



THE MBERE WOMAN AND THE FACTORS BEHIND HER DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO: THE CASE OF THE KELLE DISTRICT FROM 1960 TO 2011

Oba Dominique

Marien Ngouabi University, Teacher Training College, Brazzaville, Congo

Abstract: *Inhabited since time immemorial by diverse and varied peoples, Central Africa is a great center of civilization. This civilization has always impressed travelers and missionaries who have set foot in Central Africa for the first time. Thanks to its cultural and human wealth, the population of Central Africa in general and that of the Congo in particular is made up of several ethnic groups which exert a remarkable influence on each other. First is the woman in the Republic of Congo in general and the Mberé woman from the west basin in particular, who has received several influences, both homogeneous and exogenous. Contact with external civilizations has produced a positive effect among the Mberé of Kelle. These different factors contributed to its social and cultural evolution. In the civilizations of the peoples of the west basin, the Mberewoman of Kelle district has been able to use his creative genius by helping to invent objects and useful elements of life. It is in this sense that the presence of the Mberé woman is very noticed.*

Keywords: Mberé woman, evolution, social integration, Kelle, Congo

Introduction

Civilization is the way of living proper to a people. Whatever the form of a society having known writing or not, this society has a civilization in the sense that it is based on several elements. The peoples of Central Africa in general and those of present-day Congo in particular have a distant origin, sometimes poorly understood and often described by the first missionaries who arrived in the Congo as part of the evangelizing and civilizing mission. In the district of Kellé where Mberé from the western basin have lived since time immemorial, women have shown themselves to be creative in various gainful activities. Certain factors in particular contributed to their evolution. These so-called factors of societal evolution favored the opening of the Mberé woman towards other climes. This development is a long process that has been underway for several decades. This evolution is the result of

almost good internal and external factors. Contact with external civilizations has produced a positive effect among the Mberé of Kelle. This article aims to show this long process from the essential elements that contributed to the development of the Mberé woman from the Kellé district of the west basin. At first, it is a question of showing the factors of the evolution of the Mberé woman and secondly, the main areas where the presence of the Mberé woman is very noticed. These are the main points that this research proposes to develop.

I. The factors of the evolution of the Mberé woman

1. Description of the study area

The district of Kelle is located in the western basin (Fig.1). It is limited to the north by the district of Mbomo, in the south and the east by the district of Itoumbi and in the west by Gabon. The current district of Kelle is located in the north-west of the Republic of



Congo (Department of the west basin created by law n ° -2-95 of February 18, 1995) (Fig.2).

