment on the education of children.

### **II-2 Data collection tools**

The primary data collection for the study was done through a questionnaire. This questionnaire, which guided the entire survey phase, essentially focused on closed questions and was aimed at both male and female heads of households with economic autonomy. He was also interested in the children in these households. This choice of quantitative approach made it possible to analyze the impact of women's empowerment in relation to the schooling of children.

### **I-3 Data entry and analysis tools**

Two (2) software programs were mainly useful for data entry and analysis. These are SPHINX and EXCEL software. The SPHINX software was used to write the questionnaire and subsequently, it was useful for entering the survey data. The use of the questionnaire lies in the fact that closed questions lend themselves to coding and categorization. They were the subject of a computer analysis supported by methods of analysis of the quantitative data obtained using descriptive statistics used. Once entered into the SPHINX software, the data was exported to an Excel workbook in order to proceed with the purification of the database and then the analysis of the survey data.

### **I-4 Sample of the study population**

To determine the sample size for this study, which focuses on the analysis of the impact of women's empowerment on schooling, the following steps were taken. The first step involved the implementation of network sampling to have a database of households where women are heads with children of school age. Subsequently, thanks to an accidental sampling, it was listed households headed by men with also children of school age. Equally, we interviewed 10 households where the woman is the head of household and 10 households where the men are the heads. The criteria for inclusion of heads of household are as follows: having children of school age and exercising an economic activity to meet the economic needs of the family. A total of 20 heads of households were interviewed for this study. It should also be noted that beyond the heads of

households interviewed, the children of the latter were surveyed. The sample size is one hundred and seventeen (117) social actors. It's about:

- 10 women heads of households in the village of Sanégorifla;
- 10 men heads of households in the village of Sanégorifla;
- 97 children from these surveyed households.

The administration of the questionnaire took place during the period of June 2019.

## II-RESULTS

### II-1 Sociological profile of women heads of household

#### II-1-1-Origin of households

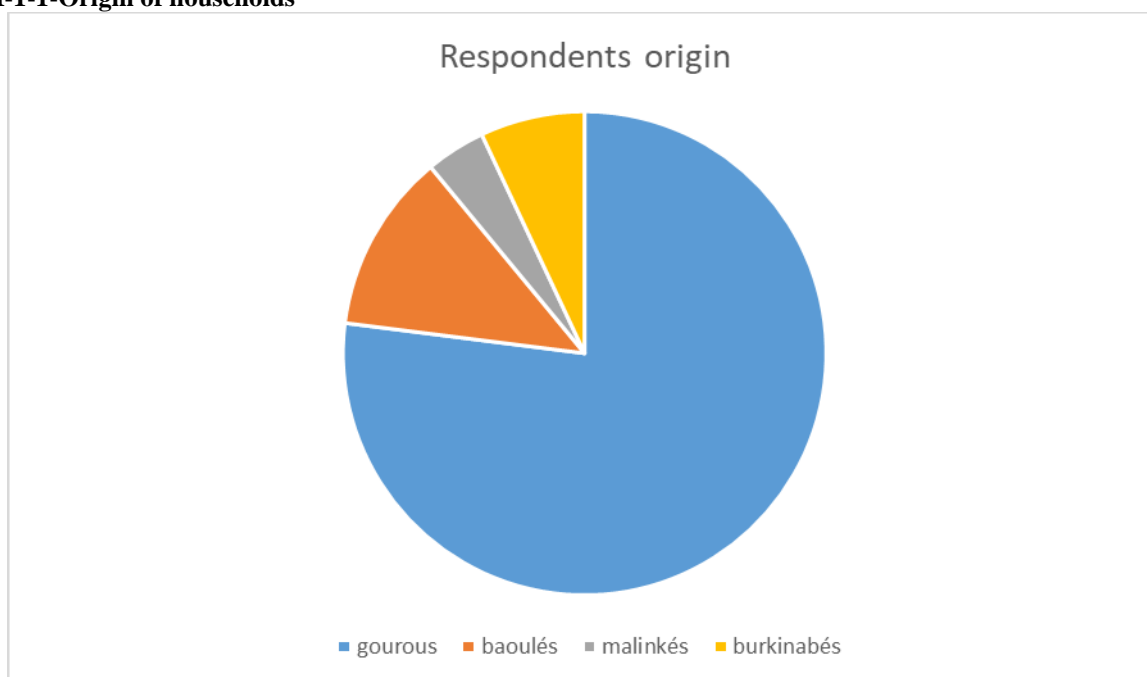


Figure 1 Ethnic distribution of respondents

Source: Survey data

Research reveals that the village of Sanégorifla is full of natives, non-natives and foreigners. It turns out that the majority of respondents are from the gouro ethnic group (77%), indigenous people. They live with Baoulé (12%). At this level, it is necessary to establish a classification of Baoulé living on the survey site. The study showed that the Baoulé Ayaou subgroup is part of the natives of the village. For the other Baoulé tribes encountered in this constituency, they are foreigners who have settled in this place in search of fertile land. In addition, the study reveals the presence of Malinkés in Sanégorifla (7%) and foreigners from Burkina Faso, specifically Mossis (4%). These last cities are mainly traders. The results of this work are in line with those of SEHI-BI (2010) who maintains that the Marahoué region, the region in which the village of Sanégorifla is located, is one of the most cosmopolitan in the country due to its ethnic and cultural diversity. It also presents itself as an example of successful social cohesion between the peoples who live there.

