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THE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS OF FEMALE INVOLVEMENT
IN AGRICULTURE: THE CASE OF CAMEROON

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.....To Patrick

and to those at
USAID/ Cameroon who
helped to make it
possible

Judith

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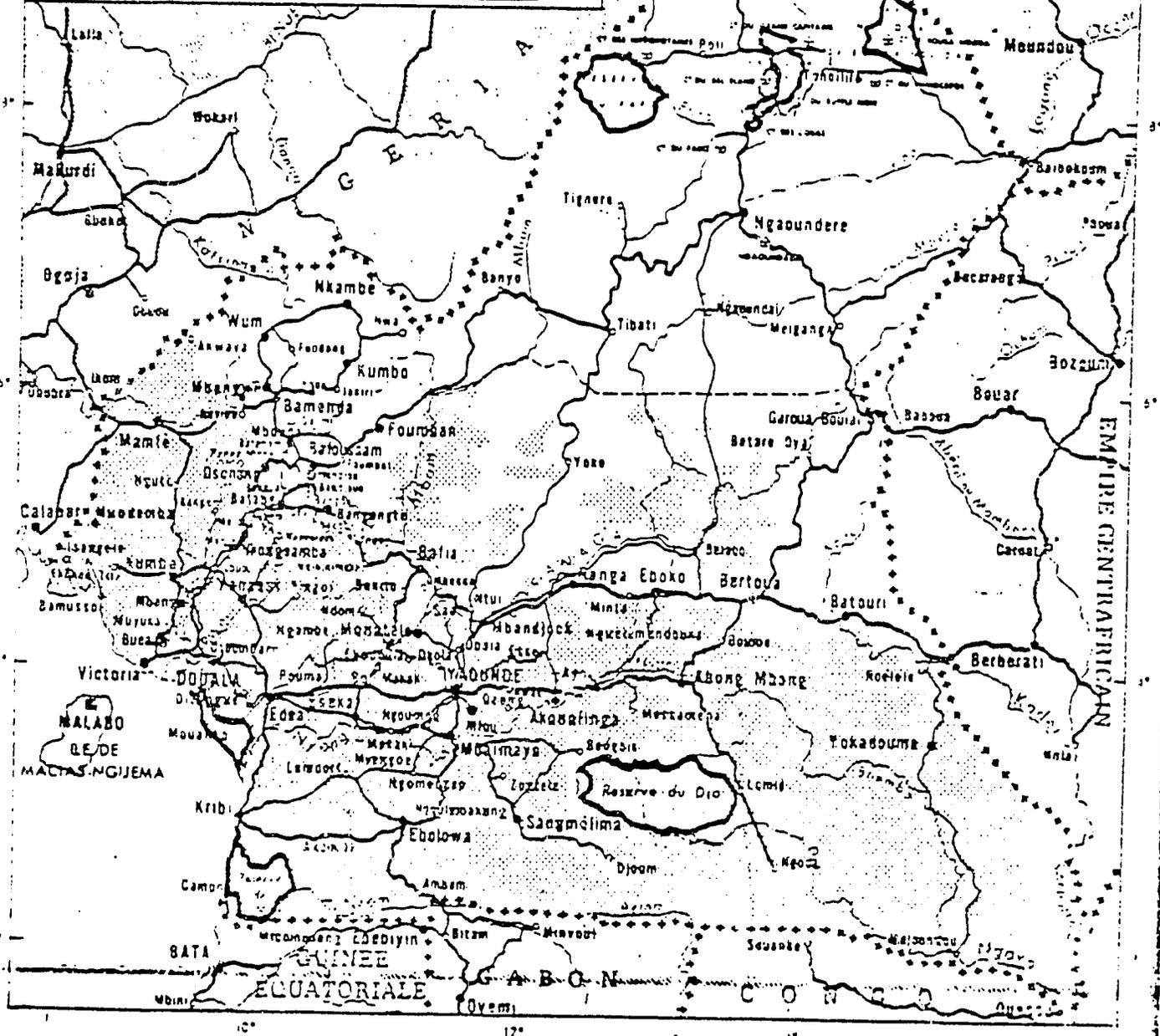
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- Capitole d'Etat
- Siège capital
- Chef-lieu de Province
- Chef-lieu de Département
- Chef-lieu de Division
- Frontière internationale
- International boundary
- Limite avec Province
- Boundary between Provinces
- Route principale
- Main road
- Route secondaire
- Secondary road
- Chemin de fer
- Railway
- Reserve de faune
- Fauna reserve
- Campement
- Camp
- Forêt
- Forest



EMPIRE CENTRAFRICAINE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, awareness of the importance of women in agricultural production in the less developed countries (LDCs), and especially in food crop production in many of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, has been steadily increasing. Certain analysts have been most interested in documenting the exact nature of what women are doing in agriculture, that is with the production side of the economic system. Much of their work also contrasts the importance of the women's role with the limited support they receive to enhance their skills, and makes the case for remedial programmes for women so that they can contribute more/benefit more from development. Other analysts have been more concerned with the distribution side of the economic system, arguing that too much attention is given to what women can contribute to development, and not enough to ensuring that they receive a fair share of the return from their labours. The concerns of both these groups stem from the growing belief that "development" is not meaningful if it concentrates exclusively on economic growth and ignores the questions such as that of providing a decent standard of living for everyone, women as well as men.

The data presented in the next chapter of this paper underline the importance of the women's productive role: females predominate in food crop production in approximately half of all sub-Sahara African societies, while they participate equally with men in another 25 per cent; accordingly, the overall contribution of women to production of this basic subsistence good greatly exceeds the contribution of men. Although there is now general recognition among agricultural economists and development theorists

gressive (or conservative) farmers by the extension staffs. As these extension workers were men who mainly contacted other males, the women working in the area were ignored or assumed to be working under the direction of their husbands even when anthropological studies of the area had shown that this opinion was incorrect. A secondary source of bias was the fact that the extension staffs were mainly involved with new export and industrial crops, and they had been successful in encouraging men to grow them (at least with respect to the more lucrative crops such as cocoa). Export and industrial crops were the crops the Europeans (including the analysts) were most interested in, and activity in this area helped to obscure what was happening in food crops.

More recently, agricultural economists have paid more attention to women, and have documented the importance of their labour, but the tendency to impose Western models on the productive process has not disappeared. For example, in his book on the use of labour in small holder agriculture in Africa, John Cleave states: "It is the use of his time and the return to his labour and that of his family that is of prime importance to the African farmer."¹ Here, the expectation as to the division of labour has been replaced by expectations as to the manner in which "family" farming is conducted. The male household head, if not the principal worker, at least allocates his wife's labour based upon his perception as to the utility of such labour.

However, the structure of the African family and the manner in which production decisions are made do not conform to this model. Instead, as will be documented in the next chapter of this paper, there are powerful social factors which have resulted in separate productive activities for men and women, and separate perceptions of utilities. These separate spheres

1. Cleave, John H., *African Farmers: Labor Use in the Development of Smallholder Agriculture*. Praeger: New York, 1974, p. 3.

interact with each other, and receive support from each other; however, it cannot be said that they are a unit. Women's role in food crop production is based upon the expectations of husbands (and their relatives) as to the tasks which wives will perform. It is the wife's responsibility in many groups to assure that the family's food supply is available; in many cases men are involved only peripherally and do not make production decisions.

The women's sphere of responsibility also involves providing a substantial proportion of other household needs by marketing their surplus production. This responsibility is assumed by women even in those groups where women do little farming work, and are met by activities such as spinning and hairdressing. It should be emphasized that women perform these functions not only because society expects them to, but also because the women themselves view them as an integral part of what they consider to be their most important role, that of child bearing.

In the introduction to Scarlett Epstein's book on the impact of agricultural development on two villages in South India, W. Arthur Lewis argues that

"Wherever we study the effect of economic change on [social] institutions, the basic answer seems always to be the same, namely, that the love of money is a powerful institutional solvent....What we need to know is just how powerful a solvent the love of money is. The answer seems to be that it dissolves what stands in its way, but nothing more. In one of the villages where the new opportunities did not conflict with existing institutions, there was virtually no institutional change; in the other village, changes were widespread, but only such changes occurred as were distinctly linked with new economic opportunities."¹

This paper suggests that a similar result can be expected in the sub-Saharan African context: i.e. if the women's productive roles are

1. W. Arthur Lewis, "Foreword" in Epstein, T. Scarlett, *Economic Development and Social Change in South India*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962, pp. ix-x.

changed by male appropriation of the most profitable crops (especially of those which are the easiest to cultivate), this change will have little effect on the women's essential roles and responsibilities with respect to providing the family's food supply.

In these circumstances, encouraging men to take over the women's most profitable productive activities may provide a short term solution to the problems of urban food supply. However, it is not consistent with transformation of the agricultural sector as it cannot be expected that the men would also produce food for the family in the many ethnic groups where this is "women's work" or that they would purchase food with their incomes. Women will continue to provide subsistence foods for the family and as a result, demand for purchased food will not be sufficient to support a rapid change-over to specialist production for the market, i.e. urban demand alone is not sufficient to support this process. Increasing incomes and specialization among rural women is the essential requirement as they, rather than their husbands, would be most likely to purchase food supplies.

