

Gender, Land Tenure and Agrarian Production Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

This article examines in historical perspective how gendered land tenure systems have contributed to shaping, and have in turn been shaped by, agrarian production and reproduction systems and how this has worked to the disadvantage of women in terms of their livelihood choices and outcomes and their position in agrarian societies. It is argued that contemporary challenges to the health of Africa's agrarian production systems have gender implications which are not sufficiently recognized, either in the literature or in policymaking. This stems from the fact that the complexities of women's positions and contributions to agrarian production and reproduction, since before the colonial period, are often not recognized and, therefore, their influence on long-term processes, such as capital accumulation and proletarianization of rural life, are not accounted for. The article provides a framing of the linkages between gendered land tenure and changing agrarian production and reproduction systems and examines two contemporary land tenure issues which illustrate the impacts of gender biases in land and agrarian policies.

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Introduction

Central to the poor record of rural development in much of sub-Saharan Africa is the long-term neglect and decline of small holder agriculture (Berry, 1984; Moyo, Yeros & Jha, 2013; Yngstrom, 2001). Agriculture dominates in its contribution to gross domestic product, employment, the way of life and material and non-material cultures of the majority of countries and people, and continues to be the main livelihood activity of the majority of poor people in Africa. The momentous changes in land relations since the colonial period as a result of colonial economic policies and legal engineering have also played a central role in the nature of rural production and reproduction and in the fortunes of rural men and women. While land tenure is not the sole factor shaping livelihoods in agrarian economies—and the literature acknowledges the pivotal role of other factors—its fundamental role makes it useful to isolate and analyze. This is especially necessary at a time when agriculture is back in the policy and research limelight after decades of neglect, when there are discussions about Africa's agrarian future, and when another scramble for land in Africa is underway.

An issue which has been in and out of the debates about agrarian systems and land tenure, without ever taking centre stage or receiving consistent policy attention, is the gendered division of labour in production and reproduction and in the control of productive resources, and its role in women's subordination and survival challenges. There have been efforts in the literature on gender and agriculture to resist the underestimation of women's involvement in market production in agriculture. This has involved debunking the notion of a gender-based dualism in African agriculture made up of a low technology, low productivity subsistence food production sector belonging to women and a high productivity, modern technology cash crop sector involving men (Whitehead, 1990, 1991). With evidence pointing to the congruence of conditions in export agriculture and food production in any one period, this is an important policy issue. Even more telling, the dichotomy between cash and food crops is not fixed, and the cultivation of both deploys a range of technologies. As Whitehead (1990) points out, women's precise roles

in agricultural production need to be better understood in a wider context of historical processes of commoditization.

In recent debates about the nature of the new scramble for Africa, which is manifested by the exponential growth of land markets and extensive land grabbing by old and new actors, the gender dimensions have once again been largely missing. This is because the analysis has often focused on the global, with a tendency to assume that all small-holders are uniformly affected irrespective of gender, class and kinship status. Furthermore, there is a tendency not to discuss the state of land tenure prior to the deals and also to ignore the sexual division of labour in production and reproduction and its implications for women's and men's entitlements and control of resources.

And yet, there is a long tradition of research which has drawn attention to these issues, particularly to the gendered nature of the land tenure systems, the sexual division of labour which underpins women's unpaid labour and the low returns on their paid labour. These issues, together with gender biases in agricultural and rural development policy, have been responsible for both rural underdevelopment and its gendered outcomes.

This article examines in historical perspective how gendered land tenure systems have contributed to shaping, and have in turn been shaped by, agrarian production and reproduction systems and how this has worked to the disadvantage of women in terms of their livelihood choices and outcomes and their position in agrarian societies. We argue that contemporary challenges to the health of Africa's agrarian production systems have gender implications which are not sufficiently recognized, either in the literature or in policymaking. This stems from the fact that the complexities of women's positions and contributions to agrarian production and reproduction, from before the colonial period, are often not recognized and, therefore, their influence on long-term processes, such as capital accumulation and proletarianization of rural life, are not accounted for. In what follows, we discuss the linkages between gendered land tenure and changing agrarian production and reproduction systems and examine two contemporary land tenure issues which illustrate the impacts of gender biases in land and agrarian policies.

