The Developing Economies, XXXIX-3 (September 2001)

BOOK REVIEW

Shady Practices: Agroforestry and Gender Politics in The Gambia by Richard A. Schroeder, Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1999, xxxvii + 172 pp.

Priority areas for development intervention by aid organizations and the ideologies that sustain such intervention change with the times. The development projects undertaken over the past quarter of a century have been carried out under the slogans that have dominated the respective eras. Such slogans include "basic human needs," "women in development (WID)," "environmentally sustainable development," and "participatory development." These slogans have been adopted not only by aid organizations but also by the recipient countries, and have influenced the policy priorities of many developing countries.

This book analyzes how a shift in priority in development policy has changed agricultural production and gender relations in The Gambia during the course of development intervention by aid organizations. In the western part of The Gambia, female farmers enthusiastically took up the commercial production of vegetables during the latter half of the 1970s. Their efforts gained positive support from aid organizations that attached importance, in those days, to women's role in development. In the mid-1980s, however, with a shift in emphasis in development intervention to environmental concerns, agroforestry projects were launched, and vegetable gardens owned by women farmers were gradually replaced by orchards held by male landlords. This book details the process of such changes by examining the changing socioeconomic and power relations between men and women in rural Gambia.

Gender relations are particularly important in analyzing the changes in agricultural production in West Africa for the following reasons. Many studies of agricultural production have regarded households as the basic units of analysis, and assumed that a household maximizes a single utility function just as an individual does. This approach is based on the assumption that economic resources within a household are jointly pooled and that those resources are used for the welfare of all household members. In contrast, recent studies have shown that this "unitary" household model, which regards the household as an economic entity, in some cases inadequately conceptualizes the household in Africa. Indeed, in many societies in rural West Africa, husbands and wives manage separate farms and their respective incomes are kept individually. The pattern of farmer access to resources and their utilization is often formed on gender lines. The different access to and control over productive resources may lead to conflicts between husband and wife. The uneven economic relations and the pattern of resource distribution between spouses are inseparably related to intra-household power relations. This book discusses how such gender relations in farming villages in western Gambia have undergone transformation and agricultural production has changed as a result of shifts in priorities in development policy and intervention.

The first half of the book analyzes the impact of the rapid expansion of vegetable produc-

tion on intra-household relations. Market gardens managed by female farmers prevailed in western Gambia from the latter half of the 1970s through the 1980s. Two factors were behind this rapid popularization of vegetable production. One was the stagnation of male-dominated groundnut production which had been the major source of cash for households, and this led women to seek out way to contribute to household earnings. Second was the emergence of WID as an important slogan for development intervention. Aid organizations increased technical and financial assistance to women farmers who were engaged in small-scale vegetable production. The resulting increase in women's cash income from their vegetable production brought about a change in socioeconomic relations between husbands and wives.

Schroeder sees two phases in this change. The first was the early years of the garden boom when female farmers began vegetable production and their gardens became, as male villagers cynically claim, the women's "second husbands." As husbands' incomes from groundnuts production declined, women spent more time and labor on their "second husbands" to ensure cash income for their household budget. The increased income that women received from their expanded vegetable production reduced the importance of husbands as income earners, resulting in the altered socioeconomic relations between spouses.

The situation of women farmers spending more time in vegetable gardens and less time in their traditional role as wives inevitably brought repercussions from husbands. Wives coped with this situation by using their cash income from vegetable production to literally "buy" their husbands' approval. This was the second phase of the change as women farmers endeavored to win their husbands' approval of their vegetable production by renegotiating and rewriting the household budgetary responsibilities. For example, with their cash income from vegetable production, wives adopted a tactic of paying for various social formalities and children's education on behalf of their husbands. They even gave cash loans or cash gifts to their husbands. One could argue that this behavior helped husbands to retain their patriarchal privileges and prestige, and at the same time it reduced the wives'autonomy in relation to their husbands. Schroeder argues, however, that it was a strategic behavior on the part of wives who attempted to enhance their social freedom within the household. By using their income from gardening to take more household responsibilities, wives tried to alter intra-household power relations.