Women will also need to market some of their surplus production to purchase other household requirements, and their ability to generate this income will be seriously eroded if men appropriate the most profitable crops. The support men provide to their wives varies from group to group, but they generally provide cash funds to meet certain specific household needs, e.g. oil, meat, cloth, school fees, and use the rest of their incomes for requirements such as bridewealth payments and roofing sheets for houses which may necessitate saving over a number of years. Although women save some of their incomes also, they generally spend a much higher proportion immediately on household needs, and often have to make up for deficiencies in what their husbands provide them. As a result, while the men may provide their wives with a portion of their

extra earnings, this fraction will not have the same impact on demand as could be expected if women earned the entire amount themselves.

Women and their dependent children represent the major portion of rural consumers (adult women and children under 15 constitute approximately 70 per cent of the rural population in most sub-Saharan African countries). Failure to substantially improve the incomes of this section of the community will act as a brake on demand for the very products which the rural sector and the developing industrial sector can produce most effectively, i.e. food crops, semi-processed and processed foods, matches, soap, cloth, etc. As a result, development of the entire economy will be affected.

It should be noted that the writer is not suggesting that the men's standard of living in rural areas will be acceptable under these circumstances: their diets will still be provided mainly by their wives' efforts, and the slow growth in the demand for food products from the urban sector (based on its small size in the economy and the large numbers of rural producers) is unlikely to stay far ahead of increases in the men's expenses, e.g. for taxes and school fees. What is being suggested is that a far more dynamic approach to the problems of development is to create programmes which impact directly on the subsistence producers, which in most cases are women. Such an approach would be more likely to generate the productivity increases required for sustained growth, and create an improved standard of living for the entire population, men, women and children.

The writer suggests that this subject affects all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa to a greater or lesser extent, and as such, it represents one of the major development issues facing the world today. Accordingly, Chapter II of the paper describes the historical, socio-cultural and economic factors shaping women's role in agriculture in sub-

Saharan Africa. The information presented attempts to answer basic questions concerning the organization of agricultural production: (1) what are the means of acquiring land for farming?; (2) what is the division of labour between males and females?; (3) what are the social imperatives sustaining the predominant role of women in food crop production?; (4) how do these relate to the environment and the cultivation system which have evolved over time? The answers to these questions have had a determining influence on the types of changes which have taken place within agriculture as a result of the altered circumstances arising from colonial rule, and they will continue to impact on the responses of the agricultural sector to the development initiatives of the independent governments.

However, if an understanding in depth of the situation is to be reached, it is necessary to review information on specific African societies, and an assessment of the full impact of the women's productive activities on economic development requires that the data presented on the societies relate to the situation in particular countries. As it would not be possible to cover more than one country in the scope of this paper, the writer has chosen to analyse information on one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa where women play a prominent role in food crop production, the United Republic of Cameroon.

Chapters III and IV build on the information contained in Chapter II and present further information on the questions posed above within the context of the Cameroonian experience. Chapter III provides a general overview of women's role in agriculture in Cameroon, especially in relation to the recent data on economic activity and social statistics which are available as a result of the 1976 census. Chapter IV examines representative agricultural systems in detail, describing the variation in the women's activities in agriculture in different parts of the country. In

addition, this Chapter contains information on the changes which have taken place within the agricultural sector over the last century, and especially in the last three decades in response to various development initiatives of the colonial and independent governments. The success and/or problems of various types of development activities are also touched on in the discussion.

The concluding Chapter of the paper begins by assessing the Cameroonian information in relation to the development process which is taking place in the country, using certain of the questions posed by the two sector agriculture-industry models (originally inspired by the work of Arthur Lewis) as the framework of analysis. The prospects for future development are then discussed, and the role of women in food crop production is considered in the light of results of recent thinking on the importance of the growth of demand in the agriculture sector (and hence technical progress and rising incomes in agriculture) for the development of the total economy.

In conclusion, recognizing the difficulties involved in effecting change in an area which impacts directly on the balance of power between the sexes, consideration is given to the types of development activities which would be most effective in the circumstances.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN AGRICULTURE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Women in sub-Saharan Africa have a predominant role in agricultural production; a fact which has been substantiated by a number of investigators. In addition, the importance of female labour in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is quite different from the overall importance of female labour in agriculture world-wide, as is illustrated by Table 1 below. To prepare Table 1, the writer drew a random, independent sample of sub-Sahara African societies from the "Ethnographic Atlas".¹ A note on the methods used is provided in Appendix A to this paper.

The distribution of labour found in that sample is compared to the distribution of labour which appeared in the world-wide samples of horticultural and agricultural societies drawn from the same data base by M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies.² A wide variety of information is available on each society included in the "Ethnographic Atlas", among which are data on the importance of agriculture in subsistence, the type of agriculture and the division of labour in production. The frequency distribution is given first in the table, and the percentage distribution is in parantheses.

In pre-colonial times, the most common division of labour in African agricultural societies assigned to men primary responsibility for administration and protection of the community, hunting, fishing and house-building. In a small proportion of societies, men also took the major

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1. Murdock, George P., "Ethnographic Atlas: A Summary", *Ethnology*, Vol. 6, No. 4: 109-236.
 2. Martin, M. Kay and Voorhies, Barbara, *Female of the Species*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975, p. 283.
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TABLE 1

Area	Division of Labour			
	Male Predominance	Female Predominance	Equal Participation	
Sub-Sahara Africa	10 (19)	27 (52)	15 (29)	52 (100)
World	92 (47)	67 (34)	38 (19)	197 (100)

role in food production, but it was more usual for them to provide support in this task, particularly with respect to land clearing. In addition, if the tribe was unable to meet all its needs from its own production, men were generally responsible for production and marketing (bartering) goods to secure the items they required. For example, in areas such as that of the Tikar and Bamileke tribes in Cameroon, where it was not possible to grow palms for oil, men spent a considerable part of their time collecting kola nuts and large firewood which they bartered with tribes to the south for palm oil. These trading trips required that men spend a substantial time away from home, as did others of their activities.

Women were responsible for care of the home, cooking, childcare, collecting fuel and water, and for taking the major role in farming activities. It has been suggested by some writers that women's involvement with farming evolved from the conditions of life in hunting and gathering societies - women were responsible for gathering food and could be expected to begin domesticating and cultivating useful plants. Others point out that it may have arisen from primitive beliefs on the connection between female fertility and fertility of the soil. Whatever its origins, the division of labour outlined above was a useful adaptation as it would have been disastrous for the tribe if the men were away fighting, for example, when crops had to be planted or harvested. Women were tied to the village

by their other responsibilities and could provide continuous attention to farming.

Obviously, the conditions of life have changed greatly in the last century, and consideration needs to be given to whether women's role in food crop production has declined as a consequence. For sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, there is little evidence of change in this area. Ester Boserup reviewed studies which had been made in African villages (some in the 1950s but most in the 1960s) and found that, in general, more women than men in cultivator families were doing agricultural work, and the women were usually working more hours per week in agriculture than the men.¹ As a result, in almost all the cases, women "were found to do around 70 per cent and in one case nearly 80 per cent of the total".² It should be noted that Boserup was looking at total agricultural production, including cash crops where men are most heavily involved.

As this evidence indicates, the female role in agriculture has persisted despite the emphasis on replacing females with males exhibited by missionary groups, the colonial administration and the school system. The influence of these groups was limited in this sphere by a variety of factors; the most important being the interconnection between agricultural production and the complex of relationships involved in African family structure and marriage. Related to these is the cultural attitude to the responsibilities involved in the childbearing role of women. These subjects will be considered first, followed by a discussion of two other factors of importance: (1) the new economic activities which became available to men as a result of colonial rule, and (2) the question of agricultural technology and the relationship between it, the environment and

1. Boserup, Ester, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970, p. 20.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

cultivation systems.

Agricultural Production and the African Family

In their article on inheritance and women's labour in Africa, Jack Goody and Joan Buckley note that the predominance of females in production might lead one to expect either that land would be inherited by females from their female relatives or that land would be transmitted through women, i.e. matrilineally to a full brother or sister's son. Although there are no known instances of females inheriting land from other females (females do transmit usage rights in land which are of considerable importance as will be discussed below), there is an association between female predominance in agricultural production and matrilineal inheritance: women are predominant in agriculture four times as often as men in societies with matrilineal inheritance as compared with twice as often as men in societies with patrilineal inheritance. It should be noted that patrilineal inheritance is far more common than matrilineal inheritance.¹

Until recently, population densities in sub-Saharan Africa have been low, and land has not been in short supply in most places; as a result, individual ownership of particular plots of land is not common. Although this situation is changing, and land registration has been introduced in some areas, e.g. Kenya, the following account is still generally true. Social groups, which may be extended families, lineages composed of persons related through either the male or female line, or larger groups such as tribes, control areas of land. The right to use land within the area depends on membership in the group, and decisions on allocation are made by the family elders or lineage heads. In some traditional political systems, chiefs or kings are said to own the land, but the authority to decide on allocations to individuals is usually delegated to the lineage or household

1. Goody, Jack and Buckley, Joan, "Inheritance and Women's Labour in Africa", *Africa*, Vol. 43, 1973, p. 110.

heads.