Gendered Land Tenure and Women's Fortunes in Rural Development

A convincing case has been made by Bridget O'Laughlin (2001, p. 3) for the need to examine 'the relationship between long-term structural

processes of accumulation of capital and the historically and regionally diverse ways in which rural people combine various way of working to produce their livelihoods'. This requires that micro-level studies of livelihoods be embedded in the historical analysis of broad processes of socio-economic change which were brought to life by concepts such as accumulation of capital and proletarianization.¹ This approach combines a study of how people make a living through the deployment of livelihood resources mediated by institutions in particular contexts with the analysis of structural changes in the organization of production and reproduction and the social relations that underpin them. As such, it 'detaches the concept of livelihoods and resistance from the micro-economic language of possessive individualism and strategic gaming' (ibid., p. 6), thus reclaiming them for structural analysis. Even more important for our purposes, it is a fruitful approach for looking at gendered experiences of rural development, with a particular focus on land tenure.

Analyses of long-term processes of structural change would benefit from engaging with the literature on gender, land and agrarian issues, which spans decades of basic and policy research, and disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary work on a broad range of issues. These include the gendered impacts of colonial and postcolonial land commercialization and tenure reforms, particularly on changing rules of access to land, and gendered processes which have deepened land concentration, the dispossession of smallholders, tenure insecurities and land conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa (Amanor-Wilks, 2009; Mbilinyi, 1988; Razavi, 2003; Tsikata, 2009, 2010; Whitehead, 2009).

Some of this work is presented in recent literature surveys (Budlender & Alma, 2011; Gray & Kevane, 1999; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003) which have drawn attention to: processes by which women's already weak land interests are further diminishing (Kevane & Gray, 1999); policy discourses on women's land rights and their implications for efforts to address women's diminishing land interests (Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003); and efforts to secure women's land rights within a neo-liberal economic order (Budlender & Alma, 2011). Kevane and Gray (1999, p. 3), for example, identify three processes by which women's already weak land rights are being further diminished. These include: (i) the narrowing of channels of access to land, such as by the lower incidence of marriage among women whose access to land is mainly through marriage; (ii) the reduction of women's rights by the manipulation of the social legitimacy and enforcement of such rights by means of the reclassification of land, crops or social status of particular women;

and (iii) changes in rules of access to land, such as by state interventions that create new rights under statutory law which privilege men's interests over women's—for example, titling and registration programmes, or irrigation and land resettlements projects which allocate land mainly to heads of households.²

Some of the literature has drawn attention to how women navigate these challenges to strengthen their tenure security. Strategies range from their labour contributions to their use of local-level institutions, and to traditional marriage practices and alliances with their children and other kin (Gray & Kevane, 1999; Manuh, Songsore & Mackenzie, 1997; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). The gender and land literature also suggests that women are often not in a position to benefit from opportunities, because opportunities are not gender neutral and the most useful are not open to them due to systemic gender discrimination and segmentation of labour regimes. Interestingly, the liberal feminist literature is not conclusive about whether these divisions disadvantage or help women (see Behrman, Meinzen-Dick & Quisumbing, 2011 for a discussion).

Agrarian Production Systems and Land Tenure in Historical Perspective

Capital accumulation in the colonial period resulted in major structural changes in production systems and social differentiation in sub-Saharan Africa. This is characterized in the literature as proletarianization. A set of complex processes characterized by the introduction of agricultural commodities and mining, the growth of urban centres which encouraged rural–urban migration and the increasing reliance of African people on commodities, brought Africans into the cash nexus and reduced the extent of self-provisioning by households (O'Laughlin, 2001). This was a gendered process which restructured agrarian production systems. Women and men were involved in this system through a sexual division of labour, underpinned by kinship and domestic arrangements. They exchanged labour both within and outside households. Within households, women's lower status was manifested by their labour obligations to husbands and other senior males. Thus, many women combined independent farming with unpaid labour for others. These two aspects of women's work had very different economic and social ramifications and contributed differently to women's livelihood portfolios. While independent work contributed outputs and income controlled by women, working for others, together with women's reproductive labour, contributed general rights of

welfare. Combined with the separation of spousal purses and resources, this resulted in separate resource streams and responsibilities divided by convention within specific productive systems (Whitehead, 1990).