**II-1-2-Age groups of heads of household**

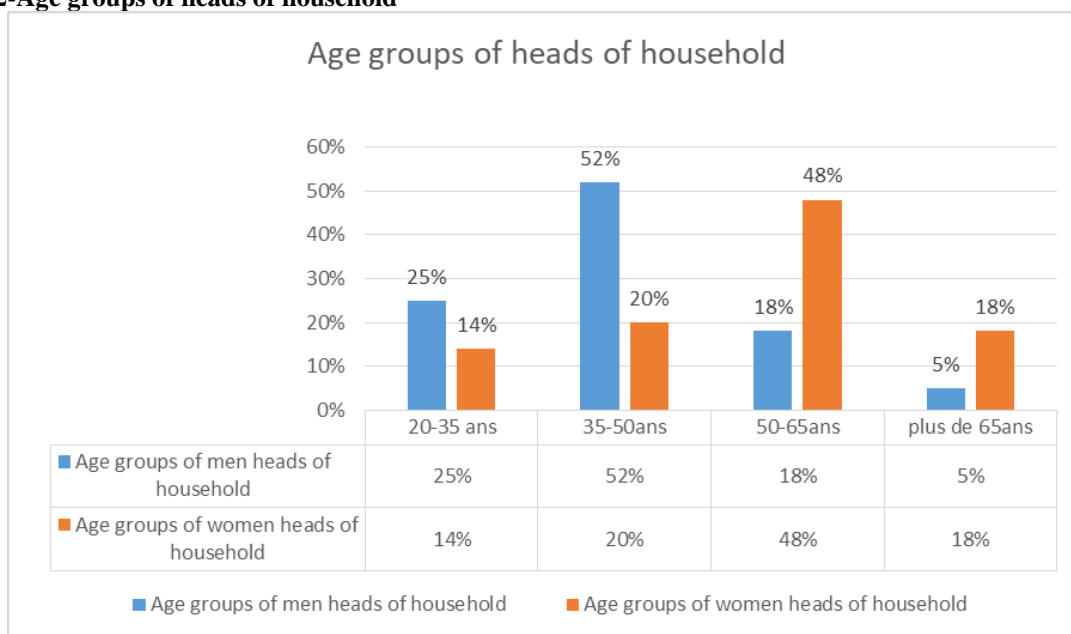


Figure 2 Breakdown of heads of household by age bracket  
Source: Survey data

The field results show that overall the highest proportion of household heads surveyed is young (53%). However, it should be noted that at the level of women heads of households, they are largely (48%) in the age group between 50 and 65 years. As age increases, the proportion of these women increases. Indeed, if women heads of household aged 20-35 are the least representative (12%), those aged 35-50 are close to 20% while those aged 50-65 reach 48% of these respondents. It appears from the data of the study that these women are generally of a certain age unlike the men. They have already had the experience of having been in a household where the man was the head. This implies that their status as female head of household results from a dynamic life course. The analysis of the age groups of heads of household in this research reflects the General Census of Population and Housing in Côte d'Ivoire, which maintains that heads of household represent a young population even if women heads of households are generally older than men (RGPH, 2014).

**II-1-3-Matrimonial status of heads of household**

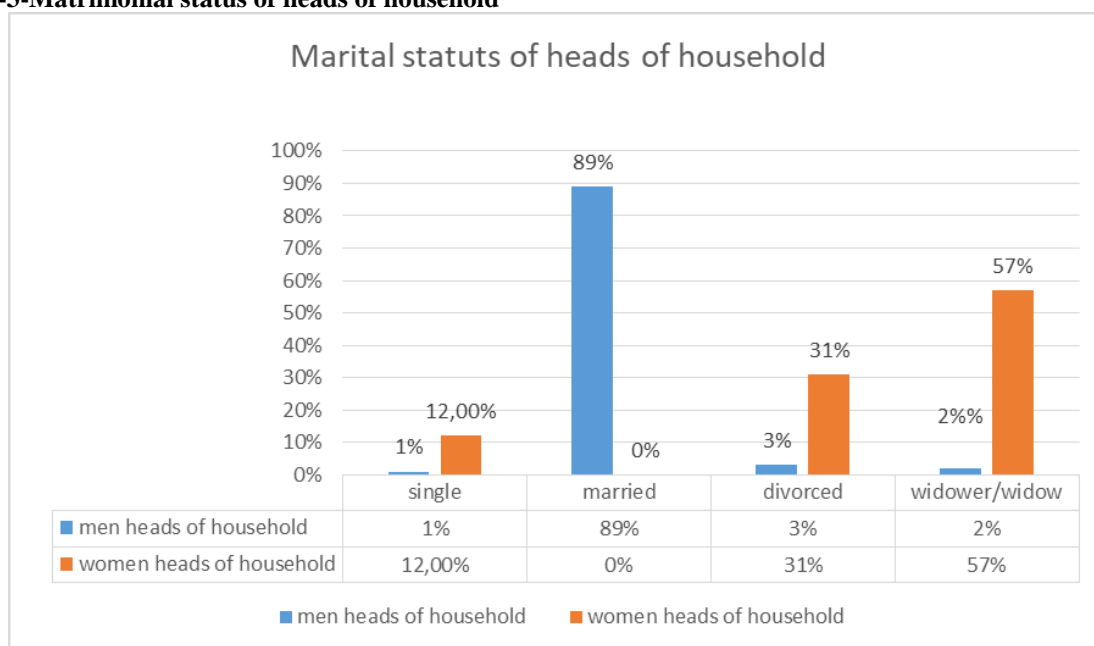


Figure 3 Marital status of heads of household  
Source: Survey data

In terms of the marital status of respondents, the lowest proportion of household heads of all sexes combined is single. It represents only 13% of this total population surveyed. Indeed, only 1% of men and 12% of women heads of households are single.

Two significant trends are also worth noting. The study shows that the majority of men heads of household are in a couple (89%). While women heads of households are mostly widows (57%) and divorced women (31%). These results reflect the advanced age of these women who claimed to have been in a previous life; in households where the man was the head. Their current status as head of a household is the result of certain painful events that have marked their social life, such as marriage or the loss of a spouse.