As these are usually males, whether a woman comes from a matrilineal or patrilineal society, her access to at least a portion of the land she farms is generally dependent on her husband (or his lineage group), or on the males of her lineage group. However, in some social groups, the woman's mother or other female relatives may also have the right to allocate land they have farmed to her,¹ and it is sometimes also possible for a woman to borrow land from other individuals or to clear and claim unused land for her own. As a result, a woman's access to this basic productive resource is generally not a problem, and it can be said that women have more control over land in sub-Saharan Africa than they do in most other parts of the world.

An important point to note is that most of the land allocated for farming is given to married couples; whether or not the wife plays a predominant role in agriculture, a man must be married before he is socially considered to be an adult. Until then he is fed by his mother, and as far as the society is concerned, has no need for land of his own. This fact helps to explain the lack of interest in returning to the land which is observed among unemployed single males in urban areas. The situation of single women is somewhat different; they may be allocated plots to farm by their families as part of their apprenticeship, and may farm actively, especially if they have any children. Widowed and divorced women generally also have access to farming land to provide their own subsistence, and that of their minor children in the case of widows and divorced women in matrilineal systems (in patrilineal systems, divorced women have to leave their children with the husband's family).

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1. The difference between this right and that of the inheritors of the land is that it is a weaker right, and can be over-ridden in certain cases, e.g. as female usage rights are passed on to women who are progressively more distantly related to the inheritors, an inheritor could get the land back, especially at the time it was being given to a new user.

Residence patterns of married couples show a great deal of variety; however, just as most societies in Africa have patrilineal inheritance, the most usual residence pattern is to live with or near the husband's relatives. Accordingly, for most women, marriage means they must go and live among strangers and must establish a new social network to insure their health and happiness. In the past, it was quite common for the girl not to know the husband before her marriage, as most unions were arranged by the families of the two spouses. Now it is more common for the girl to know the husband, and for her consent to be given to the marriage. Despite this change, it is still traumatic for girls to face the upheaval of marriage and many anthropologists have recorded the scenes of weeping which occur and even the physical removal of girls to their new homes.

Women in matrilineal systems generally have a more favourable position, as whether the residence at marriage is with their parents or with their uncles' families, they are close to and can count on the daily support of their kin. However, there is considerable variety in the status of women in different patrilineal systems, and there are also several recorded instances where the weak position of "stranger wives" has led them to recognize that they have common problems which can best be solved through solidarity. These women have formed associations which give them considerable power, and often financial support for such activities as trading ventures which has made them more independent of their husbands.¹

Marriage is normally preceded by the payment of bridewealth from the family of the husband to that of the wife. In the past, this was in the form of valuable gifts (socially prestigious items: goats, cows, cowry

1. For example, see Leis, Nancy B., "Women in Groups: Ijaw Women's Associations", in Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist and Lamphere, Louise (eds.) *Women, Culture, and Society*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 223-242. A Cameroon example is provided by the Beti women, see Manga, Lucien, "Education des Filles, Dot et Société Féminine chez les Béti", *Revue d'Action Populaire*, Vol. 180, July-August 1964, pp. 831-832.

shells, beads, etc., depending on the group) or sometimes "bride service" where the fiancé worked for the family of the wife-to-be for a certain period. In more recent times, the bridewealth has been translated into money terms. It has often been misunderstood by outside observers, who view it as an enslavement of women, i.e. that women are being bought and sold. However, the girl *is* not available to everyone but only to suitors whom her family consider acceptable. In addition, the girl's family have to be prepared to return the goods if the marriage breaks up through the girl's misconduct or she leaves her husband without good cause, and in the past, if she died without having any children. The proceeds are generally used to secure a wife for some member of the girl's family, so in effect, a person is replaced by a person. In patrilineal systems, payment of the bridewealth is essential if the children of the union are to be members of the husband's family. Any children born prior to the payment will be incorporated into the girl's family. Customary sayings such as "the child is not the child of the father, but the child of the bridewealth" are common among patrilineal groups.

Monetization of the bridewealth has had a number of effects on the situation of women, most of which are negative; the potential which it has provided for women to secure their independence by repaying the bride-wealth (a source of conflict in the commercialization of food crops) is discussed below. The negative effects of monetization primarily derive from the fact that the payment of bridewealth in cash more closely approximates a commercial transaction and a large settlement permits a family to secure a bride for another member of the family, and have funds left over to purchase whatever else they desire. This leads to a greater tendency to marry the girl to the man who makes the highest offer even if he is not the most acceptable suitor. Once the family has used the payment to purchase other items, they may not be able to permit the girl to leave a

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clearly disastrous marriage as they cannot return the bridewealth.

However, monetization of the bridewealth and the availability of money earning opportunities increase the possibilities for independence on the part of young men. The items which made up bridewealth in the past were controlled by the lineage and were usually at the disposal of the elderly men who were the lineage heads. In a situation of excess land, a young man could secure land without the help of his lineage by moving out of the village and clearing land for his own farm, but he usually could not secure a wife without the consent of his father or the elders who had to provide the bridewealth. Once export crops were introduced and the bridewealth monetized, however, young men could establish their own farms for crops such as cocoa, and pay their own bridewealth. This greatly reduced the power of the elders over them. At the present time, it is much more difficult to find unutilized land for export crops, and many young men migrate to the cities to find work which will provide them with the funds for bridewealth payments.

Another interesting consequence of the monetization of the bridewealth and new economic activities is the possibility presented to women to secure their independence from their husbands. If a woman can repay the bridewealth herself, she is free to leave her marriage without upsetting her natal family. In the past, there was little likelihood that women could amass the necessary commodities themselves, but it became possible once the bridewealth was monetized and markets were created for the foodcrops produced by the women. Male fears of this possibility have led to attempts either to increase the bridewealth, or to appropriate any funds earned by the women. It is also a factor in male hostility to development projects whose objective is to increase the production and commercialization of foodstuffs, or in their supplanting women in the production and sales activities connected with such projects even when women are the principal

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producers of food crops in the area.

Despite their marriage, both the husband and wife remain members of their own lineages; even in patrilineal systems, women are not incorporated into their husband's family. In this situation, a woman's link with her husband's family does not become strong until she has borne children who are lineage members. Even then, many of a woman's ties and often access to productive resources are provided by her natal family, and this is an important factor in the fragmented nature of both the patterns of holding and use of economic resources. It is expected (and accepted by the husband) that the wife will make gifts regularly to members of her family, and help them financially in times of need.

Another reason for the often distant relationship between husbands and wives and the separation of their property and incomes, is the high rate of polygamous marriages. Polygamy is an ideal for most African males, and many attain it for at least some period of their lives. However, the incidence of polygamy at any one time rarely exceeds thirty-five per cent of married men, and while there are many reports of chiefs with hundreds of wives, most polygamous men have only two or at most three wives.¹ Contrary to popular opinion, this incidence and intensity of polygamy is not made possible by a large excess of females over males as the sex ratio is approximately in equilibrium with just slightly more females than males. Polygamy is thus achieved mainly by an early age at first marriage for females coupled with a relatively late age for males which increases the pool of women available for marriageable males.²

Prior to the monetization of the bridewealth, it was a simple matter

1. Dorjahn, Vernon R., "The Factor of Polygamy in African Demography", in Bascom, William R. and Herskovits, Melville J. (eds.), *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 104-105.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-109.

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for the societies to control this marriage system, as the elders controlled the bridewealth. Latterly, when young men with their own bridewealth payments have been entering the marriage market, competition between them and older men seeking second wives has sometimes resulted in an escalation of the bridewealth payments to incredible amounts. As older men generally have greater economic resources, they have been able to maintain their position. Marriage instability is a secondary factor which helps to make polygamy possible. As women often make several marriages in a lifetime, their movement from husband to husband makes it possible for more males to be polygamous, if only for a brief period in their lives.

A formal relationship between husbands and wives in polygamous marriages is necessary to avoid jealousies and quarrels between co-wives. The relationship between wives is also formalized; in many cases strict equality between wives is observed, but it is also common for there to be a hierarchy among wives with the first wife and the favourite wife being on a more equal footing with the husband than the junior wife or wives.

The need to avoid quarrels also creates a distant relationship between fathers and children; if the father appeared to have a closer relationship with some children than with others, it would lead to quarrels among their mothers. Conversely, there is a close relationship between mothers and their children. Among many groups there is no concept of a family as consisting of a husband, wife and children. Instead, a woman and her children constitute a clearly separate unit within the polygamous compound where they are known as one "house" and it is common for them to live in a separate residence within the compound (see below).