Initially during the colonial period, men were targeted for forced wage labour in rural and urban areas and for the production of agricultural commodities, while women remained in the rural areas and participated in self-provisioning and commercial farming, both as independent producers and unpaid family workers (O'Laughlin, 2001; Whitehead, 2001). Over time, women also came to be drafted into forced labour, which consisted of both forced cropping and or non-agricultural labour, but on a smaller scale, and to a lesser extent. This process was buttressed by forced labour legislation, which focused on male recruitment as well as a gendered pass system which was more restrictive of women's mobility, as this required permission from husbands, male lineage elders and local authorities (O'Laughlin, 2001).

Thus, proletarianization of labour involved both women's and men's participation in commodity production and the reproduction of labour. Land relations and the organization of domestic relations of production and reproduction as described above created a framework for their roles. However, the specificities of proletarianization processes in different parts of Africa were directly related to colonial policy choices. In Southern Africa, settler colonization and mass labour migrations created sharper contrasts in men's and women's productive and reproductive activities. Although both men and women were involved in commodity production, such as cotton and cashew in Mozambique, there were clear differences of scale and livelihood outcomes. In much of West Africa, where the smallholder model of production was established, the gendered division of labour and the control of productive resources affected men's and women's fortunes as well as their relative bargaining power within the conjugal union.

Labour mobility across and within borders has been one of the factors underpinning the commoditization of land in Africa. Population movements from rural to urban and other rural areas and between countries have determined the demand for land and competition for its use. Processes which integrated African farmers into the colonial economy also integrated them into its labour markets. Migration in search of better incomes became a popular response of men wanting to establish themselves in farming, particularly in West Africa. This allowed them to leave their kinship groups through which agricultural labour was organized to set up their own households. Particularly in situations of land scarcity, young men had to find alternatives whether in wage employment or

agriculture. These processes resulted in the establishment of land markets powered by incomes from non-farm activities and wage labour. In many African countries, the creation of informal land markets was exemplified by land rentals and purchases in rural areas by migrant farmers moving from areas of land scarcity to those of land availability and by local farmers without lineage land (Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2006; Yngstrom, 2002).

There is general agreement that changes in land tenure under colonialism eroded the strength of women's precolonial land interests (Mbilinyi, 1988; Pala-Okeyo, 1980). Specifically, the conversion of land from food to cash crops is an example of the changes which occurred in different parts of Africa (Mbilinyi, 1988; Mikell, 1989; Okali, 1983). Studies of early postcolonial agricultural development projects (Carney, 1988; Carney & Watts, 1991) and land settlements schemes in Zambia and Zimbabwe (Himonga & Munachonga, 1991; Ncube et al., 1997; Njaya, 2014) have shown the ways in which the rules and practices of land distribution disrupted women's interests and resulted in agricultural failures. However, it has been argued that although women's land tenure interests were often not as strong as men's, in areas where their self-provisioning responsibilities were substantial, they were able to negotiate rights to cultivate land tied to their wider responsibilities in the production process. These rights were not rule based or set in stone, but were instead open to negotiation and contestable, and the strength of their negotiation positions influenced by the fact that women were not only wives, but also mothers, sisters and daughters. With time, women's inheritance rights were also eroded in situations where, as recently as the early twentieth century, there was evidence of them passing on land to their daughters and granddaughters (Yngstrom, 2002).

Because the value of land is established by labour, women's labour relations were implicated in their continued access to land in spite of tenure insecurities. An example of this land and labour connection is seen in the ways in which male responses to forced labour had implications for women. One of the strategies men used was to become commodity producers, and in doing this they increased their use of the labour of women and children and also of non-family members. Through this, they became employers of wage labour and the users of unpaid labour. Women's labour for their husbands became particularly important in situations where agricultural commercialization destroyed the ability of male household heads to control the unpaid labour of younger household members (Roberts, 1984, cited in Whitehead, 1990; Tsikata, 2009).³ Women, for their part, sometimes resisted this intensification and made

efforts to protect their subsistence by incorporating manufactured commodities into their livelihoods, thus anchoring them more firmly in processes of commodity production and labour market participation, but also creating tensions in gender and intergenerational relations. It is important to note in this regard that women did not have a uniform experience of the gendered nature of land tenure and agrarian systems. Widows and divorced women had more difficulty retaining their interests in land, although seniority worked in their favour.