#### II-I-4-Size of households

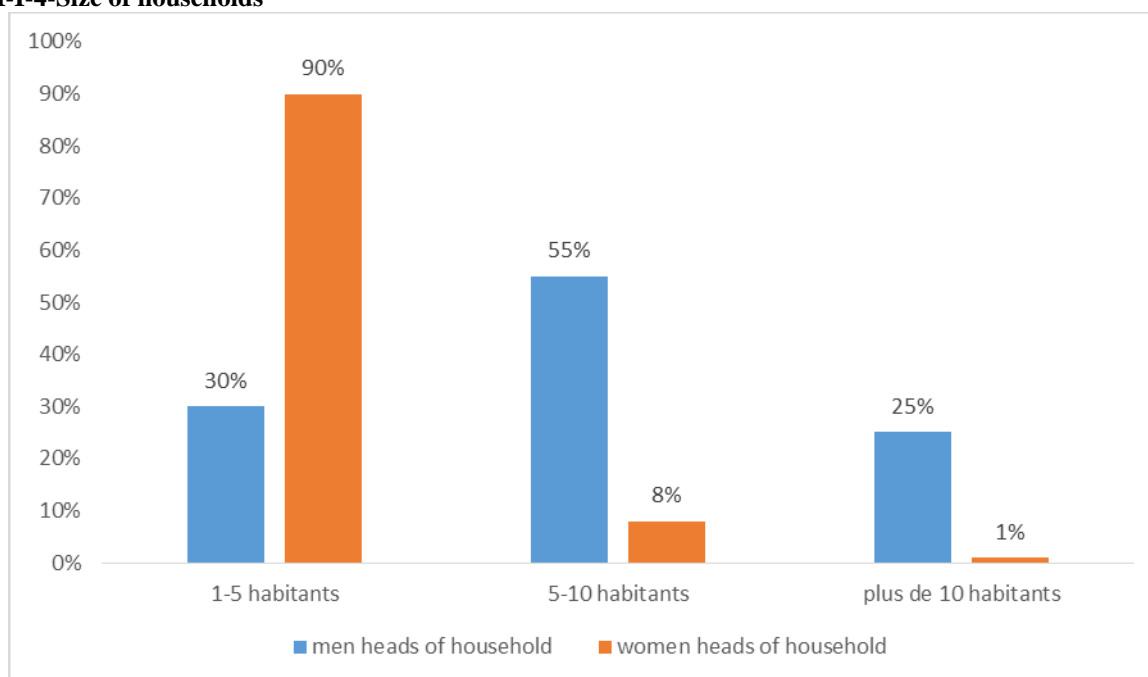


Figure 4 Household size

Source: Survey data

In terms of household size, research reveals that women households are small. Indeed, 90% of these households have a population of 1 to 5 inhabitants. Furthermore, 8% of women households have 5 to 10 residents. When, 1% of these dwellings have more than 10 inhabitants. Paradoxically, male households are larger in size. The majority of them (55%) revolve around 5 to 10 inhabitants and more than 10 inhabitants in 25% of cases. Upon analysis, the female heads of household in this research maintained that they had very few means to take care of a large number of people. It appears that the number of dependent children in female households is less significant than in households where the man is the head. It is in this same vein that LLOYD and BLANC (1993) also assert that female households are smaller because of income insecurity. Furthermore, according to research findings; BLE (2016) argues in this work that female-headed households are on average economically disadvantaged. They find themselves in a more precarious situation than those whose men are heads of households.

In addition, the study shows that the enlarged size of households is linked to the presence of relatives. It is evident through nephews and nieces and other relatives in the habitat. VLEI-YOROBA (1997) maintains in turn that even in Ivorian urban areas, the structure of households remains marked by the presence of kinship because of the perennial family ties in Ivorian society. Approaching in the same direction as our work, she explains that beyond the biological children of the head of household, the presence of nephews and nieces is considerable. In addition, according to the General Census of Population and Housing in Côte d'Ivoire (2014), households are large in rural areas compared to urban areas. They have an average of 6.7 people (RGPH, 2014).

**II-1-5 Level of education of heads of household**

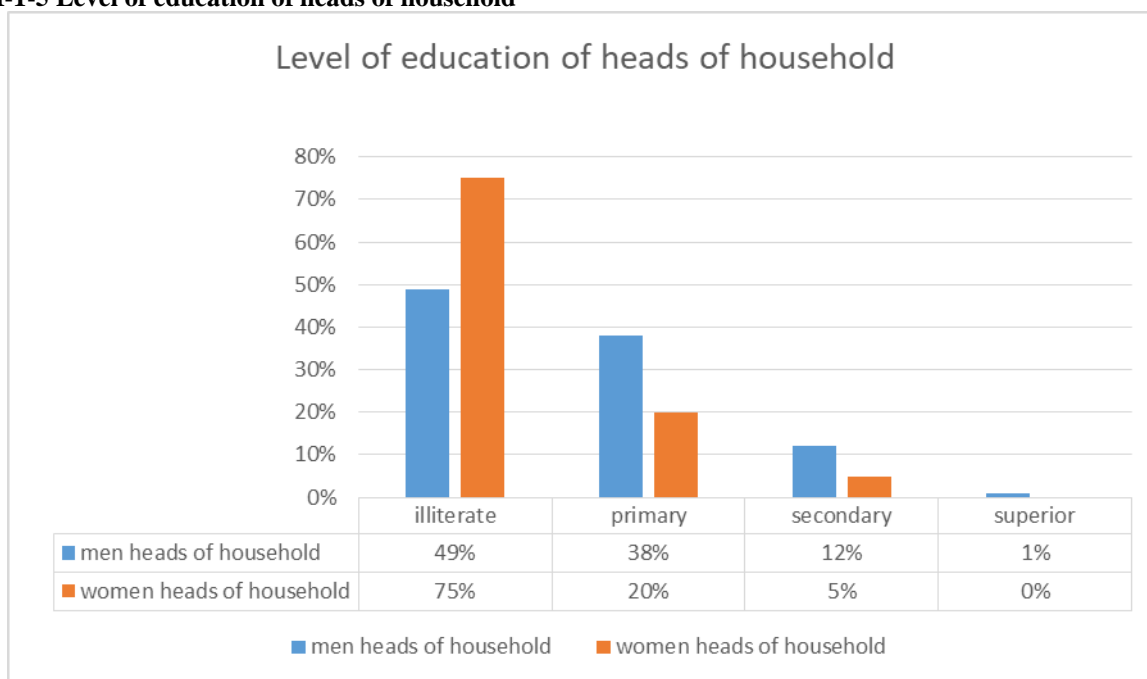


Figure 5 Level of education of household heads  
Source: Survey data

The results of the survey reveal that 49% of men and 75% of women heads of household cannot read and write. The analysis of these data shows that the school is a recent institution in rural areas. At the level of men, 38% have a primary level; 12% the secondary level and 1% the higher level. These results in terms of level of schooling are higher than those of women even if the general level of education is low. Indeed, the majority of these women cannot read and write in 75% of cases. Moreover, as the level of education rises, the education rate of these women decreases. This shows that 20% of them have the primary level and 5% the secondary. Moreover, none of them have the upper level. In short, women heads of household have a low level of education. These trends are the result of socio-cultural obstacles which are an obstacle to the education of women in rural areas. Indeed, in these societies, it is the education of young boys that is privileged to the detriment of women. This social reality is explained according to the collective consciences whose social position of women is restricted to the role of procreation, submissive wife, housewife and accomplishment of domestic tasks.