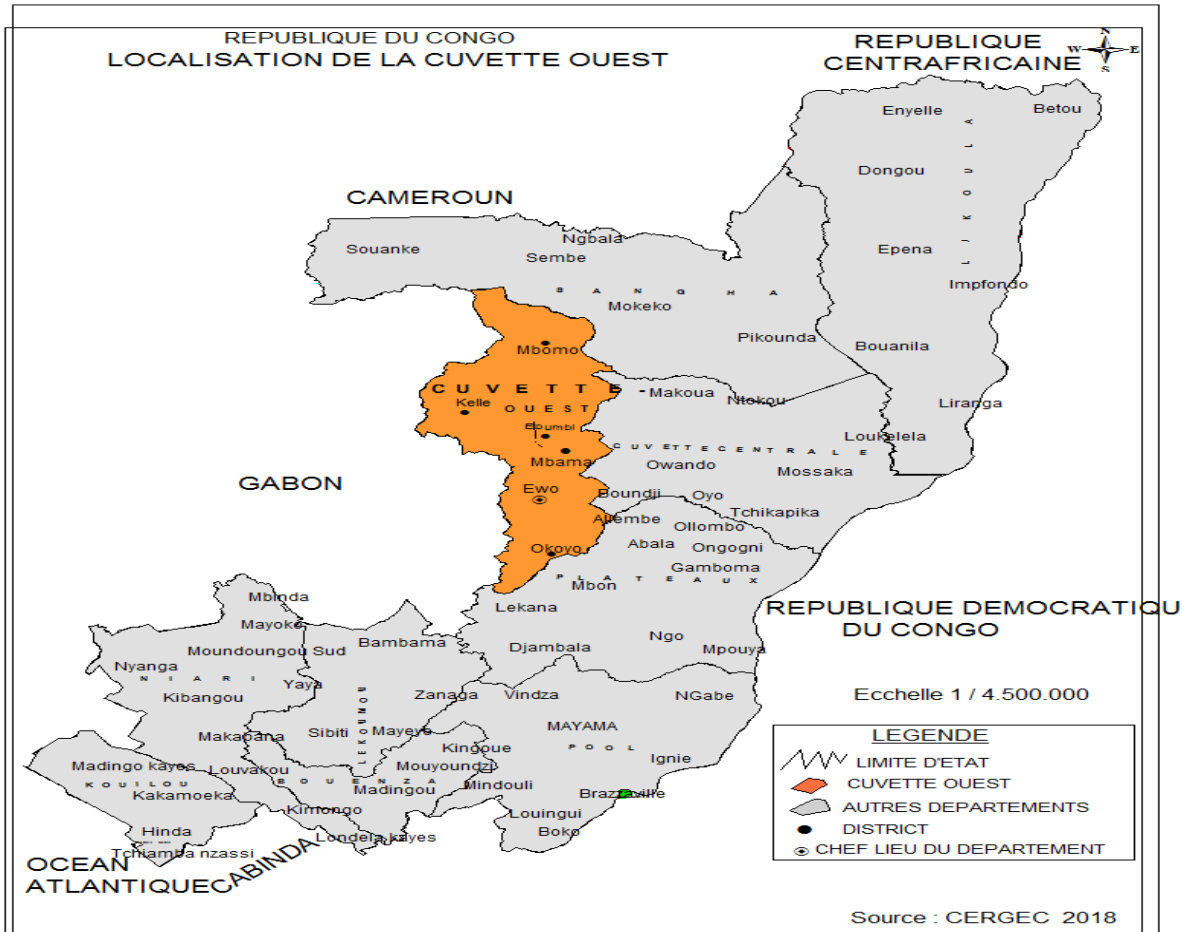


Fig 1 : map of the Republic of Congo

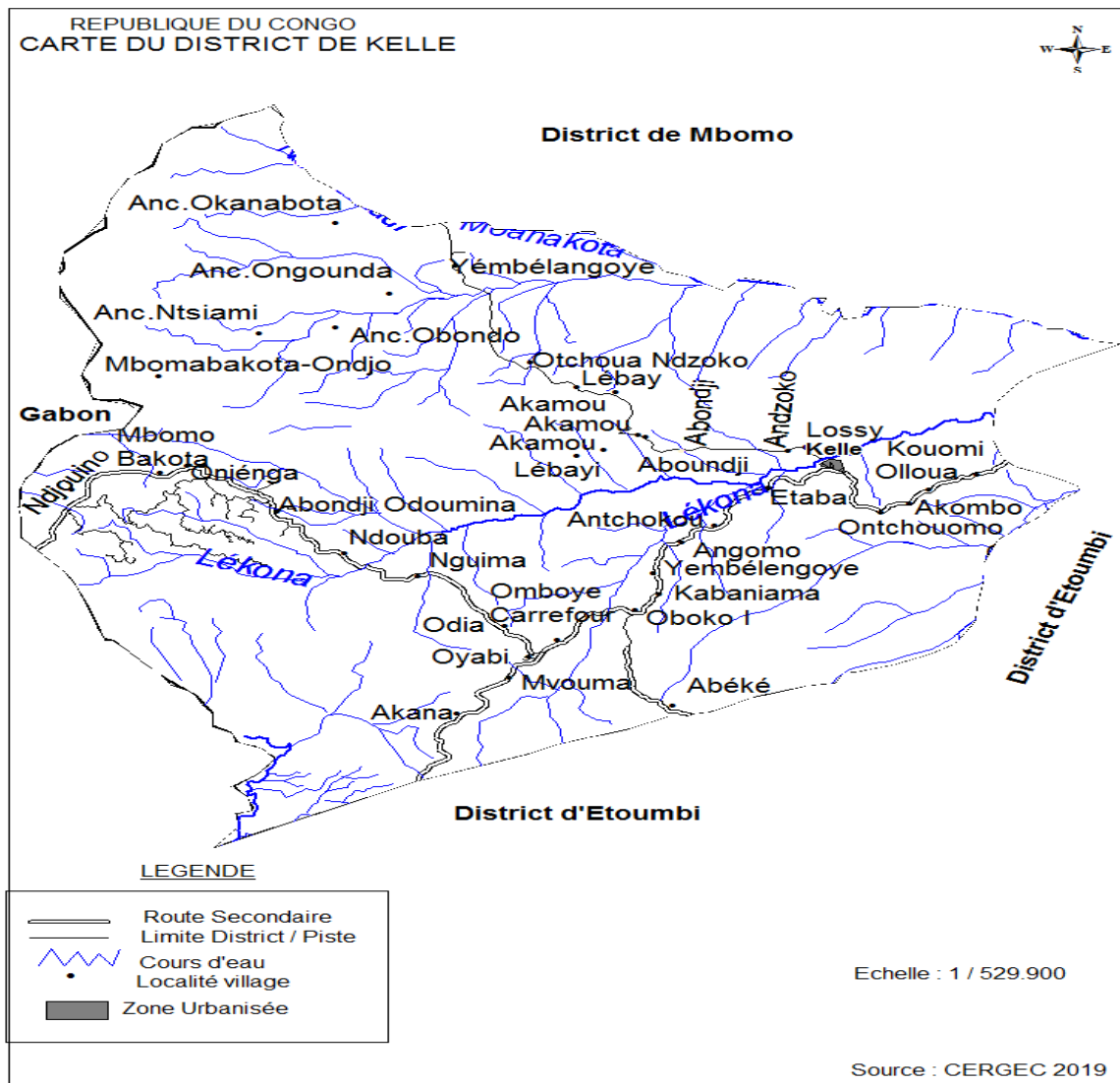


Fig 2 : Map of kelle district

2.

The school

The school as a place of learning existed in the district of Kellé before the creation of the latter in 1947. Indeed, since the middle of the year 1914, the sons and daughters of Kellé have known the school although being scattered in some villages. Because of this distance, access to school was not easy for girls, except those who were in the villages where there was a school, said Ngouono Cécile [1]. Thus, according to her, the girls missed their school education because

their mothers used them for housework: babysitting the children, the cadets while the parents worked. Moms told them that school was not for girls. This conception meant that in the district of Kellé, there were not enough girls who went to school, especially since the girl was considered as a being who had more role to play within the household. However, for half a century, schools have been everywhere in the district and there were also many educated girls.

2.1. The creation of schools in the district of Kellé



The school arrived in the district of Kelle in the 1940s. The first schools created in the district of Kelle are:

- on July 24, 1914, the school of Odzala and that of Ololi which, unfortunately, had not worked [2]
- On October 15, 1914, the Mbomo school was opened 65 km from Kellé upstream of the Lekouona (river),