The prevalence of polygamy in sub-Saharan Africa is related to the cultivation system and land use practices. The more wives a man has, the more land he will be allocated to cultivate, thus increasing his wealth and power. This is true whether or not men "own" the crops which are

produced on the land as the availability of land for their sons' families-to-be is important in keeping the allegiance and support of these young men. In addition, even when women are considered to own the crops, each wife generally is required to give a portion of the harvest to her husband for his own use; e.g. Bamileke women produce all food crops, and also control their use and sale with the sole exception of the yam harvest which they produce and give to their husbands for prestige consumption.

Obviously, the predominant role of women in agricultural production is essential to the attractions of polygamy in this regard. It would be of little use to the man to be allocated a larger acreage of land if his labour alone was to be used to exploit it, as he might not be physically capable of realizing its potential, and if he failed to farm it regularly, he could lose his usage rights to it. As population growth continues, and land becomes more scarce, the rate of polygamy may be expected to decline unless a more intensive system of agriculture is developed in which the labour of several wives is still required.

Polygamy also makes it more likely that a man can achieve the socially admired status of being the father of many children. However, polygamy has a depressing effect on the overall rate of population growth, as the number of children born per woman in polygamous marriages is lower than that in monogamous marriages.¹ Child spacing is considered desirable by most African societies, primarily to protect the health of the first child. This is normally achieved by abstinence on the part of the wife during a prolonged period of breast feeding (two to three years was the usual period in the past, and breastfeeding to 18 months is still a common practice). This separation is much more difficult to maintain in a monogamous union.

Whether marriages are monogamous or polygamous, a wife expects her husband to build her a separate kitchen of her own. Although these are

1. Dorjahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-112.

usually quite small, they are the woman's own kingdom in which her authority is supreme. Although husbands may not build their wives a separate kitchen until several years after their marriage when children have arrived, and a second wife may have to move initially into the first wife's kitchen as a subordinated resident, all wives strive for this sphere of autonomy. The crops that women grow are normally stored in their kitchens and no one is allowed to enter them or take any of the produce without their authority. Both girls and boys may sleep with their mother in her kitchen when they are young; boys normally move to a separate hut in the compound as they grow older, but girls may stay with their mothers until they marry. In other tribes, women may spend most of their time in the kitchens and entertain their friends there, but sleep in the husband's house.

In addition to providing his wife with a kitchen, the husband is expected to provide other resources such as oil, meat, health care, and more recently, clothes and school fees. In addition, he is usually expected to provide his wife with farming land, though land might be provided by her own lineage as was noted above. Men who have several wives often can decide how much land to allocate to each wife, and sometimes can reallocate the land provided by his family among them. As a result, the amount of land women receive from their own kin often creates considerable differences between the independence of wives of the same man and between their ability to feed themselves and their children or to generate a marketable surplus.

Except in rare cases, even when women do not predominate in agricultural production, they are expected to provide a large portion of the livelihood of themselves and their children. Accordingly, one finds in the anthropological literature, long lists of productive activities engaged in by women, for example, Miriam Eguchi lists many different means used by Fulani women in Cameroon to earn money including food processing, spinning and

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weaving, and hairdressing.¹ For women in West Africa, the most usual money earning activity is trading.

In summary, family structure and inheritance systems in sub-Saharan Africa combine to create a land usage system which is very different from that found in most other parts of the world. As a result, it is difficult to apply the models of land tenure usually found in the literature on agriculture, e.g. landlord/tenant, owner-operator. The use of the household as the basic unit of analysis, with the management role assumed to be taken by the husband and the wives filling the role of labourers under his direction, is also problematic. The presence of the wife, and usually her competence in agricultural work, are crucial to the husband, but there is considerable variation in the husband's decision-making role over her activities. Even in societies where men are closely involved in agriculture, women generally maintain an area of autonomy, e.g. special crops which they alone grow. This is essential to the women, both to meet household requirements not provided by their husbands and to fulfil their obligations to their natal families.

The African Concept of the Child-Bearing Role of Women

In addition to the many other factors discussed above, the prevalence among Africans of a particular concept of the child-bearing role of women has been an important factor in the predominance of women in food production. There is a general association world-wide between the "mother" and the "giver of food". In Africa, the giving of food is closely allied to its production, and is often seen as an integral part of motherhood.

Success at both child bearing and food production is essential to women, for in the view of society, and especially in the eyes of the women

1. Eguchi, Miriam Joy, "Aspects of the Life Style and Culture of Women in the Fulbe Districts of Maroua", *Kyoto University African Studies*, Vol. 8, March 1973.

themselves, childbearing is basic to their reason for living, the very essence of their femaleness, and raising food to feed the children is part of their nurturing role. To fail in this realm would be to fail as a mother and as a person. Under these conditions, food crop production can be seen as "women's work" *par excellence*, and men would be understandably reluctant to take it over. As Theresa Ndongko points out, a "man performing a duty which is looked upon as that of a female is ridiculed as is a woman who performs labour assigned to males".¹

The Creation of New Economic Opportunities for Men

The arrival of the Europeans and the establishment of the colonial system created many new economic opportunities for males. Male movement into new roles was to a certain extent inevitable; the colonialists had pre-empted many of their former responsibilities (administration and policing for example), and in turn, offered or required performance of new roles which involve absence from the village, e.g. portage duties (though women were sometimes also forced to take part in this) or labour on roads and railroads. The demands on male labour helped to ensure that women would continue to dominate food crop production both to guarantee the food supply and to protect family rights to property in accordance with inheritance and land tenure customs.

Also important, however, were European attitudes to education for Africans, and employment in supporting roles in commercial ventures and the colonial administration, as they decreed that these were to be primarily for males. In addition, most European efforts in the agricultural sector were concentrated in cash crop production where men were taught by other men to grow crops such as coffee and cocoa, and were provided with consider-

1. Ndongko, Theresa, "Tradition and the Role of Women in Africa", *Présence Africaine*, No. 99/100, 1976, p. 147.

able support and incentives. Although men were exhorted to take over food crop production as well, little assistance was given to them in this area. As they did not have the competence of women in growing food crops, and no inclination to acquire it on their own, male movement into food crop production was limited.

It is apparent that European actions in this area were in conflict with their stated desire to move women out of agriculture and into the home (the Europeans did not envisage new productive roles for women). If they wished to have men replace women in food crop production and take on the new economic roles as well, they would have had to ensure that productivity per labourer in food crop production was greatly increased first. Instead, almost all research and extension efforts were concentrated on cash crop production,¹ and as a consequence, female labour became more rather than less important in food crop production, and they also took on additional tasks in cash crop production.

Agricultural Technology, the Environment and Cultivation Systems

This portion of the paper will consider the question of agricultural technology, and the relationship between it, the environment and cultivation systems in sub-Saharan Africa. The question of technology is important to our analysis as it is commonly assumed that there is a correlation between low levels of technology in sub-Saharan African agriculture and the predominance of female labour, and it is further assumed that, as

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1. Lele, Uma, *The Design of Rural Development Lessons from Africa*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press for the World Bank, 1975, p. 28. In a footnote on p. 28, Uma Lele notes that "...81 per cent of agricultural research expenditure in Africa went to export crops and only 14 per cent to food crops in 1961. By 1971 the proportions had become approximately equal with 45 per cent of research expenditures on export crops and 47 per cent on food products". Her information is derived from Kassapu, Samuel, "Dépenses de Recherche Agricole en Afrique", unpublished memorandum, Paris: Organisation pour Coopération et Développement Economique, September 14, 1973, p. 46, Table 1.

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a result, female labour will inevitably drop in importance as development progresses. We will begin by examining the background to this assertion, and demonstrate its lack of validity in sub-Saharan Africa. The second part of this *section* will discuss the inter-relation between the environment and cultivation systems, and the likely impact of this combination on changes in agricultural technology and women's role in agriculture.

The Question of Technology

Certain analysts claim that female labour is more likely to dominate at low levels of technology and to be less important at higher levels of technology (this may be either in terms of the equipment used or the skill level of the activity).¹ In agriculture, these analysts have shown that females are most often associated with extensive systems where only simple tools and cultivation practices are used. Intensive systems which have been created to secure higher yields per unit of land, either through the use of the plough, irrigation, or such cultivation practices as crop rotation and fertilization, generally use only limited amounts of female labour.

The Martin and Voorhies data, which provided the basis for the illustration of the importance of female labour in agriculture on a world-wide basis (presented on Page 11 above) is a recent demonstration of this proposition. The aggregate data previously presented was based on two separate samples drawn from the "Ethnographic Atlas", one for "horticultural" societies and one for "agricultural" societies ("horticultural" was the term they applied to extensive cultivation systems and "agricultural" to systems which used one or more of the forms of intensification mentioned above). The results of these two independent samples are shown separately below.

1. Murdock, George P. and Provost, Caterina, "Factors in the Division of Labor by Sex: A Cross-Cultural Analysis", *Ethnology*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1970, p. 213.

with the frequency given first and the percentage distribution shown in parentheses.