It is in this same perspective that UNESCO affirms that the schooling of young girls in Africa is even more difficult and therefore constitutes an emergency. Indeed, nine million girls aged around 6 to 11 do not attend school, compared to six million boys (UNESCO, 2011). Moreover, according to the School Statistical Analysis Report in Côte d'Ivoire, the education of young girls is still insufficient, especially in rural area where the situation is alarming. Indeed, nearly 49% of young girls in rural areas do not go to school. However, the question of Education For All (EFA) is a matter of equal opportunities and social balance (DSPS, 2016).

Still in the same vein as the results of this research, the General Census of Population and Housing in Côte d'Ivoire (RGPH, 2014) affirms that women are more illiterate than men. 63% of women cannot read and write compared to 49% of illiterate men. On the other hand, this gap in terms of level of education between men and women widens as age and level of education increase. In addition, this persistent gap between men and women is especially greater in rural areas. Indeed, if the enrollment rate is 58% in urban areas and 46% in rural areas; it is in the rural area that people with no education are the most significant with 52% of men and 66% of women.

## II-1-6-Profession of household heads

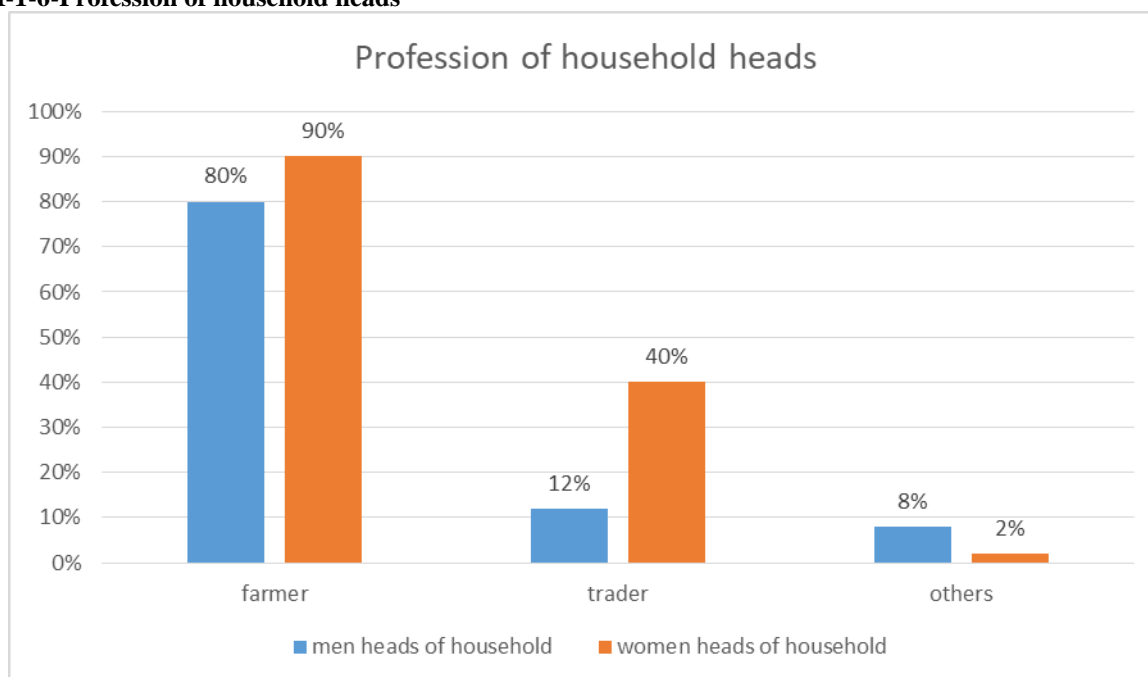


Figure 6 household size  
Source: Survey data

The results of this research show that the heads of households surveyed are largely farmers. Indeed 80% of men live from agriculture when 12% are traders. At the level of women heads of households, the analysis of their income-generating activities reveals two (2) main sources of income, which are agricultural activities in 90% of cases and trade (40%). Contrary to the men who do not combine these two trades, these interviewees are both farmers and shopkeepers. This versatility of women heads of households shows their dynamism. Regarding agricultural activities, they revealed that they practice food crops, market gardening and cash crops, which is not the case for men who limit themselves to cash crops. The fruit of these farms, according to them, allows firstly to meet the nutritional needs of the family, and secondly to satisfy a commercial objective. In addition, 2% of the women in this research are hairdressers and restorers.

According to the respondents, on a theoretical 24-hour day, they do an average of 12 hours of work and 12 hours off work. They spend an average of 8 hours of their time carrying out IGAs (income generating activities). Men, like women, also have a professional time of 8 hours. Regarding domestic time, women spend an average of 4 hours performing domestic tasks while men have an average domestic time of one hour.

To add to the dynamism of the respondents, according to a report by the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2011), women produce up to 80% of the food intended for household consumption and sale in local markets. As for secondary crops (legumes and vegetables, for example), she indicates that the contribution of women is even more important. The FAO adds that it seems that only women are involved in producing these crops.

Furthermore, in the case of crops such as rice, wheat and maize, which account for around 90% of the food consumed by people in rural areas, it is mainly women who plant the seeds, do the weeding, grow and harvest agricultural products and sell surpluses. In short, any agricultural transformation in Africa will require the participation of women. "Investing in women's economic empowerment is a high-return investment, which will have multiple effects on the continent's productivity, efficiency and inclusive growth" as explained by Kathleen Lay of ONE; an organization that advocates for the elimination of poverty in the world. The International Fertilizer Development Centre, an organization that focuses on improving agricultural productivity in developing countries, summarizes the concept as follows: "The African farmer is primarily a female farmer, able to feed her family and continent if it is given the necessary means" (NIRIT BEN-ARI, 2014).