The latter half of the book is devoted to analyzing the agroforestry projects introduced in the mid-1980s following a shift in emphasis by aid organizations toward more environment-oriented development. In the course of this shift, vegetable gardens worked by female farmers were gradually replaced by fruit orchards owned by male landlords. The author carefully traces how these newly introduced agroforestry projects provided opportunities for male landlords to get back their land which in the past had been rented out to female vegetable farmers.

By willingly participating in agroforestry projects, male landlords began developing their fruit orchards on the land where female farmers managed their vegetable gardens. While creating their own orchards, male landlords planted fruit seedlings in the midst of women's vegetable gardens and contrived to have the water that female farmers put on their vegetables redirected to their fruit seedlings. When these seedlings grew and spread their canopy, the shades and lack of sun began to hamper the growth of vegetables. As the result, some

women had to give up their vegetable farming. In this way, agroforestry projects provided male landlords with opportunities to grow tree crops by taking advantage of female labor and promoting their own economic gains. These projects slowly drove female farmers off the land by creating circumstances unsuited for vegetable production, and gave male landlords a chance to take back their land rights.

Behind these agroforestry projects lies the influence of ecofeminism which sees women as linked deterministically with the environment. Assuming a natural connection between women and the environment, ecofeminists argue that women play a crucial role in preserving the environment and that environmental conservation can ensure advantages for women. Nonetheless, the author concludes that in reality these projects in western Gambia were skillfully utilized by male landlords and wound up hampering women's benefits, thereby undermining the projects' best intentions.

The book is thought-provoking in many respects. The author adopts a political ecology approach that places agricultural production in the context of the interrelations between the economic activities of African farmers, the natural environment surrounding these activities, and the politico-economic environment influencing them. The changes in the environment and agricultural production in rural Gambia were analyzed as the outcome arising from the complex interaction among various actors (such as husbands and wives, male landlords and female vegetable farmers, aid organizations, and government personnel). Based on the author's in-depth fieldwork, the book traces in detail the long-term changes that occurred over a period of twenty years, clarifying the diverse and complicated relations between many actors.

The book also presents important policy implications for planning and implementing development projects. In agroforestry projects, the mere act of planting trees is obviously insufficient for the success of the projects. As this book shows in detail, rights in trees (or farms) and rights in land are embedded in local institutions such as indigenous land tenure systems. In addition, such rights to productive resources are closely linked with various power relations that exist between men and women and between landlords and tenants. Development intervention, if implemented without proper understanding of such complicated relations, might adversely affect a specific group of people despite its best intentions. This case study of The Gambia points out these dangers.

Another significance of this study is that it does not treat local residents simply as beneficiaries or victims of development intervention. Rather it pays attention to the process by which farmers tactically endeavor to utilize the intervention to their own benefit. In the process of expanded vegetable production in the latter half of the 1970s, female farmers were intent on utilizing the WID initiatives of aid organizations to increase their income and enhance their position within the household. As the emphasis in external development intervention shifted to agroforestry in the mid-1980s, male landholders were quick to seize the chance to retrieve land rights from female farmers. The author's analysis rightly focuses on both the effects of outside intervention on farmers and the villagers' strategic reaction to the changing sociopolitical environment.

A possible shortcoming of the book may be that the readers are left with the impression that the dynamics of power relations other than those between men and women are not sufficiently analyzed. In contrast to the rich and in-depth analysis of gender politics in rural

Gambia, the book gives only secondary importance to other dimensions of power relations such as those between elders and younger farmers or between landholders and landless villagers. By connecting gender politics to various other power relations, the book could have further disaggregated the category of "female farmers" or "husbands" to add more variation to the description of strategies employed by individuals belonging to different socioeconomic groups. (Tsutomu Takane)