- In 1948, the colonial administrator, under Robert Lejoly , chief of the district of Kellé, received a credit of 90,000 francs from the administrator, chief of region of Sangha-Likouala intended for the construction of a school in Kelle center. This school is today called " *Ecole Essengué* ". Here is the image of the place where the Essengue school in Kellé was built.

Therefore, on February 24, 1949, by letter telegram, the chief of the district of Kellé proposed to the chief of the region of Likouala- mossaka, the creation of the schools of Ololi, Yembelengoye, Kékélé , and Ndjoukou-Essela and he also reminded the question of the school of Itoumbi which remained pending, although the building and the furniture had been ready for a year. It was finally in 1950 that the first school opened its doors in Etoumbi and whose first teachers were: Mouangoli Pascal, Megot Gustave, Jean Pierre Nonault[3].

On May 13, 1953, by telegram No. 1499.E, the governor of the Middle Congo authorized the opening of the school for the children of the gold panners of the Longama camp . This school was transferred to Etsiami in October 1954.

Thus, we understand that the establishment of schools in the district of Kellé had not required the consent of the concessionaires , this taking into account their economic activities which require an abundant and dynamic workforce . It is for this reason that they had not made school their priority and those established should just prepare auxiliaries capable of relaying. This is why, before 1949 in the district of Kelle those who

had access to school were more boys for two reasons: the first one is what we have just mentioned above and the second because of the distance according to the history of the district.