Labour migration continued into the post-colonial period and women became labour migrants in their own right. From the 1980s, however, labour migration from rural areas became a more uncertain livelihood strategy and this had implications for processes of proletarianization in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Urban unemployment and redundancies became a common occurrence, and commercial agriculture did not create decent employment. This was deepened by the impacts of structural adjustment policies and the labour regime it created. Rural areas experienced agricultural stagnation, which made rural–urban migration still necessary. However, the loss of employment opportunities in urban areas and the growing informalization of work resulted in complicated livelihood portfolios, combining both on-farm and off-farm activities and seasonal migration, as captured by the livelihood studies. As O’Laughlin (2001) points out, dichotomies such as those of subsistence production versus migrant wage labour, and landless rural proletariat versus commercial farming, no longer held. Instead, the same persons who laboured for others also employed labour for their own farming activities. These complicated livelihood activities affected the structure of households, rendering many of them unstable. Even more importantly, they ensured that land remained a very critical factor in livelihoods.

Scoones (2009) has identified three patterns within rural livelihoods systems in the post-colonial period: agricultural intensification through the use of more capital or labour; extensification through the use of more land; and diversification of income sources and migration. His classification has some similarities with Bebbington’s (1999), applied to South America, which are relevant to sub-Saharan Africa. They include: (i) capitalized family farms, (ii) rural proletarianization, (iii) migration, (iv) rural industry and (v) rural and urban commerce. Each of these demonstrates the interconnections of labour and land relations in particular ways, but also the gendered character of these relations. Capitalized family farms are an important source of rural family employment and accumulation, which relies on women’s unpaid productive and reproductive labour. Rural proletarianization is linked to an expansion of

large-scale, capital-intensive agricultural enterprises, most of which are owned by men, but which use cheap female labour. Examples of these in sub-Saharan Africa are the fruit produce and horticultural industries in Kenya, Uganda and South Africa, which employ labour from both urban and rural areas and prefer women workers. The opportunity of waged work may enable farm labourers to stay on the land (Tsikata, 2009).

In some countries, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, before their recent land redistribution, land concentration arising from long-term promotion of capitalist agriculture has resulted in widespread landlessness among agricultural labourers, who do not then have the cushion of growing their own food crops. Women are often found in the poorer quality jobs in this sector and are often poorly paid, with longer hours of work, poor conditions of service and no social protection, while facing numerous health hazards (Razavi, 2007). In other situations, women have responded to their growing landlessness and tenure insecurities by building livelihoods around commerce. Agricultural produce from their farms and other peoples' farms are often an important source of goods which are exchanged for manufactured consumer imports.

Rural–urban linkages are a feature of livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa often discussed in the literature (Scoones, 2009; Tsikata, 2006). Rural–urban linkages in livelihoods may be stronger in situations of high rural agricultural productivity. For example, some traders in Zimbabwe were engaged in farming maize in both rural and urban areas. Some were also receiving food items from relatives in rural areas—groundnuts, maize, meal and peanut butter—in return for financial support. In Ghana, for example, some urban dwellers in times of hardship have sent spouses and children back to rural areas to establish income-earning activities with an agricultural base, or involving trading (Tsikata, 2006).

The Gender of Contemporary Land Tenure Issues

Land Tenure Reforms under Economic Liberalization

There is a remarkable convergence among the land tenure reforms being implemented around the continent. In several countries, land tenure reforms have been instituted under the guidance of the World Bank with the support of bilateral aid agencies. The emphasis of the reforms is, in most cases, on reforming and strengthening of land administration institutions; consolidating, harmonizing and updating of land legislation; and adjudication, titling and registration of individual and group land rights.