TABLE 2

Type of Cultivation System	Division of Labour			
	Male Predominance	Female Predominance	Equal Participation	Total
Horticulture	17 (17)	52 (50)	35 (33)	104 (100)
Agriculture	75 (81)	15 (16)	3 (3)	93 (100)

Given this result, it is sometimes suggested that female predominance in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is due to the fact that most societies practice extensive cultivation, and that when intensive measures are introduced, female labour will drop in importance. For example, when the British Administration in Kenya began an extension programme to introduce oxen ploughs to African culture, Lord Lugard stated, "Since men alone tend oxen in Africa, the result, as I have elsewhere said, will be to replace female labour in the fields to a large extent."¹ Obviously, this assumption is open to criticism; the more academic approach taken by Martin and Voorhies and others can also be questioned with respect to its applicability to change. As the data used in the analysis is cross-sectional information on different societies, rather than samples taken at different points in time in the same society, it is an open question whether the observed differences are due to changes in technology, cultural differences, a combination of

1. Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1965, first published in 1922, p. 517. Quoted in Staudt, Kathleen, "Agricultural Productivity Gaps: A Case Study of Male Preference in Government Policy", *Development and Change*, SAGE, London and Beverly Hills, Vol. 9, 1978, p. 441.

of the two, or some other factor.

However, setting aside these objections, it is instructive to examine the specific information on sub-Saharan Africa drawn from the "Ethnographic Atlas" with reference to the above suggestions. The random sample drawn by the writer does show the prominence of extensive cultivation systems; 42 out of 52 societies are in that classification. However, further analysis of the sample shows that while female labour is reduced somewhat in importance in intensive cultivation systems, there is no significant difference between the labour usage practices of societies having extensive cultivation systems as compared to those with intensive cultivation systems.¹ The frequency distribution of labour usage in the two types of systems is given in Table 3 below (as usual, the percentage distribution is shown in parentheses).

TABLE 3

Type of Cultivation System - Sub-Sahara Africa	Division of Labour			
	Male Predominance	Female Predominance	Equal Participation	Total
Extensive	8 (19)	23 (55)	11 (26)	42 (100)
Intensive	2 (20)	4 (40)	4 (40)	10 (100)

1. As Appendix A indicates, the sample drawn by the writer from the "Ethnographic Atlas" was selected in a random manner which assured the independence of the observations. When this procedure was followed, and a χ^2 significance test performed on the data, the value was 0.88 which does not fall in the critical region even at the 0.50 level. This result is very different from that obtained by Goody and Buckley, see *op. cit.*, p. 110. Their result, which is based on the entire population of societies described in the "Ethnographic Atlas" for Africa as a whole has a χ^2 value of 29.29 which falls in the critical region at the 0.001 level. However, Murdock indicates in the "Ethnographic Atlas", *op. cit.*, pp. 111-113 that use of statistical techniques on the entire population of the Atlas will not give correct results as neither randomness nor independence are assured by this method.

Obviously, an explanation for the difference between the importance of female labour in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa as compared to the rest of the world has to be sought in factors other than that of intensive versus extensive agriculture, and part of the answer is provided by the preceding portions of this Chapter of the paper. The concluding section considers additional information on the environment, cultivation systems, and agricultural technology.

Environment, Cultivation Systems, and Changes in Technology

There are three basic ecological systems in ^{sub-Saharan} Africa: wet and dry forest, grassland and savannah, and that found on high altitude plateaus and mountains. However, variations in rainfall in each of these areas results in a fairly complex pattern of agricultural exploitation, in terms of both crops and the number of growing seasons in a year. Multiple cropping can be practiced in some areas while only one short and precarious growing season is possible in others; concomitantly there are variations in the labour requirements of agriculture.

Whatever the particular agricultural problems of each area, in general, they all share the unfavourable characteristic of poor soil. As John de Wilde states in his book on African tropical agriculture,

"African soils are in large part deficient in the characteristics of structure, texture, and chemical composition which together are the principle determinants of fertility....[as a result] The precarious equilibrium in African soils is easily upset after the natural vegetation is cleared and cultivation begins."¹

As was noted above, population densities in Africa were not high in the past, and as a result, land was (and still is in most places) relatively

1. de Wilde, John C., *Experiences with Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa, Vol. 1, The Synthesis*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press for the World Bank, 1967, pp. 15-16.

abundant. In these conditions, the Africans generally have responded to the problem of soils and climate by evolving a pattern of production which involves an alternation between periods of cultivation and fallow. Where population densities are very low, "shifting cultivation" is sometimes practiced. In this case, the farmer clears and plants a plot which is used until it loses its fertility; it is then abandoned and reverts to fallow. The farmer uses other land controlled by his/her social group and does not reclaim land previously farmed after the fallowing period. Another system is that of "rotational bush fallowing" which follows the same pattern of cultivation and fallow, but in this case, the individual or family (and their descendants) who first clear the land establishes continuous rights to it and reclaims it after the fallowing period. This system was more common where population densities were higher, and is the most usual system today where population growth, the practice of colonial governments of fixing tribes in place and along main roads, plus the introduction of lucrative cash crops (which are often perennials) have made individual usage rights in land much more desirable.

Permanent systems of cultivation are much more rare, and generally depend either on especially favourable soil conditions and/or political circumstances which resulted in population concentrations in easily defended locations. A mixed system which involves permanent cultivation of "compound" or "kitchen" gardens whose fertility is maintained by the application of animal manure and household waste, combined with rotational bush fallow for production of the staples in the diet, is much more common. Here again, individual and family rights to use the land are maintained and inherited.¹

Intensification in these cultivation systems are most often achieved by techniques such as crop rotation or manuring rather than through the use of

1. Morgan, W.B., "Peasant Agriculture in Tropical Africa", in Thomas, M.F. and Whittington, G.W. (eds.) *Environment and Land Use in Africa*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969, pp. 248-257, *inter alia*.

the plough (cattle are not available in many areas due to disease problems) or irrigation systems which put a premium on male involvement due to the need for their greater physical strength. As a result, in sub-Saharan Africa conditions, intensive systems are still compatible with a predominance of female labour. Also, even when the plough is introduced, alternate demands on the labour of men, and the concept of what constitutes women's work sometimes results in the men merely adding ploughing to their land clearance activities (this is normally performed by men, but is often confined to a short period, e.g. 10 days a year). All other activities in the productive process are then carried out by women.¹

In terms of the likely results of the development process, analysis of the agricultural situation in Africa indicates that intensification through the use of oxen ploughs or tractors in areas where cattle cannot survive, are unlikely to be cost-effective without a prior major increase in the productivity of agriculture. For example, Dale Thornton notes (quoting from the work of C. Clark and M.R. Haswell) that the introduction of animal power requires a doubling of output per person before it is economic.² In addition, ploughing requires the removal of roots (and generally the cultivation of larger areas of land) while roots and small plots are highly important in maintaining the fertility and stability of soils.

R.F. Morgan, for example, in an article on the ecological background to land-use in Africa, notes that, under current usage systems in forest areas,

"...most woody roots are left in the ground, facilitating a supply of nutrients to the soil and hence to the crop by

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1. Martin and Voorhies, *op. cit.*, p. 284.
 2. Clark, C. and Haswell, M.R. (Miss), *The Economics of Subsistence Agriculture*, Macmillan, 1964. Quoted in D.S. Thornton, "Agriculture in Economic Development", *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 24, May 1973, p. 227.

sloughing, exudation and decomposition, and also ensuring rapid regeneration of woody growth after the cultivation cycle....Lastly, the continued presence of living roots in the soil, together with the effects of the extensive rooting volume of the adjacent forest, acts as a buffer against major change in groundwater levels and soil moisture characteristics at depth. The size of the cultivation patches is thus critical in relation to the disturbance they bring to the balance of the closed forest as a whole."¹

The continued presence of roots in the soil is also important in the areas which are classified as a "mosaic of closed forest and grass-with-trees" and areas of "grass-with-trees", as the trees are the flora which make the greatest contribution to the restoration of soil fertility during the fallowing period, especially with respect to calcium which is important to the phosphate balance of the soils.² (These three ecological classifications account for the bulk of the land area in sub-Saharan Africa.)

While these problems may be overcome by the application of fertilizers (itself an extra cost which would have to be justified in terms of increased productivity) Morgan points out additional problems which may then arise:

"The great increase in the use of chemical fertilizers that is to be expected in West Africa in the near future will rapidly extend the problem of soil erosion. The tendency will be for fields to be cultivated for longer periods of time....Some permanent cultivation is found about Zaria [Nigeria]....Here the rainfall is higher and the soils have a finer texture than at Kano [also in Nigeria, it is an area where successful permanent cultivation has been achieved]. They tend to form an impermeable cap during the dry season and rainfall infiltration is slow. The result is that sheet wash and gully erosion are rapidly destroying large areas of soil...."³

Soil conservation along with irrigation systems to solve the problems

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1. Moss, R.P., "The Ecological Background to Land Use Studies in Tropical Africa, with Special Reference to the West", in Thomas and Whittington (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 211 and 214.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
 3. Pullan, R.A., "The Soil Resources of West Africa" in Thomas and Whittington (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 148.

of watering crops all represent additional costs. Given the environmental constraints, it may be possible that the system of rotational bush fallow which represents the best adaptation to the environment is also the most efficient production system. These observations suggest that the tendency to assume intensive cultivation on fixed fields is the best form of production and the direction of agricultural research efforts to the means of achieving it may represent another Western bias which is inappropriate in the African context except where particular environmental conditions make them feasible, e.g. heavy volcanic soils in mountainous areas, the flood plains of lakes and rivers, etc.

