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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROLES IN RURAL UPPER VOLTA

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Studies of rural economic change have often focused on the segment of society participating in the modern economic sector. This segment is generally composed of young men who migrate to urban centers in order to exchange their labour for wages. The necessary adjustments on the village level, permitting the shift of labour input from the rural sector to the national economy, are rarely explored. My purpose is; 1. to examine the structural changes generated in village society by the increased participation of young men in the modern economic sector; 2. to pinpoint the role of women in facilitating these structural changes, shedding light on the resultant transformation of women's traditional economic roles; and 3. to show how international development accelerated the integration of rural economies into the national economy and helped to reinforce the growing economic dependency of village women on wage earning men.

The village is located in the sparsely populated region of northern Gourma. Population density averages ten inhabitants per kilometer square. The village chiefdom is at the base of the traditional political structure. The Kuamba, which

incorporates several village chiefdoms, is the larger administrative unit ruled by the djisidjlanu. The Kuambas, as Gourma kingdoms were named, were virtually independent political units. Nonetheless they recognized the ritual sovereignty of a paramount king located in the province of Fada N'Gourma.

The majority of the inhabitants of the region are farmers. Local farming is characterized by hoe technology and shifting cultivation. The staples are millet and sorghum as well as a small variety of other cereals and vegetables. Peanuts are grown as a cash crop. The villagers adhered to strict codes of division of labour according to sex and age.

The area was colonized by the French in the mid eighties. The population was subject to heavy taxes and to forced labour. During colonial times, this geographically isolated region was accessible through roads built with forced labour mobilized by the colonial powers. After the departure of the colonial administration and the end of forced labour the Voltaic government was left with few resources with which to pay for the improvement of roads. Northern Gourma, sparsely populated and somewhat isolated, was not high on the priority list in the distribution of government funds. Consequently the roads and bridge fell into disrepair, plunging the region into further isolation.

With the advent of the drought in the Sahel, international relief agencies began to focus on hard hit countries such as Upper Volta. Remote rural areas began to witness and influx

headed by the oldest member of the lineage segment. They were composed of three generations of male agnates, their wives and children. The head of his unit had control over the distribution of the fruits of labour of all its members. Since colonial times, however, there has been a gradual tendency for young men to head their own units of production. In so doing they retain control of the fruits of their labour as well as of the labour of their wives and children. This trend has been intensified by the increased opportunities for the sale of cash crops.

Control of units of production by young men has meant a gradual decrease in size of the units. Not only have they diminished in size but young men, responding to the opportunities to become wage earners, may not take part as fully in the agricultural production cycle.

The decrease in size of the units of production places an additional burden on the wife who has to share the responsibility of the farm with her husband. In addition, because she is no longer operating in an extended family household, the full burden of household duties fall on her shoulders. Not only are men investing more time in the production of a cash crop, they are also devoting extra time to building up their businesses. The result is that women have less time to devote to their private fields and source of economic independence. They must spend an inordinate amount of time in farm work that does not benefit them directly.

of strangers. Donor agencies were initiating development projects in remote rural areas. In addition, the increase in population of urban centers as well as the growing demand for millet in cities prompted merchants to expand their sources of agricultural goods. Hence more isolated regions were being visited by grain merchants. Add to this the arrival of migrants fleeing the drought afflicted regions of the north. All of the above contributed to a sizeable increase in population of the region as well as a transformation of the economic panorama within the region itself.

This meant that there was a greater market for millet and peanuts, a demand for labour to assist in the implementation of drought relief projects as well as to provide domestic help for the expatriate community, and an influx of manufactured goods brought to the area by merchants. All these economic opportunities addressed themselves solely to young men. The role of women in this economic climate took on added importance. It will be shown that in these instances women furthered the economic expansion of men on two levels: 1. by filling the work gaps created by young men once they became actively involved in other economic activities and; 2) by providing men with the material means with which to take advantage of the present economic opportunities. It was particularly in the sale of cash crops that young men were able to take advantage of economic opportunities. In the past, units of agricultural production were

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Men are opting to become wage owners and businessmen. In so doing they have had to lessen their contribution as producers within the once self-contained village economy. As wage earners men form economic relationships outside of thier villages and outside of thier family circles. Manufactured goods have replaced many of the village industries and often those that gave women access to wealth.

As the social relations of production that gave women access to surpluss labour and goods disappear or are modified, women find that they need mre and more cash to buy certain goods and services. However, while money making opportunities have expanded for men, women's alternatives seem to be narrowing. As a result they are becoming increasingly dependent on men economically.