In reality, it was not from 1949 that the installation of schools was effective in the district of Kellé, the school was no longer a place where people would just learn to read in order to relay the settler. However, they should now come to school to undergo full training for both girls and boys.[4].

Basically, we can say that school is the first factor in the development of the Mberé woman, because it is from her learning that her independence begins; it is there she will understand that school was a place reserved for all.

3 - Religion

Like the school, the church had played a considerable role in the education of the children of the district of Kellé, which had favored the emancipation of the Mberé woman. Indeed, it must be said that evangelization in Congo was the work of the colonizer. It was gradually

done gradually in almost all the districts of the Congo, from the end of the 19th century until African independence.

In the district of Kellé which is the object of our research, evangelization corresponded to the gradual arrival of the first Catholic missionaries. This is why Sisney Debouayi stipulated that:

- On July 8, 1947, the Reverend Father Martin Joosten founder of the Catholic mission of Kellé arrived in Kellé;
- On February 3, 1948, my lord Biechy arrived in Kelle. He was accompanied by fathers Raymond Defosse , Jean-Baptiste Chosfell and Martin Joosten ,
- At the end of 1953, the beginning of the construction of the chapel of Kelle with the father Destombe as master of work,



After settling down, Father Martin had invested in implanting catechists[5] in several villages in the district that we can cite:

- Ndjouono : Agnama Denis teaching 1955;
- Mbomo- Bakota : Akomékoli teaching 1955;
- Entsiami : Okô Olivier teaching 1955;
- Etoumbi : Pascal Oleka teaching 1955;
- Ngouoni : Pascal Oleka teaching 1955.

It should however be pointed out that these aforementioned places will become the places of predilection for nascent Catholic schools.

As for the girls, they will be interested in the church and catechism more with the arrival of the sisters such is the case of: sister Alice , sister Anne- marie Chanelle Upon their arrival, the sisters of the cross will create the first school for girls in 1961, they will get involved in the education of young girls by teaching them not only catechism , but also the rules of hygiene, cooking, knitting, gardening. For the sisters , these teachings should serve them not only for evangelization but also to keep the population in the church. This is how the first sister M beti P alessonga was formed.

Okouri Denise said: *The sisters occupied us Almost every day, it was a way of preventing us from being often in the field, but being with them to help them in domestic work and in the afternoons knitting*[6].

This contact with the sisters of the Catholic Church began to install in the heart of the Mberé woman an evolution . To this must be added their presence at the catechism . Today, the district of Kellé has three (3) nuns.(the sisters: Palessonga , Ngakoma , Ntsia)

As for the Evangelical Church, it did not really play an important role in the development of the Mberé woman; this for two reasons according to Pastor Miyouna Didier. The first reason is that until August 2018, Kellé did not have a church as such, it was just an annex

which depended on the evangelical church of Tséré [7]. This is what explains the lack of mberé women as deaconess. The second reason is that, given the distance between Kellé and Tsere, it took women from time to time to go there to Tsere for teachings and the ordination, the distance and the abundance of their homes created at level of district women selflessness.

It is on September 09, 2018 that the annex of Kellé really became a full-fledged church, with a resident Pastor , today this church has ordained a woman as deaconess: Yvonne Letambi

4 . The sport

We reserve the right to say with deference that in the district of Kelle, sport had never been a priority for the settlers who settled there. However, in Kellé, a class " C " football stadium was traced under district chief Mellet Pierre, assistant administrator of civil services, on December 8, 1955. Since then, this stadium, which moreover portrays its name (stadium Pierre millet de Kellé) shelters the meetings opposing Kellé- Itoumbi or Kellé- Mbomo[8].

As for the female sport (handball), this sport started to be practiced in the district very late compared to football . It is necessary all the same report that some competitions were among the students of the junior high school with the support of teachers. Rosalie Akobo states that:

the history of handball in the district of Kellé began from 1970 and in 1971 the team of handball Kellé had met the team of Makoua under the patronage of the current venerable Oba Apounou[9]

In conclusion, following the contact between the Mberé de Kellé and the settlers, several factors favored the development of women in the district of Kellé . .