These reforms are also meant to strengthen land markets and make them more efficient and convenient for foreign investors, with trickle-down benefits for locals. They are conceptualized within the evolutionary theory of land holding, which sees the shift from traditional customary systems to individualized systems as a spontaneous process to be supported by titling programmes (Amanor, 2001; Yngstrom, 2002).⁴ South Africa and Zimbabwe are exceptions to this trend: in South Africa, the reforms combine an explicit focus on redress and social justice, including gender justice, with market-led land reforms (Walker, 2003), while in Zimbabwe they focused mainly on redistribution in favour of black farmers.

Within sub-Saharan Africa, the long felt need for land tenure reforms predates the economic reforms instituted in the 1980s. Since the colonial period, processes of agrarian change have exerted pressure on land tenure systems and vice versa. In the last few decades, a twin process of land concentration for big business (tourism, large-scale agriculture and dams and industrial production) and land fragmentation for small peasants has been observed in several countries (Shivji, 1998; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003; Wily & Hammond, 2001). Also, increasing land shortages and the rapidly rising prices of land in both urban and rural areas have become a problem. This has been accompanied by a transformation of customary norms of land tenure in ways which weaken collective interests at the expense of individual interests in land. Incomplete processes of titling and registration since the 1960s have also exacerbated tenure insecurities. All these factors have resulted in tenure insecurity and landlessness which affects a larger proportion of land users than is recognized. As Wily and Hammond (2001) observe, tenure insecurity occurs with respect to both customary and statutory law and also at their interface, when customary interests come under statutory law and vice versa. While tenure security is a generalized problem, its impacts on the holders of derived interests—tenants, share croppers, youth and women—are particularly serious.

What distinguishes other experiences of land tenure reforms from what is currently going on in Africa is their strong redistributive basis. Studies have suggested that this element has been important in laying the foundations for the successful industrialization of countries such as China and Taiwan, in providing labour, cheap food and a market for industrial commodities. This suggests that there are important connections among land reform, industrial accumulation and livelihoods diversification (Hart, 1995). However, redistribution has been more between households than within them, thus neglecting issues of women's land interests within households. The benefits that women derived from the

broad-based access to land which underpinned wage work have, therefore, been indirect.

The literature on land titling and registration, which has reviewed the experiences of Kenya and other countries, has suggested that titling and registration has neither guaranteed security of tenure nor encouraged investments in land. And yet, this remains the centre piece of several land tenure reforms, such as Ghana, Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania, to name a few. Some countries are proposing selective registration, probably as a concession to the lessons from Kenya (Bugri, 2004; Manji, 1998; Shivji, 1998). It has been suggested that titling is not always the most viable option in some cases and that in cases where titling is not appropriate, other alternatives would be sought. The costs of titling have been important in the position that titling could not be justified for all parts of a country.

Titling and registration are problematic in contexts of coexisting multiple interests in land, particularly for those interests described as derived and secondary. This is because the exclusivity of registered rights weakens these interests which are often informal and negotiated, and increases the tenure insecurities of their holders. Studies have explained how women's rights were eroded by titling and individualization which was backed by statutory law in countries such as Kenya. While a few women may have benefited from the reforms in Kenya, the majority, especially women without husbands, lost out (Knowles, 1991). While those who can purchase land might be more certain of the title they get, women who have to rely on their husbands, or beg land from landowners, find themselves in difficulties. These insecurities created by titling can exacerbate problems in rural production processes (Platteau, 1996; Yngstrom, 2002).

Contrary to evolutionary assumptions that the development of land markets would modernize traditional societies and result in market-based individualized land holding systems, the evidence points to a more complicated process of change in which commercialization and land scarcity coexist with strong customary claims, with the result that the land holding system continues to be embedded in kinship systems (Mackenzie, 1990, 1993; Yngstrom, 2002).