### II-1-7-Level of participation in associations

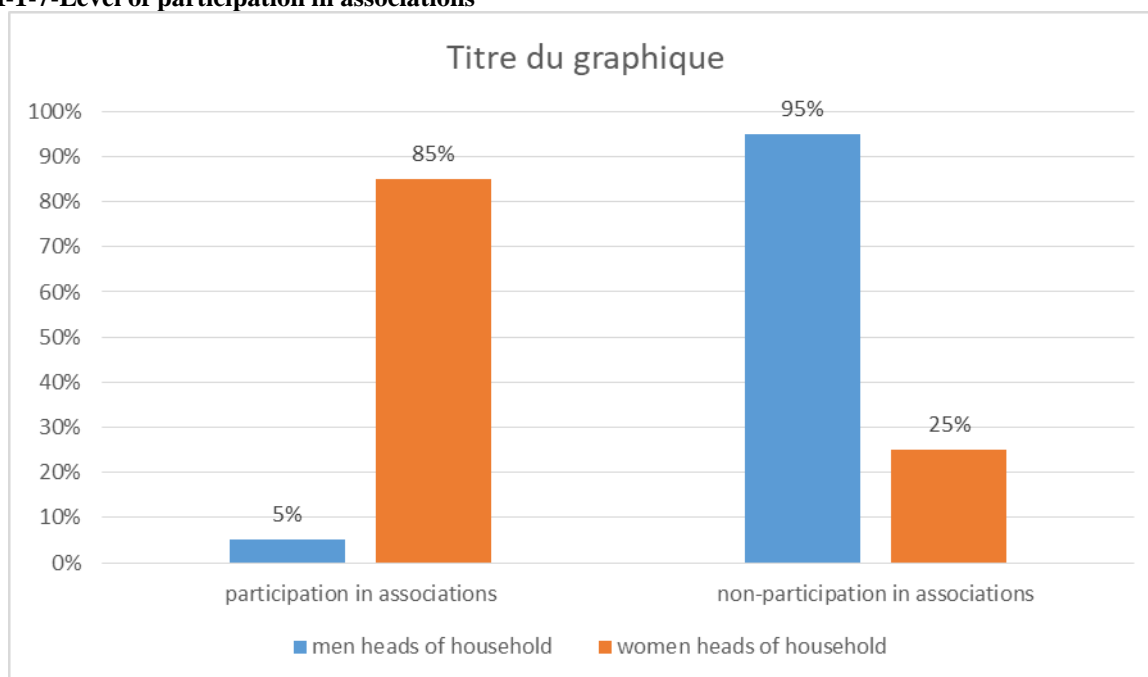


Figure 7 Level of participation of heads of household in associations  
Source: Survey data

Almost all of the women heads of households surveyed (85%) are affiliated members of an association. Paradoxically, men do not invest in these structures in 95% of cases. Based on the analysis of field data, the membership of women in an association is a community development strategy. Indeed, they have clearly stated that they are grouped into cooperatives for the cultivation and sale of foodstuffs. According to them, the creation of associations responds to a socio-economic need in the face of precarious income. These structures offer them opportunities to undertake and participate in activities to improve their socio-economic conditions. This social solidarity enables them to mobilize stable economic resources in order to meet the needs of their households. The associations are also, according to them, the expression of local solidarity, creating new social relations and manifesting the desire of these women to enhance the local wealth of Sanégorifla. In short, associations that present themselves as a social or alternative economy are development processes based on collective management. They are therefore creators of economic development in order to achieve local development. The study clearly shows that the empowerment of rural women is a key model for sustainable development. These works which highlight the strong involvement of women in the associative life of their community; thus attest to the great dedication of these women in thinking about and carrying out activities relating to the future of their community.

It is in this same vein that BEKKARI (2016) asserts that one of the best representatives of the local community is the associations. These organizations interact with a dynamic context and face new development challenges. Moreover, it is in this same perspective that MOUSSAOUI et al, (2014) argue that local development actions aim to improve the living environment and standard of living of a given community through a comprehensive approach which offers harmonious integration between the different sectors of activity (economic, social, political and environmental) while promoting local resources. It is for this purpose that the associative actor intervenes to strengthen its weight in local development strategies.



II-2 social representations of school according to household heads

II-2-1 School membership

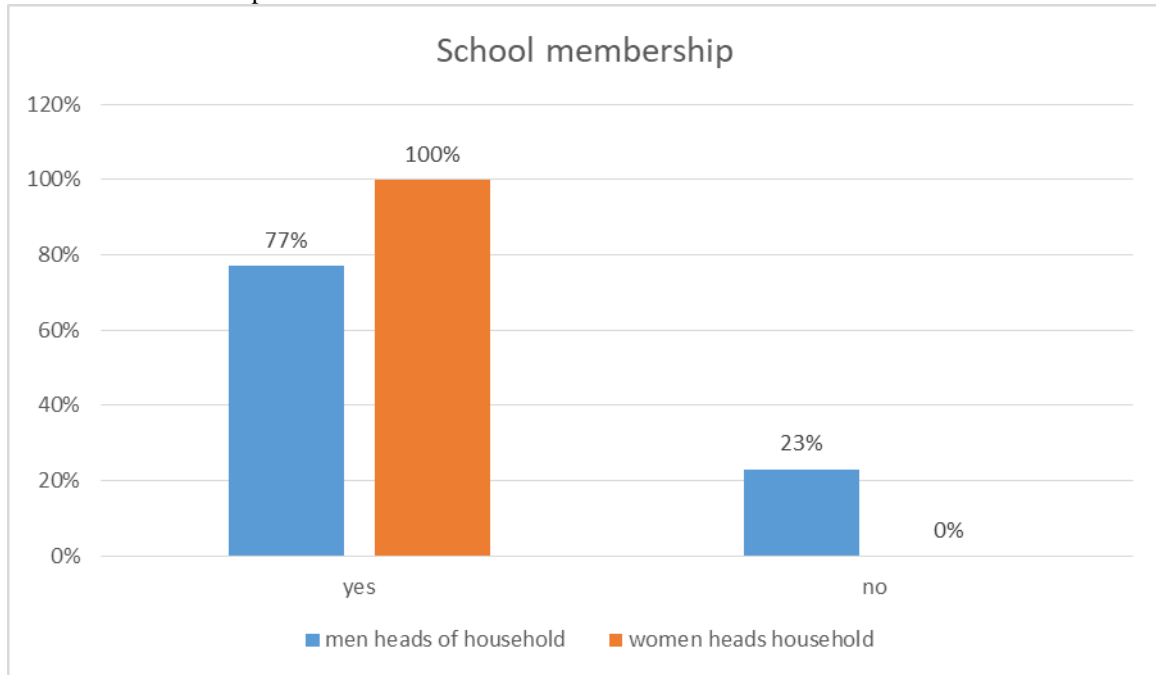


Figure 8. Distribution of respondents in terms of school membership  
Source: Survey data

The study reveals that even if the women heads of household did not go to school in their majority; they are all in favor of the instruction (100%). This reflects their strong sense of belonging to this educational institution. According to them, the school is an essential institution in the education of an individual. This unanimity in the face of education is explained through the idea that school is considered an obligation in social life according to the actors. Moreover, unlike women, men have a lesser sense of belonging to school. Indeed, 23% of them do not adhere to schooling. The reasons given are essentially economic. According to these heads of households, education is expensive.