II. The main areas present by the Mberé woman

Evolution is a change of ideas or personal conduct. Thus, the evolution of this people in particular of the mb é re woman of Kellé rests mainly on the fields such



as: agriculture, politics, industry, the administration to name only these .

1 - In agriculture

In the field of agriculture, Congolese women represent 64% of the active population.[10] They occupy an important place in this activity compared to men[11].

It is in this context that Yvonne Preiswerk wrote :

In agricultural work, the role of the man generally consists in supervising his working wife. The work of women is all the more painful because, in addition to work in the family fields, they are responsible for the hut gardens.[12]

Although still a traditional agriculture, with low-yielding agricultural and rudimentary equipment , the mbéré woman in the district of Kellé is no longer the same woman, who expects everything from man.

In the Mberé tradition, the felling of trees in a field was a work mainly intended for men. Nowadays, there are certain women in relation to their physical state who cut down trees in the forest, she only asks for help for larger trees , [13] Said Ekira .

In the same vein, Fatoumata Kane wrote :

Women are not only responsible for the production process, especially in terms of food crops of which they produce 70%, they are responsible for processing and preserving food, but (...) they also help men in field crops, handle the processing and marketing of harvested products. Sowing, weeding, harvesting, packaging are, by tradition, reserved for him. These multiple activities participate in the definition of female identity and social status.[14]

We understand that before 1960, the year corresponding to the independence of French-speaking countries, this work was strictly prohibited for women, it was the work of men. Her contact with other ethnic groups pushed the Mberé woman to do what was not before, and most of her production is intended for consumption and to

supply the local market of the district. This is for the respect of the world food summit which was held in Rome in 1996 which stipulated that:

the concept of food security as a state where all human beings have, at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient, healthy and restrictive food enabling them to meet their energy needs and their food preferences to lead a healthy and active life[15].

Also to ensure food security for the populations of the district of Kellé; the Mbéré woman learned to cultivate crops such as: purple eggplant, cabbage, (modern) spinach, spring onions and others, even if the production is not sufficient

According to Pauline Ewouri , the production of these crops is insufficient because many women do not get involved because of the road condition. She adds that it is the same for the cultivation of peanuts that production has strictly reduced since the closure of the food crops office " OCV ". Currently, it is difficult to have five (5) or more bags of peanuts after harvesting in the district of Kelle, it is done just to save the seed[16].

2. Industry: Manufacturing and extraction of palm oil

In the Mberé civilization, the extraction and manufacture of palm oil was an activity essentially reserved for men. Today, this myth has been broken and we met in the Mberé country in general and particularly in the district of Kelle, women who make the extraction of palm oil. It must however be said that, the mberé woman still uses traditional methods as well as her equipment to extract the oil[17].

To this end, for the production of oil, she takes still fresh walnuts and ripe the regime she left to stand for three (3) days and the fourth (4th) day, she cleans the nuts and their preparation . You have to boil them in water for about an hour, then let them cool and drain for three (3) days until you remove the nuts and keep the rest (fibre) [18]. The amount obtained is placed under the sun for half a day , after which the pot is set on fire with two (2) glasses of water. After reheating the fibers



over low heat, until you see the presence of a little oil in the pot, it is removed from the heat, depending on the quantity of fibers and the size of the bag, some of the heated fibers are placed on the bag, in the meantime, a pot is placed under the bag to collect the oil which will fall from the pressure while it will move its bag hanging on a tree and another piece which will be used to turn the bag. This oil is used for cooking, it can also be eaten with cooked tubers and yams.

Currently, this activity is practiced in mberé countries by both men and women. In relation to the amount collected, the woman can sell part of it at the local market in case she has grown up.

3 -In administration

Paul Desalmand , taking Simone de Beauvoir, said:

It is the work that the woman has largely passed the distance which separated the male ; it is only can guarantee him a concrete freedom[\[19\]](#).