Accordingly, the present system could well be maintained throughout the development process although it may benefit from improved seeds, fertilizers, some minor mechanization, etc., without changing the basic patterns of hoe culture or the predominance of female labour in production. Such a result will depend on either enlightened extension activities on the part of governments or benign neglect which places resources and markets within the reach of women and does not attempt to change the basic framework of their productive activities. Alternatively, new forms of intensive cultivation will require vast increases in productivity to be cost effective, and these will make heavy additional demands on labour at other points in the production process, e.g. harvesting and processing, even if mechanization or animal power are used for other cultivation activities, e.g. weeding.

So, in either circumstance, the continued importance of female labour in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is to be expected, especially when one considers the cultural factors outlined above. At the same time, government intervention might result in women losing their independence of action in agricultural production, whether within hoe cultivation or modern intensive agriculture. This occurrence would have a problematic impact on development within agriculture, the economy in general, and on the women's desire to

remain in agricultural production. These subjects will be considered in more detail in the concluding chapter of the paper, especially in the light of the Cameroon-specific information on women in agriculture contained in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER III

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE IN CAMEROON

The division of labour in agricultural production in Cameroon conforms to the pattern of female predominance described in the preceding Chapter. A review of ethnographic studies¹ of tribes living in all parts of the country and representing more than 50 per cent of the population found the following general picture: men in the southern part of Cameroon make very little input into food crop production and are mainly involved in cash crop production, while those in the north of the country participate on an essentially equal basis with women in food and cash crop production. Although women provide support in cash crop production, food crop production is the dominant economic role of women in all parts of Cameroon and consumes a large share of their waking hours. The only exception to this pattern are the Fulani who live mainly in the north of the country. The Fulani are primarily transhumanant cattle people although certain of them have established a settled pattern of residence, and as a result, neither men nor women were involved in agriculture to any extent in the past.

The ethnographic studies reviewed were made at different times over the last thirty years, and might not represent the current situation. However, recent data are becoming available on Cameroon as a result of the first national census which was made in 1976. Preliminary information on the economically active population indicates that a total of 2,758,000 Cameroonians are in the labour force out of a total population of

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1. Bryson, Judy C., *Women and Economic Development in Cameroon*, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Yaounde, January 1979. Certain portions of the analysis prepared by the writer, and included in this study have been used in the present dissertation without attribution; however, whenever the analysis is derived from other sources, reference is made to the original work.

7,663,000.¹ A large proportion of the population is young, so approximately 53.5 per cent (4,098,000) of Cameroonians are in the age group of 15 to 64 when they would be expected to be economically active.

Approximately 400,000 persons listed as economically active are younger than 15 or older than 64. Accordingly, around 1,636,000 persons aged 15 to 64 have not been counted as economically active. A large proportion of these are women; unemployed males are primarily in the age group 15 to 24 and a very high proportion (43 per cent) are in urban areas (only 28 per cent of Cameroonians are resident in urban centres). Female participation rates are approximately 25 per cent lower in urban areas than in rural areas, while those for males are ten per cent lower in the cities. Obviously, questions could be raised as to whether all the urban women and men involved in informal sector activities had been counted as economically active, and similarly for rural women involved in agricultural production.

The census indicates that there are a total of 1,656,000 males in the labour force as compared to 1,101,700 females, so males represent 60 per cent of the labour force. In agriculture, and especially in food crop production, the situation is different. There are 1,073,000 men listed as economically active in agriculture as compared to 961,700 women. Men's involvement is divided mainly between food crop (590,000) and export/industrial crop production (378,400) while women are almost totally concentrated in food crop production (924,600). As a result, even if they have been undercounted, the census indicates that women provide at least 61 per cent of the labour force in food crop production. Clearly, Cameroonian women have maintained their predominance in food crop production to the present day.

1. Cameroon. Direction de la Statistique. Unpublished preliminary information from the 1976 Population Census on the Economically Active Population, supplied by Mr. Kamgang. All subsequent information on the economically active population is based on the writer's analysis of this data.

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The Cameroon had a somewhat unusual colonial experience as it was first a German colony and was divided between Britain and France for administration following World War I. The separation of the two parts of Cameroon (France controlled five of the present seven provinces, including the north of the country, while Britain controlled what are now the Northwest and Southwest Provinces) continued until after the independence of the French portion when the British section voted for union with Cameroon rather than Nigeria in a plebiscite administered by the United Nations. As a result, there is considerable diversity in the governmental structures and school systems in Cameroon and it is the only country in Africa which is officially bilingual, French and English.

Despite these differences, the three colonial powers followed policies with respect to male involvement in export crops (cocoa, coffee and rubber were among those introduced) and privileged access to education and wage employment similar to those outlined in the previous Chapter. Much more encouragement was given to the attendance of boys at school than to girls by missionaries and colonial administrators. In many cases, facilities for girls were opened several decades after those for boys. In addition, the purpose of education was to train persons for jobs into which primarily only men were being hired. Families could see little reason for sending their daughters to school, and they were further discouraged by the fact that the limited educational facilities available were usually located some distance away. As a result, school attendance rates for girls were very low through most of the colonial period, and did not reach any significant level until the 1940s when their attendance rate was 15 per cent.¹

That this situation was not due only to African conservatism is indicated by Madelaine Richard's study of the Batanga who live on the Atlantic

1. Levine, Victor and M'Ballah, Henri, "Federal Republic of Cameroon", in Kitchen, Helen (ed.) *The Educated African*, New York: Praeger, 1962, p. 521.

coast in Cameroon. When missionaries arrived in 1879 to establish a school, the first class of twelve pupils selected by the Batanga consisted entirely of girls, and female attendance at the schools continued to high up to the First World War. After the War, the French colonial administration was established and (in Richard's opinion) the lack of interest of the French colonial government in female education caused a sharp decline of female attendance to fall dramatically.¹

The results of this lack of interest were clearly evident in the data collected in the 1976 Cameroon census as the information indicated that 64 per cent of females aged 10 and up had never attended school as against 40 per cent of males. The independent Cameroon government has made strenuous efforts in this area, and its success is also indicated by the census data; among children in the age group 6-14, 63.7 per cent of girls as compared with 71.1 per cent of boys are in school.²

The census data also clearly indicates male dominance in employment outside the agriculture sector; 35 per cent of economically active males are in employment outside agriculture as compared with only thirteen per cent of economically active females. Although continued male dominance in new employment is due partly to their earlier entry into these activities, a major problem for women is lack of education. For example, a recent study by Dolores Koenig of the employment of men and women in banks and insurance firms indicated that "for the sector as a whole, men and women of a certain educational level seem to be given the same employment opportunities and are also taking them to a similar degree".³ In other words, the

1. Richard, Madeleine, *Histoire, Tradition et Promotion de La Femme Chez Les Batanga*, Bandundu, Zaïre: Centred'Etudes Ethnologiques, 1970, pp. 94-97.
2. Cameroon. Direction de la Statistique. *Principaux Résultats Du Recensement Général de La Population et de l'Habitat d'Avril 1976* 1978, pp. 18 and 16.
3. Koenig, Dolores B., *Sex, Work and Social Class in Cameroon*. Unpublished doctoral thesis presented to Northwestern University, August 1977, pp. 155-156.

numbers of men and women employed by the banks and insurance firms was in proportion to the respective numbers of educated men and women in the society. If this situation continues, women may be expected to increase their percentage among workers outside agriculture over the next few decades as more educated women enter the labour force.

As the above figures indicate, 57 per cent of male labour has been absorbed by the new economic activities generated by contact with the Europeans: 35 per cent of males are working outside the agriculture sector and a further 22 per cent are in export and industrial crop production. While it is sometimes assumed that the unemployment problems of males could be solved if women left their productive roles to concentrate on their homes and children, it should be recognized that unemployed males in Cameroon represent less than fifty per cent of the female labour force. Further, most of these males are young and have not been trained in food crop production and will not have access to land through their families until they are married. Any efforts by the government to involve them in food crop production would require heavy inputs of scarce resources such as extension agents and modern inputs, probably in combination with resettlement schemes. Even then, it is doubtful if they would equal the yields per hectare of female farmers, let alone match their productivity in terms of the inputs of labour, seeds, etc., employed to secure the yields.