II-2-2 Perception of the school

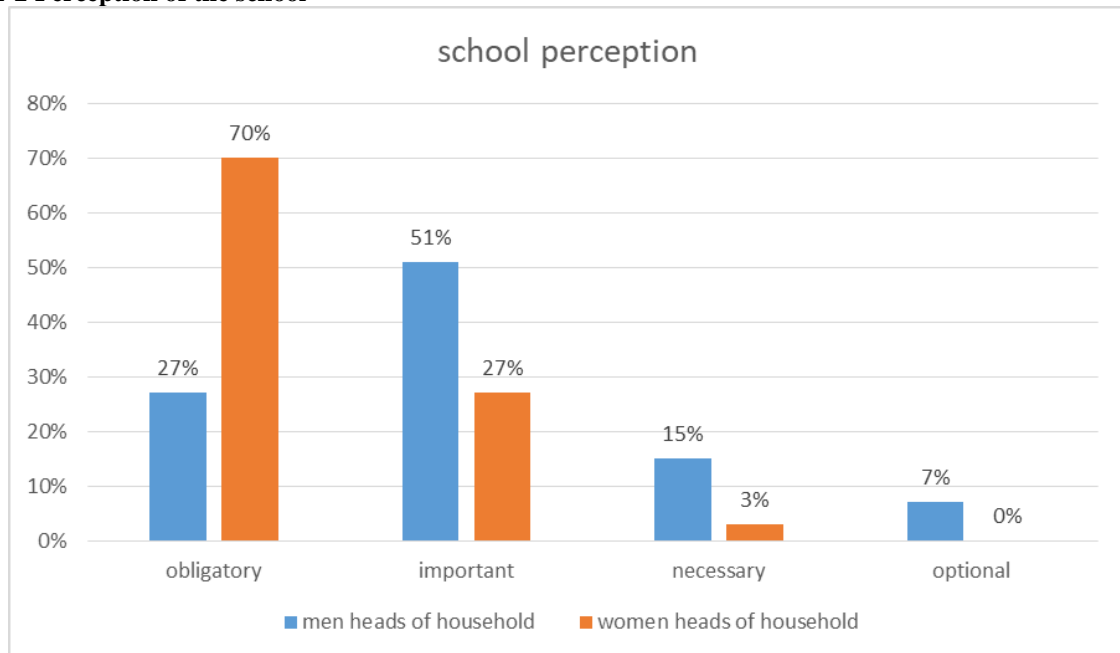


Figure 9 Perceptions of school according to respondents  
Source: Survey data

According to the results of the study, the majority of women heads of household (70%) perceive school as an obligation in the process of acquiring know-how and social skills. This opinion is paradoxical to that of men. Indeed, only 27% of male heads of household said that school is an obligation when most think it is rather important (51%) and even optional for 7% of cases. In view of the results, the school has a highly symbolic value in the social representations of women heads of household although they themselves are poorly educated. It is in this that PILON (1996) maintains that one can think that women having themselves been, on the whole, victims of under-education; perceive better than men the importance of education for the future of their children. Such a result obviously deserves particular attention and leads to further questioning of the situation and strategies of these female heads of households, knowing that this status covers very diverse family and economic realities.

**II-2-3 School and social success**

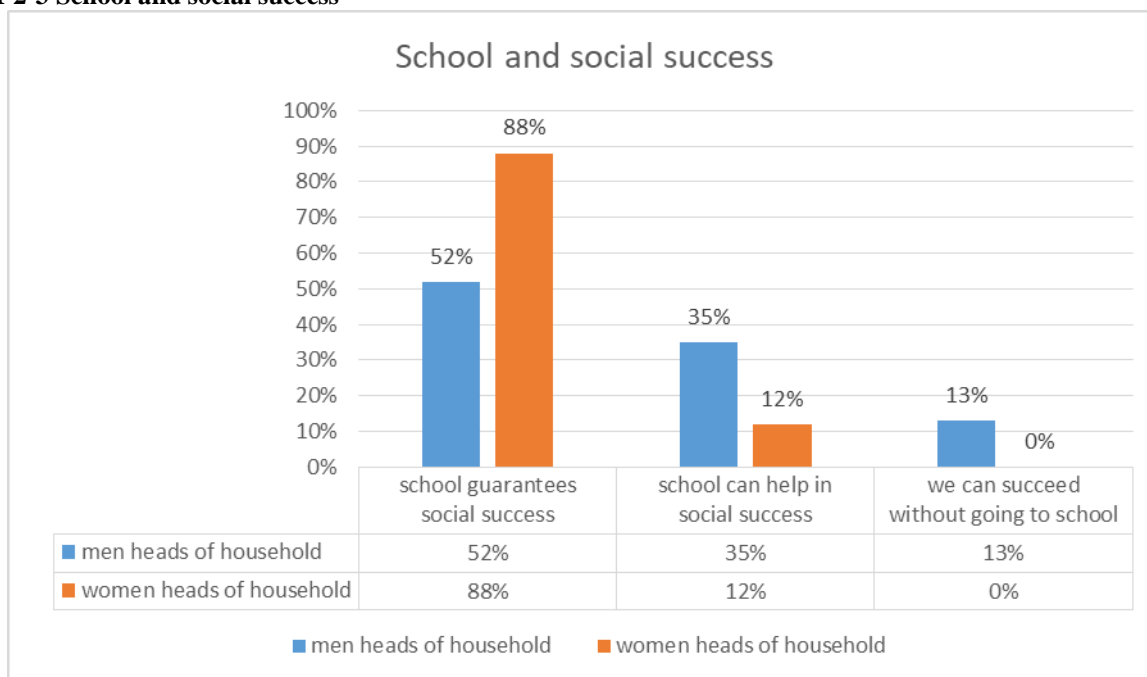


Figure 10 school and social success  
Source: Survey data

According to most actors of all genders; school guarantees social success. But this trend is more significant in women compared to men. Indeed, 52% of men affirm that school contributes to social success, while some of them (12%) affirmed that school can help in social success; when others (13%) think that school is not an instrument of social success.

As for female heads of households; almost all of them (88%) maintain that education is the means by which an individual can access social success. It therefore appears that for female heads of households, school is an instrument of social advancement. It allows the individual to access a valued social status.