We understand that only work ensures the woman her independence , this work can be administrative or any trade that the woman exercises. What is true is that, in our traditional societies , the man never accepted the place occupied by the woman in the administration especially. This is why Jeanne Dambendzet , Scholastique Dianzinga and Elise Thérèse Gamassa stated that: “the issue of the place of women in the Congolese administration has been a recurrent debate for several decades. Talking about women, more specifically about their presence and the place they occupy in public administration, gives rise to many controversies. Despite her growing success at various levels, she is still hampered in her professional aspirations by numerous obstacles”[\[20\]](#).

The analysis of the explanations of these authors allows us to understand that shortly before the accession of Congo to independence some women were already carried in government.

So saying, the Mbéré woman in the district of Kelle did not remain on the sidelines of this development in 1960.

We can say there that this Mbere woman of Kelle district was involved in administration Congolese for more than a decade. Almost in all administrations, there is a Mbéré woman , some of whom have occupied positions of responsibility. It is especially of:

- Feue Géorgine Okalassa, long secretary of Direction to the insurance company (ARC);
- Clemence Ossie, for more than ten (10) years Director General of Secondary Education (DGES) ; currently advisor to the Minister of the Civil Service;
- Ida Ngafouomo , Secretary General of the town hall of Bacongo , currently appointed itinerant ambassador to the Congo;
- Claire Assombo , medicine , head of nephrology department at the Brazzaville University and Hospital Center. Gisèle Ognami , secretary general of the district of Komono .
- The late Yolande Rose Daboudard , cashier at the technical school 1st of May, etc.

Apart from the names mentioned above, there are other women who have occupied positions of responsibility in private structures such as:

- Tilde Douma, chief of staff at Airtel;
- Gaëlle Jaria Yama, Manager customers to the bank Congo of habitat;
- Ella Ombaka , branch manager at the Postal Bank of Congo.

Thus, we can see that in the administrative field, the Mbere woman of the district of Kellé fights in the society in order to have a place in the management of the affairs of her country, like the other congolese Mbere women want to bring their stone to the building.

4 - In the political field

According to Félie Addley Mfina , “the political life of a people is the set of existential activities relating to the functioning of the state and the exercise of power over the various problems connected with it and the actors who animate. It takes place in a specific space and time and is organized around built



issues or under construction by actors whose games are structured by written or unwritten rules”.

For Rose Makita, “in Congo, the political involvement of women was very late, but quite remarkable in view of the actions carried out within women's organizations which emerged from the 1960s. If the involvement of Congolese women to politics had been delayed it is simply because in our country before our independence, few women were interested in this field. She also perceives that the convention of the rightswomen in politics was still recent[21].

Paul Desalmand stipulated that “it was on December 20, 1952, that the general assembly of the United Nations Organization, adopted by an impressive majority, the convention on the political rights of women. It is therefore the first instrument of international law which has as its object the recognition and protection of women worldwide.[22].

After spending several decades outside of politics, the Mberé woman began to take an interest in political life. They have realized that they constitute an essential component of society and therefore a human source that political leaders must not ignore. This awareness led to the Mberé woman's desire to create mutual associations. The woman told herself that her place was not only at home to educate the children, but she, like the others, could also access parliament. For the latter, household chores will never prevent her from accomplishing certain political tasks, contrary to the thinking of men.

In a political document titled Women Testify, stipulate that:

the women have emancipated the role of men and traditional cultural materialvalues in the same time. They questioned the priorities of the life of a politician. The household chores that some women used to assume before entering parliament were taken care of

by husbands or partners when they became parliamentarians[23].

This group of parliamentarian'swomen think that in the African culture, men find it difficult to accept that their wives occupy positions of responsibility. It is a frequent cause of disputes within households. A politician woman must organize herself in such a way as to reconcile her political, family and professional actions.

It must be said that the fact for her to take part in political activities does not in any way prevent her from knowing how to take care of her house, no, it would just be necessary to have a way of doing it.

Therefore, the participation of the Mberé woman in the political life in the country, become quite important under the reign of President Denis Sassou Nguesso II where we are witnessing a real commitment of the Mberé woman. We can cite for example:

- Doctor Claire Assambo who was a Senator and was replaced by the present Christine Ndzokevouka;
- Obele Antoinette, departmental councilor and even the one who had tried twice to seek her place in parliament , but without success. The late Rose Yolande Daboudard [24]. The latter had headed for years the section of the mother association Antoinette Sassou Nguesso (AMAS) of Ouenzé , she was president of the association “ lekoua a mbua ” which means: helping each other. This is what Paul Desalmand said we quote :

“Both for her personal happiness and for the development of the state, it is necessary that women participate in the political life of the country; in doing so, it only conformed to African tradition. He is saying that "it must also fits into the modern world of work; there is no real independence for her without the exercise of a profession ” [25].