Beyond the specific policy of titling and registration is the situation of land tenure reforms within an agenda of liberalization and the strengthening of land markets, and the overall technocratic approach to land tenure reforms based on the assumptions that the registration of lands and the reform of land tenure institutions would address the deep-seated problems of land tenure. This denies the political issues of land tenure,

which include attention to different interest groups and their fortunes, the place of land reform in the development agenda, longstanding land conflicts arising from migration and dispossession, discriminatory practices in access to and control of land, the high levels of agricultural rent, the high costs of urban land, the widespread alienation of land by chiefs and land allocation practices which discriminate against certain members of landowning families, the distribution of stool revenue and the growing insecurity of secondary land interests, which are a result of the increasing privatization of communal interests and the individualization of land (Britwum et al., 2014).

The technocratic liberalization approach privileges the World Bank and donors, and the idea of stakeholders ensures that contradictory interests of different social groups are not recognized and addressed. This failure/refusal to differentiate social groups in the land tenure reform process delegitimizes them and leaves their issues poorly defined and unresearched, and far away from the agenda of the reforms. Thus, only the most organized social groups get a hearing and have their interests addressed. In Ghana, the chiefs, who are the most organized social group around the reforms, have been successful in raising and putting their concerns on the agenda, alongside the interests of foreign capital which was put there by the World Bank and the bilateral agencies. Other groups such as tenants, migrant farmers, youth and women are not as organized and have not been successful in putting their issues on the agenda. The decision to establish decentralized land secretariats and to train their personnel and give them the facilities to do efficient administration presumes that technology and capacity are the only two issues on the table. The role of the World Bank, donor agencies and the international consultants they have hired strengthens the idea that this is a technocratic process, when nothing could be further from the truth.

The Gender of the New Scramble for Land in Africa

The current food, energy and financial crises have been linked with the third land rush in Africa since the colonial period (Moyo et al., 2013). The large-scale land acquisitions in the colonial period created a distinction between settler-colonial Africa and Africa of small-holder agriculture (Amanor-Wilks, 2009; Moyo, Tsikata & Diop, 2015). Economic liberalization, since the 1980s, created the conditions for a second wave of large-scale land acquisitions for a range of economic purposes, such as mining, tourism, logging and real estate. These acquisitions were

preceded or reinforced by the liberalization of investment codes and land tenure reforms. Various studies have drawn attention to the impacts of foreign direct investments on the livelihoods of local communities, drawing attention to implications for land tenure systems (Akabzaa, 2000; Chachage & Mallya, 2005; Mbilinyi, 1988).

The significance of the third land rush lies not only in its scale, but also in what is driving it, who is involved, and how they are going about it. With regard to scale, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), for example, has stated that 20 million hectares of African land have been acquired by foreign interests in the last three years; while others have put Africa's share of land acquisitions at 30 million hectares, out of a figure of 37 million hectares for global acquisitions since 2008. Much of the land is being acquired in Africa, and while it is difficult to get an accurate figure of the acquisitions, it is significant enough to cause concern. Apart from the difficulties of collation, it is important to note that some of the acquisitions are under negotiation, some have been acquired but are not being used and some have been acquired and are being used, with business models that sometimes involve locals as contract farmers. The largest acquisitions are in Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Madagascar and the DRC. Many of the deals involve governments, such as China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, while private investors from the European Union, the United States, India and South Africa are also involved (Borras & Franco, 2010; Chachage, 2011; Cotula et al., 2009; Verma, 2010).

This new rush has many drivers, including the food and energy crisis, the search for super profits through land speculation, and the rising food, energy and raw materials needs of emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil. The deals have the effect of dispossessing large numbers of farmers of a key resource in their livelihood portfolio and could be a threat to their food security. Some have suggested that a good business model which involves locals in the production activities of the investors can create a win-win situation. However, this analysis does not consider the overall impact of acquisitions on land availability in countries, or the threat to their long-term plans for agrarian transformation (Yaro & Tsikata, 2015).

In communities which are land-scarce, acquisitions can exacerbate the competition over land, and this has special significance for women and other social groups already suffering disadvantages in access to and control over land. Even in situations where land is relatively abundant, the loss of the commons, or common property resources have been discounted. These are important sources of resources which are very critical

to livelihoods, particularly in poorer communities and for women and other disadvantaged groups (Kachika, 2010; Verma, 2010). A recent study which looked at three such acquisitions in Ghana found that the loss of the commons was something all three shared, and gained some insights into the implications for livelihoods (Yaro & Tsikata, 2015).