## II-3 Contribution of heads of households in the schooling of children

### II-3-1 School and family responsibilities

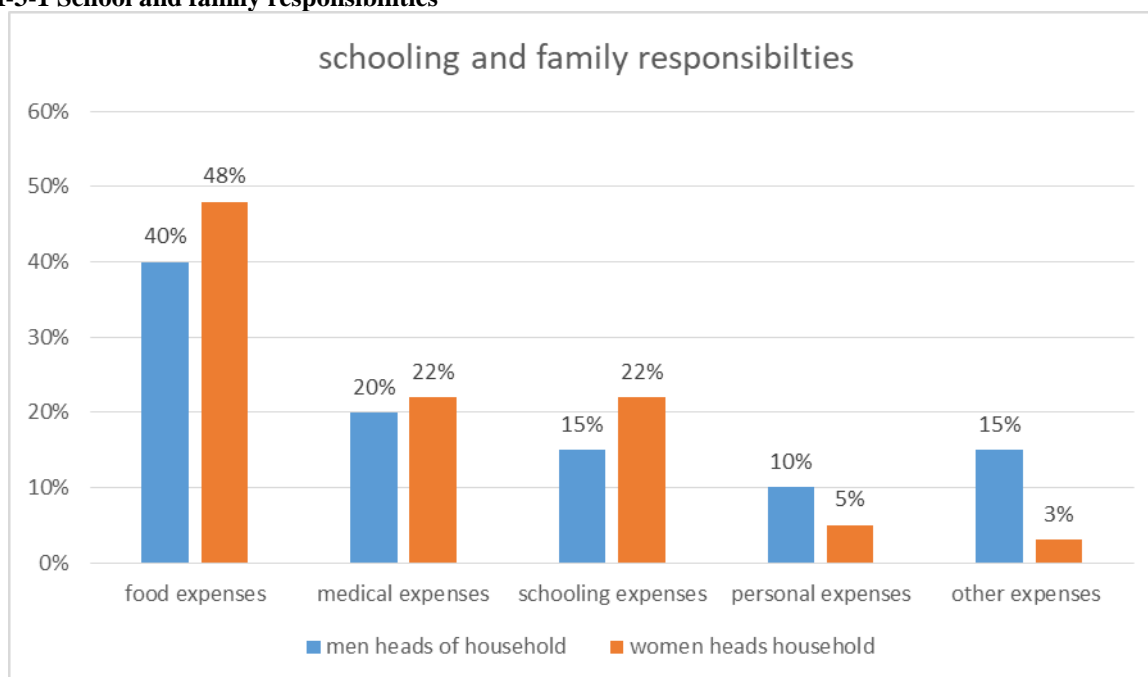


Figure 11 family contributions and expenses related to schooling  
Source: Survey data

The women heads of households in this research all have income-generating activities. Their economic autonomy allows them, like men, to mobilize financial resources in order to meet the expenses of their households. Instrumentality contributes in this respect to enabling these women to have the capacity to meet the family budget.

The results of this research show that food expenditure is the top priority in both male (40%) and female (48%) households. When it comes to school fees for children, the trend is quite different. In fact, among men, the family budget favors expenses related to possible health problems (20%) to the detriment of expenses related to education (15%), which is the third priority.

On the contrary, in households where the woman is the head of the household, the budget linked to possible health problems is proportional to the expenses linked to education (22%). The woman prioritizes both the health and the education of these children on an equal level. If the woman invests very little money in these personal needs (5%), it is not for the man (10%). In addition, households whose women carry out an income-generating activity have a better food expenditure score. This confirms the hypothesis that women would spend more on food and the physiological needs of their household. They thus contribute significantly to food security and the fight against malnutrition within their households.

Despite all this dedication, the women heads of households in this research testified to being subjected to low monthly incomes. Indeed, more than 70% of women carrying out an income-generating activity have a monthly income less than or equal to 50,000 FCFA, against only 28% beyond this interval.

Analysis of the situation of men shows, however, that only 30% of men carrying out an income-generating activity have an income below 50,000 FCFA.

This precarious situation of the women surveyed can be explained according to various logics. The first obvious reason remains girls' poor access to school education. Indeed, the widespread illiteracy of these women or the low level of education in this rural environment push them to turn to trades that do not require any qualification, at hand but with low income. The second reason is the difficulty of access to financing. Indeed, banks and micro-credit structures, out of fear and the rational calculation of the risks associated with investments, legitimately refuse credit application files that do not respect all the project study standards relating to the creation of a micro enterprise. Also, even when the files of these women are well put together by experts, the fear of the risk attached to the different sectors of activity means that very often, these women heads of households generally grouped in cooperatives see their application for financing rejected.