Solving the problems of unemployed males by involving them in food crop production would be of little assistance to the large numbers of women who are in polygamous marriages where each wife is expected to provide the basic subsistence for herself and her children. In addition, a substantial number of women are heads of rural households either through divorce, separation or widowhood, and are totally responsible for themselves and their dependents. The Cameroon census indicates that the polygamy rate is still quite high; it totals 23.6 per cent of married males nationwide, divided

between 18.6 per cent of married men in urban areas, as compared to 25.4 per cent of those in rural areas.¹ As a result, between 40 and 50 per cent of rural married women are in polygamous marriages.²

With respect to female-headed households, the 1972/73 agricultural census found that there were 80,128 women classified as the head of an agricultural household as compared with 845,767 males.³ The female-headed households accordingly represent 9.5 per cent of all farm households; most of the women who head farm households are widows or divorced women, and only a small proportion are single or married either monogamously or polygamously. The number of women in polygamous marriages and the number who are household heads suggests that at least 50 per cent of rural women aged 15 and above have a compelling need to produce their subsistence requirements, and that of their dependents (the number of women in that age group who are single is only 15.9 per cent nationwide, and is probably lower in rural areas than in urban areas). A woman in a monogamous marriage is also expected to produce her own subsistence, but may receive help from her husband as he has fewer demands on his resources. However, the *max* should be emphasized as he might also be saving his funds to make a second bride-wealth payment.

Analysis of rural budgets indicates that a man's resources from his wage earnings/cash crop sales, are almost totally absorbed by payment of

1. Cameroon. Direction de la Statistique. *Principaux Résultats*, p. 15.
2. If 25.4 per cent of men are in polygamous marriages, one would expect to find at least 126 married women for every 100 married men. As some men have more than 2 wives, the number of married women for every 100 married men would probably be closer to 130 women. Hence between 50 and 60 of the 126-130 women would be in polygamous marriages, that is 42-46 per cent.
3. United Nations Development Program/Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNDP/FAO). *Recensement Mondial de l'Agriculture et Etablissement d'un Système Permanent de Statistiques Courantes-Résultats du Recensement Agricole 1972/73 Pour le Cameroun*, Rome: AG:DP/RAF/71/86, 1977, p. 163.

tax, bridewealth, school expenses for his children, and his own personal needs. He often has little left over to give to his wife/wives as his contribution to the cash expenses of the household (cash contributions have generally replaced the contributions in kind of meat, oil, etc., which men were expected to make in the past), so she/they not only have to grow the basic subsistence for their families, but also have to generate a surplus for sale to purchase these items. When one further recognizes that adult women and children under 15 make up 75 per cent of the rural population (67 per cent of the total population), the importance of the women's role in agriculture in meeting the "basic needs" of the majority of the population is obvious, as is the need to find ways to enhance their skills and productive activities.

CHAPTER IV

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF PRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS, FOOD CROP MARKETING, AND RURAL INCOMES IN CAMEROON

The following discussion provides a description of the production systems in the forest and highlands/grasslands areas in southern Cameroon and in the mountains and plains areas in northern Cameroon. In addition, existing information on the sales of food crops is considered, including the mode of operation of traders, particularly where women are involved. The resulting pattern of rural cash incomes and the manner in which incomes are spent are also described.

A number of ethnic groups live in the two areas in the southern part of the country, and while there are broad similarities between the land usage practices of the tribes who live in each area, there is considerable variation in the details of their systems. In order to avoid a lengthy and complicated description for each area while highlighting the points which are useful to our analysis, the situation in representative tribes which have been the subject of extensive studies will be discussed. The Eton, a Pahouin tribe of the forest area, and the Tikar and Bamileke tribes who live in the western highlands and grasslands respectively will be used as examples. The Pahouin as a whole, and the Bamileke are the two largest tribes in Cameroon. The Bamileke cultivation system is of particular interest as it is an intensive system which depends entirely on female labour.

The North of Cameroon is a large area, much of which has a low population density. In many areas, shifting cultivation or bush fallow rotation are practiced by settled agriculturalists in conjunction with shifting communities of the Fulani, who are now mainly transhumant cattle people. The

Fulani established control over large areas of the north in the nineteenth century, and made their capital at Ngaoundere which is now the administrative headquarters of the North Province. The agricultural system of the settled agriculturalists in the areas of low population density will not be described due to the small numbers involved.

In the extreme north of the country, there are two areas of very heavy population concentration, the Mandara Mountains and the area along the Logone River which is subject to flooding from Lake Chad. The people living in these two areas, among whom the Mafa in the Mandara Mountains and the Massa/Toupouri of the flood plain have been studied in detail, both practice intensive agriculture. There are considerable differences in the details of their production systems as to rotations, organization of fields, etc., resulting from their different environmental situation and social systems. However, a similar range of crops is grown, and they also exhibit similarities in the division of labour in agriculture as men and women in both places cultivate the staples, and in addition, women grow special crops of their own. Accordingly, the agricultural system of the Mafa has been selected for detailed description as it has been studied most recently, and in addition, data are available on the changes in the system which occur when certain of the Mafa migrate to plains areas adjacent to the mountains.

The tools used in food crop production are similar in all parts of Cameroon and consist primarily of a hoe, a machete (a large knife) and an axe. The 1972/73 agricultural census indicated that while 97 per cent of farm households had hoes (an average of 3.3 per household which had a hoe), 83 per cent had machetes and 81 per cent axes. Only 31 per cent of households had shovels, these being the next most frequently found tool.¹ These implements are supplemented by baskets or headpans which are used to carry items and crops to and from the fields. The tools of production are

1: UNDP/FAO, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

accordingly very simple; however, agricultural techniques are much more highly developed especially in certain areas of the country.

The Forest Zone

The forest zone is in a generally favourable agricultural situation with respect to rainfall as it is in the equatorial wet zone, and as a result, there are two growing seasons each year. The same basic foodstuffs are grown over most of the area, maize and various rootcrops - yam, cassava, and taro provide the staples in the diet, groundnuts and palm oil provide oil and protein, and a whole variety of subsidiary crops - peas, beans, pepper, melon, green leaves, tomatoes, etc., provide the vitamins and interest in the diet. Industrial and export crops are also grown in most areas, mainly oil palms and cocoa, and coffee is grown in those areas which are compatible with its cultivation requirements. Considerable attention will be paid to this area, partly due to the number of recent detailed studies of agricultural systems, food sales, and household budgets which have been made in the area, but also because of its overall importance in Cameroon - the total population of the four provinces in the forest area, East, Central-South, Littoral and Southwest was 3,413,861 in 1976 or approximately 45 per cent of the total Cameroonian population.

There were no centralized kingdoms in this area but instead patrilineal clans controlled areas of land and regulated their own affairs. While they generally recognized their membership in larger ethnic groups, they did not pay allegiance to any higher authority. Women were exchanged in marriage between the clans to make alliances between them. This provided an assurance of support and solidarity in times of trouble. Residence at marriage was with the husband's family, and women were provided access to land through him. They did not receive any allocation from their own family. Men cleared all fields and planted a few crops which did not

require hoeing of the field prior to planting. Women hoed and planted the plots which produced the other crops grown by the group, and were responsible for all other agricultural work in all the fields. As each family could produce its own requirements, there was no need for trading, and as a result, markets were essentially non-existent in pre-colonial times.

The colonial era and its aftermath have resulted in profound changes in the way of life in these areas; they were in close contact with the colonizers, and many of the people accepted Christianity. Many men no longer do any work in food crop production as they are concentrating on wage employment and/or cash crop production. At the same time, there has been a large increase in the demand for foodstuffs as a result of the establishment of the two largest cities, Yaounde, the capital with a population of 313,706 in 1976, and Douala, the port city, population 456,426, and active markets are found throughout the area. However, land holding remains vested in the patrilineal clans, and a woman's production possibilities are still dependent on her husband's family. The following description of current practices among the Eton living in the Lékié (an area 30 kilometres north of Yaounde) is based on the information collected by Dr. Jane Guyer in 1975-1976.¹

The Production System

Girls start their apprenticeships in farming at an early age, and begin by assisting their mothers in the fields. When they reach their teens, the mother will often mark out a portion of a field from among her own for the girl to work herself. This decision is made by the mother without consulting the father. The girl may farm energetically, often selling a fair portion of what she produces. However, her mother takes the primary responsibility for her subsistence, and the young girls are

1. Guyer, Jane, *The Women's Farming System, The Lékié, Southern Cameroon*, Yaounde: National Advanced School of Agriculture, 1977.

likely to be erratic farmers, especially as many of them are currently attending school. It is upon her marriage that a girl begins to farm seriously.

When a new bride moves to her marital home, she is provided with land to farm by her mother-in-law who also provides her with seeds for planting and feeds her for the first year. After a year, the new wife has all the main types of food to eat, but it takes four or five years for her to develop the full complement of fields necessary for the rotational bush fallow system practiced in the area. Once a woman has been allocated a plot, it is hers to use; she refers to it as "my plot" and reclaims it after each fallowing period. Her husband cannot allocate it to his other wives (if any) or to his sisters. He may take it for his own use, but if he does, he has to make arrangements for an alternative. Guyer noted that while all the fields came from among those which the mother-in-law had farmed, she did not find any instances of jealousy between the two women, even though there was a considerable amount of litigation over land in the area. Each woman took it as her responsibility to ensure that her son's wives would have sufficient farming land and saw to it that she acquired land for the purpose, and farmed all over it to maintain the property rights to it. In the process, she reaffirmed her husband's right to the land, and his power and prestige in the clan.