Their loss is a major source of increasing vulnerability for the poor and especially women who depend on the commons for their dry season livelihoods in the savannahs of the Northern and Volta Regions. In the commons, shea nut, *dawa-dawa*⁵ and fruit trees, as well as bushes for fuelwood and charcoal burning provide a critical source of food and fuel which are consumed and sold to meet household expenses. In the forested parts of Southern Ghana, it means the loss of wildlife, mushrooms, fuelwood and uncultivated foodstuffs.

Thus, while the commons are often seen by state and investors as vast lands far away from the communities, thinly populated and therefore devoid of complications, these resources have owners and users. When cleared for mono-culture, it necessitates long-distance travel into territory of neighbouring villages involving investments in transport beyond the poor's reach, the loss of entitlements and potential conflicts. Also, convenience, an important traditional attribute of livelihoods, is lost. As the commons disappear, so do people into urban and rural areas with better resources. Particularly, in communities with established histories of outmigration, this is a trigger for another wave of departures which deepen the depression of the local economy.

The impacts of transnational land deals go beyond livelihoods. They are also changing the traditional arrangements of power and resource systems. Competition for inclusion in the benefit streams accentuates the class differences which are normally camouflaged by relations of kinship in rural areas. Emerging differences in communities affect the relationships and social capital needed to facilitate sustainable livelihoods.

Conclusion

Efforts to address the challenges of agrarian production systems have to become much more self-aware about the gendered character of these systems and the need for reforms that do not reproduce or deepen gender inequalities in livelihood outcomes. This is important for women's citizenship and also for the efficacy of rural development efforts. Past efforts to engineer rural development failed on many counts. An important aspect of these failures was the failure to recognize women's

varied and substantial contributions to rural economies. Even more serious, development projects operated with gender stereotypes and simplifications of Ester Boserup's characterization of Africa as a female farming system. This resulted in blindness to women's integration in commercial production, albeit in subordinate ways, as well as the interdependence of men and women in agrarian production systems. The unitary model of the household which underpinned development projects also ignored intra-household labour relations and the separate purse arrangements. Projects often privileged men and, in some cases, converted common property resources which were the mainstay of land poor women into project lands controlled by men. In assuming that men were the cash crop farmers, projects directed their efforts at improving agrarian productive systems and promoting accumulation from below to men and neglected women, thus compounding the livelihood stresses of households, particularly women, and contributing to agricultural stagnation.

The current global food crisis once again brought rural women to the fore of policy debates about what to do with agriculture and rural development. However, in keeping with past practice, the initial invoking of women's importance to agriculture did not influence policy prescriptions. This has to change fundamentally along with the insistence on market solutions to the problems of food security and rural development. Accumulation from below, which has been identified as a strategy for agrarian transformation, and which requires redistributive land policies and the reversal of the 1980s policies—such as those that removed subsidies on agricultural inputs, closed down state-owned crop marketing agencies, maintained a low level of public investment in the food sector and agricultural infrastructure and liberalized the labour market—have to proceed in a gender equitable manner.

Notes

1. Proletarianization here refers to the creation of an economy in which labour power is bought and sold, although without excluding unwaged labour (O'Laughlin, 2001).
2. See also Lastarria-Cornhiel (1997), Toulmin and Quan (2000) and Whitehead and Tsikata (2003), who have examined the impacts of titling and registration programmes on women's customary tenure interests.
3. Studies by feminist economists have also drawn attention to the relationship between men's control over land and their control over women's labour (Evers & Walters, 2000; Sen & Grown, 1987).
4. Underpinning the land tenure reforms are the market liberalization policies which have been implemented in various countries in the last two decades, first under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and more recently

under Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). These policies include exchange-rate devaluation, tax reforms and trade liberalization policies. Trade and investment liberalization under the World Trade Organization (WTO), Free Trade Areas (FTAs) between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of USA provide the international framework for these policies, which have been described as open regionalism within the globalization agenda (Razavi, 2003).

5. The fruit from a tree used extensively as spice in the Northern Ghana cuisine.

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