### II-3-2 Involvement in the educational monitoring of children

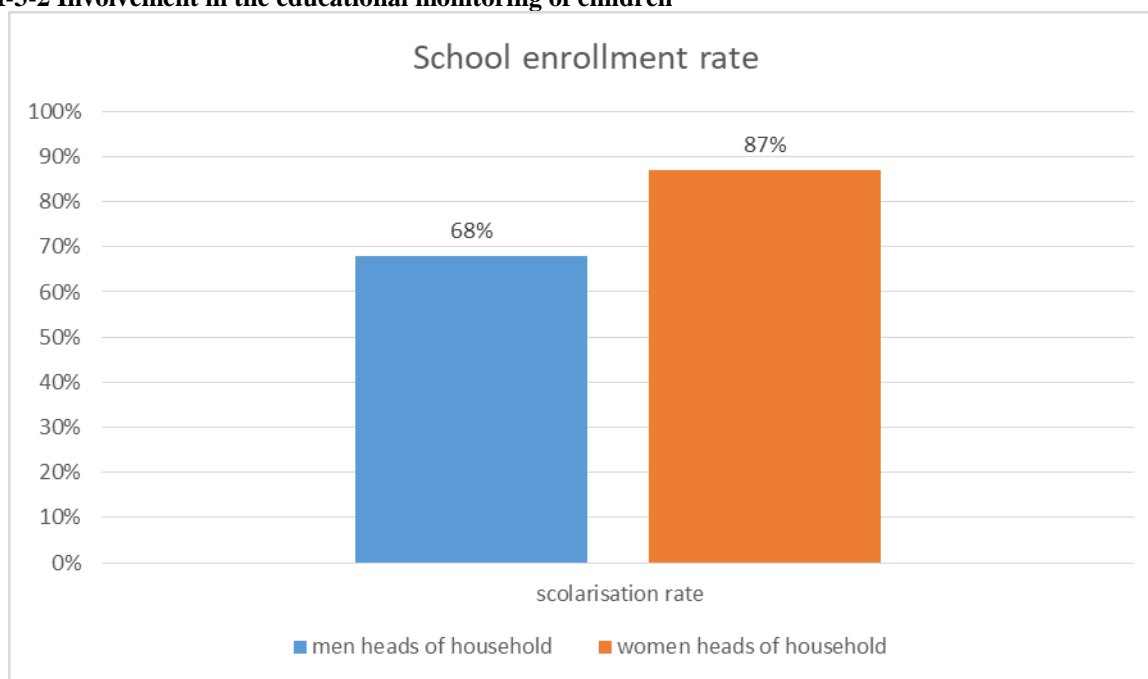


Figure12 Enrollment rate by household

Source: Survey data

The study reveals a very high school enrollment rate (87%) in households where the woman is the head of the household. Despite the precariousness of their income, these women make schooling for their children a priority. During the field survey, it was found that almost all of the biological children of these women go to school. In addition, the main reason for the cessation of frequentation of these children within these households is their desire to exercise a profession. There is also the case of those who have dropped out of school because of poor results at school or who are prone to health problems.

The other dependent children in these households who are out of school are helpers for these women for the preparation of meals and for field work.

In men households, the study shows a lower rate of schooling than that of women heads of households (68%). According to the actors, the logic of this social reality is linked to the many family responsibilities they face. The increased size of households, which contrasts with low income, does not allow them to meet the challenge of providing schooling for all dependent children.

The economic empowerment of women has a positive influence on the schooling of children within the household. Indeed, the analysis of the school career of children within the household shows that the schooling rate of children from households whose women carry out an income-generating activity is more significant than in households where the man is the head. It is in this same vein that LLOYD and BLANC (1993) argue that if female households are smaller and have fewer school-age children than in male households, the average absolute effort to educate them is almost identical ( 1.59 children enrolled against 1.66); and, for an equal number of school-age children, the average number of school-going children always appears to be higher in female households (LLOYD and BLANC, 1993)

**II-3-3 Involvement in monitoring children's schooling**

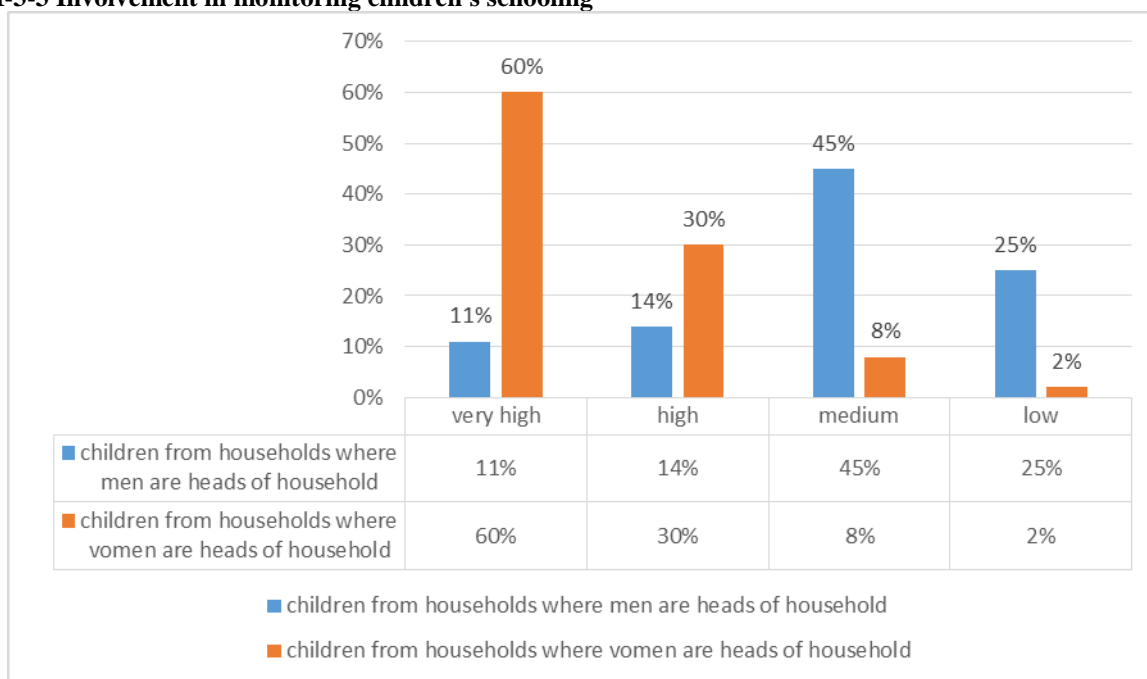


Figure 13 Involvement of heads of household in the educational supervision of dependent children  
Source: Survey data

These data obtained are the result of the administration of the questionnaire sent to the children found in all the households during the survey. In the majority of cases, these children expressed special attention from women in their upbringing. It turns out that women heads of household are more involved in the education of their children compared to men heads of household. Most of the children from women households maintained that the level of supervision and monitoring of their mother's education is very high (60%). Moreover, even if these children have admitted that the low level of education of their mother does not allow them to guide them in the school career, they in many cases call on more educated people for their school monitoring at home. This indirect strategy therefore allows his wives to solve the learning difficulties of their children. At the level of men, beyond the payment of school fees for which they are responsible, monitoring in terms of supervision remains passable overall. Indeed, according to the majority of respondents (45%) from men households; the follow-up of the father in terms of supervision is considered to be fair. In addition, 25% of these respondents admitted to a low involvement of the father in school supervision.

These results confirm the words of PILON (1996) when he asserts in his book gender and schooling of children in sub-Saharan Africa that several studies show that children are better educated when the head of household is a woman. This result concerns both the proportions of children attending school and the level of education attained. According to him, it is all the more significant that studies also show that households headed by a woman are on average economically disadvantaged, in a more precarious situation. Yet women heads of households invest more than men in the needs of their children, whether in terms of time, money or emotional support, and this is particularly true in terms of education. Their management of resources is more rigorous, more responsible (PILON, 1996)

**II. CONCLUSION**

This research reveals that the empowerment of women in rural areas has a considerable impact on the schooling of children. It appears that despite the widespread illiteracy of these women; the exercise of an income-generating activity allows them to meet household expenses while prioritizing the schooling of their children, which is a factor of social success according to the actors. Placing a particular emphasis on the economic empowerment of women means promoting the education of children and therefore the implementation of community development.

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