Basically, the constitution of 2002 in its article 8, in particular in the second paragraph, stipulates that:



“the woman has the same rights as the man; the law guarantees and ensures her promotion and her representativeness to all political, elective and administrative functions.[\[26\]](#)”

5 - In the socio-economic field

Mfina Félie said that: “concerning the economic implication, it should be said that in collaboration with public and private bodies , the ministry for the promotion of women and the integration of women in development has opened women's funds in several localities of the country. In these, women received aid and loans which enabled them to embark on economic activities. This empowerment policy has enabled some women to take charge, to participate in household , family and community management. [\[27\]](#)”.

This implication of the ministry pushed certain Mberé women to learn the small trades through certain associations such as: sewing, hairdressing, hotel trade , all this so that it is also able to take part in the exchanges of the house. To this, we add the list of Mberé women civil servants in the public service as well as in the private sector, they contribute and participate in household and family management; all this is to ensure their independence.

Regarding trade, some Mberé women exercise this activity, having agents under their supervision. “We can cite the case of Lisa mode establishments”. She says that in her establishments, she has one hundred (100) agents. Apart from that emerging in this area, there are others in the small trade in the market (sale of food, clothes and many other items) ”. For example, in Mikaloumarket, said Lucienne Etoko, there are ten Mberé women”.

The education sector as a whole has experienced very significant quantitative development . Indeed, a good number of Mberé women have integrated the Congolese education system from preschool to secondary; Mberé women are found in almost all cycles.

Still on the social side, it is the choice of spouse today; that choice is no longer the parents, the Mberé woman chooses herself her husband especially those who went to school.

6. In the cultural field

Jeanne Dambendzet stipulated that “in Congo, women have distinguished themselves throughout their history by the tenacity of their commitment to assert their cause, in building a better society. To do this, she found in consecration to the various fields of cultural expression, the way par excellence of their affirmation and of equality. They continue by saying that: “after independence, from 1960 to 1965, only a few rare names emerged, including Joséphine Bijou and Marie Bella; this feminine absence from the music scene is easily explained, since the musical career was considered as an immoral domain for women. We preferred other trades for nobles ”.

Thus, nowadays, the torch lit by Marie Bella of the West Basin in the district of Okoyo precisely Yaba village is maintained by the famous Ossièli called the “Reine Gega ” of the traditional group Mbere-Junior. This singer lady transformed and modernized the dance “Leguké ”, she proved to men that the profession of music was not only to men, the girl also could tie her life to the musical career.

Conclusion

In view of the above, it should be noted that the Mberé woman attached very great importance to the education of the girls, this to prepare them for a happy marriage tomorrow. Even today, although turned towards modernity, the Mberé woman in the district of Kelle continues to take from nature the food necessary for her survival and that of her family through activities such as: agriculture, breeding, fishing, gathering. Its evolution has been considerable with the arrival of modernity which has upset a social structure pre-existing for many years. However, this modernity has brought both positive and negative judgments.

A cknowledgements



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02	Nonault Jean Pierre	54 years	Peasant	The creation of schools in Kellé
03	Okourou Denise	74 years old	household	Role of religious sisters
04	Hiyouna Didier	55 years old	pastor	The history of the evangelical church
05	Akobo Rosalie	65 years	retirement	Sport: handball
06	Ekira Mikaëlle	42 years old	household	Cassava manufacturing and sales
07	Ewori Pauline	48 years old	household	Manufacture of fishing baskets and agriculture
08	Mbongo Marie	42 years old	household	Local wine making
09	Okanopassi Vicky	56 years	household	Oil extraction and manufacturing

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		old		
10	Makila Rose	48 years old	Woman house agent	Mberé woman in the Congolese administration
11	Obelected Antoinette	60 years	Retirement	Mberé woman and political life