A number of different types of fields are in cultivation in the area. In the past, men took a more active part in farming, and would clear and plant an *esep* field which included melon, macabo, plantain and cassava. *Esep* is the name given to the men's plots. These plots were cleared from heavy forest which had been in long fallow, and were planted without being hoed. All other cultivation activities on the *esep* fields had been undertaken by the women. Two other major types of fields were planted, a yam field and a groundnut field, and in addition, minor fields for the production

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of particular crops were sometimes worked. All of these fields were cleared by the men, but did not require the heavy work of the *esep* plots as they were left fallow for only two to at most five years.

The yam fields were very labour intensive as they had to be hoed and mounds built for the yams; these had to be remade and weeded several times during the growing season. The groundnut fields were interplanted with a number of crops to provide the balance of the consumption requirements, and were carefully hoed and tended. Women did almost all the work involved on these two fields; other than clearing, the men's input consisted of preparing stakes for the yam plants and building storage shelters for the yams. These plots and the minor fields were considered to be the women's plots.

When cocoa was introduced, men began cultivating it, and much of the land available for *esep* fields was converted into cocoa plantations. As a result, these moist virgin areas were permanently lost to food production. In addition, cultivation of cocoa took more time than the men had previously spent on food crops so they generally stopped doing other agricultural work even though the work peaks of the food crops and cocoa crops do not clash. At present, many men (but not all) still clear their wives' groundnut plots for them, but Guyer found very few *esep* fields, and her informants told her that those in her sample were much smaller than they had been in the past. Yam fields have also essentially disappeared.

Instead, women grow all the family's requirements on their groundnut fields. To do this, a 10 are¹ field is cleared and planted twice a year, and continues in production for two years. In its first growing season, groundnuts, cassava, macabo, maize, okro, peppers and green vegetables are planted, the vegetables are harvested after a month or so, and the groundnuts

1. All data on land areas cultivated are given in the metric unit of ares; 100 ares equals one hectare. Small plots of irregular size and shape are much easier to measure in ares as each are is composed of 100 square metres.

and maize after three months. The field is replanted with cassava, macabo and maize in the area left by the groundnuts, and plantain is added. A second harvest of maize is made the same year, and the root crops and plantain are harvested in the second year. The third year, the land returns to fallow though there may be some plantain remaining to be harvested. A new field is planted each March and September, so a woman normally has between 30 to 40 ares in these all-purpose "groundnut" fields, and in addition, she has in the order of 8 ares of additional speciality fields. Dr. Guyer's information on yields indicates that they are sufficient to support the woman farmer plus the three dependents of the average woman, and in most cases, a surplus is available for sale in the markets.

Some of the women whose husbands do not assist in land clearing receive help from other male relatives, and it is also possible to hire labour to clear the fields. As a result, the period from mid-December to early February represents the lightest workload for the women as it is the period of clearing where they take a supporting role. Beginning in February with the planting of the main groundnut field, the women's workload increases dramatically, and continues throughout the rest of the year with the exception of October which is the period of the heaviest rains. May to June and mid-October to November when weeding is the principal activity are somewhat less busy than the months of planting and principal harvesting. Variations in rainfall shift this calendar of work around the months of the year for other places in Southern Cameroon.

The harvest is stored in the wife's kitchen, and it is generally considered that she owns it and may decide on the allocation of food to family members and the sales of surpluses. In the past, when families were normally polygamous, the husband had his personal granary where contributions from each wife were stored for his personal use in entertaining his

friends or for feasts. This custom has died out, but husbands often attempt to take a share of their wife's cash income from food sales instead, and while the wives generally adopt a variety of strategies to avoid this, they do admit that the husband has a right to a portion of their income and share with him when it cannot be avoided.

Male Involvement with Food Crops

Guyer also collected information on male productive activities, which included cultivation of cocoa, palm wine tapping, and wage labour. Only a few young-unmarried-men cultivate an *esep* field to produce food for themselves, and the only extensive male involvement with food crops is in the production of tomatoes. This crop is almost totally commercialized and all inputs involved in its production are treated commercially, e.g. while land is lent at no cost for food crop production, there is a cash rental rate for tomato plots, and any outside labour used in production is paid for in cash. Although cultivation of tomatoes is hard physical work and carries the risk of total failure or limited profits due to fluctuations in price, some men are committed to it as their principal income earning activity. Some of these men are experts who are earning substantially more from sales of tomatoes than the average man is earning from cocoa. There are three growing seasons for tomatoes in a year, so income is spread over the year rather than coming only once as in the case of cocoa.

Most other reports of male involvement in food crops in the forest area are confined to "European" vegetables or tomatoes, or to the production of maize, bananas and plantains. In the case of maize, men generally plant it in pure stands on just cleared land strictly as a cash crop. One observer emphasized how little effort is put into this activity by men; branches are not removed from the field after clearing and the field is not hoed before planting nor weeded during the growing season.¹ Bananas and

1. Champaud, Jacques, *Mom, Terroir Bassa*, Paris: ORSTOM, 1973, p. 30.

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plantains are also sometimes cultivated by men; in some areas, men were traditionally involved in the production of these crops so it was natural for them to continue producing them for sale. They are highly profitable crops as they produce very high yields per unit of land and labour inputs involved in their production. Rice has also been introduced in some areas as a cash crop, in which case it may be cultivated and sold by men.

Family Budgets

Considerable information is available on family budgets in the forest area of Cameroon due to extensive research into this area over the last three decades. Three specific studies will be discussed in this section: (1) Jean Tissandier's study of the Yengong (another branch of the Pahouin tribe) at Zengoaga in the forest/savannah transition zone;¹ (2) Jacques Champaud's study of the Bassa (another important tribe of the forest area at Mom;² and (3) Guyer's study of the Eton which also contains a review of other household budget surveys.

Tissandier collected data on the cash incomes of husbands and wives in six families in a cross-section of marital situations: a single man; two monogamous families, and three polygamous families in which the husband had two, three, and four wives respectively. The incomes of the men were very variable, depending on whether they were salaried workers, owned cocoa or coffee plantations, had received a bridewealth payment, etc. Interestingly, however, in three of the families, one monogamous and two polygamous, the wives' income from food sales exceeded their husband's incomes even though the average earning of the women was about a third that of the

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1. Tissandier, Jean, *Zengoaga (Cameroon)*, Paris: Mouton and Co., 1969. Tissandier collected his information at Zengoaga in eight months from January to September, 1964.
 2. Champaud, Jacques, *op. cit.* Champaud's field research was conducted between July 1963 and February 1964.

men. Tissandier notes that, on average, 38 per cent of the earnings came from the men's sales of cash crops (cocoa, coffee, tobacco and rice) as compared with 32 per cent from the women's sales of food crops.¹ Tissandier provides no information on whether the women had control of the funds, or how typical his sample was of people in the area, so it is not possible to generalize from his information.

However, Tissandier's data is substantially similar to the information collected by Champaud and Guyer. Champaud's information indicates that among the Bassa, food crop production is strictly the business of females. In the Mom area, twenty per cent of the households were headed by women (27 out of 125), most of whom were widows whose husbands had been killed in the troubles at the time of independence. It is notable that the food producer households headed by females were cultivating a land area per active female only half as large as that in the male-headed food producer households (32 ares as compared to 64 ares). Each active female in the households headed by male cocoa planters was cultivating 49 ares (five of the female household heads were cocoa planters, but unfortunately, Champaud does not provide any information on their productive activities or incomes).

The smaller land area cultivated per active female is probably due to the lack of male labour for land clearing, but it does not appear to have put the female-headed households at a disadvantage - information on the incomes of the female-headed households indicate that they earned more from the sales of food crops, and that while their total incomes were lower than those of the male-headed food producer households, *per capita* incomes were higher as there was on average one less person in the female-headed households.²

1. Tissandier, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-66.

2. Champaud, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

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This data suggests that when women are left to their own devices, they adopt a more intensive form of cultivation which is more productive per unit of land area cultivated. A similar result appeared in Guyer's data as she was told that the *esep* fields which the men had cleared in the past were approximately three times the size of the "groundnut" plots currently cultivated by the women. Despite this fact, the Eton women were meeting the subsistence needs of their families and generating a substantial surplus for the market. The amounts grown and the incomes earned by the women, however, varied based on their access to the market.

Guyer's study was a comparative one of the activities of women in two villages, Nkometou which was on the main Yaounde/Obala road (one of the most travelled routes in Cameroon), while Nkolfeb was a three-four kilometre walk from the Yaounde/Okola road which was unpaved and in poor condition. In Nkometou, women had a choice of outlets for their produce - they could sell to other village women who had become food traders, they could sell in the village or regional market, or they could travel early in the morning to the central market in Yaounde, sell their produce to a retailer and return home in time to put in a day's work in the field. The women in Nkolfeb could sell to travelling food traders who came to the village from time to time, take their produce to a regional market five kilometres walk away, or walk to the Yaounde/Okola road and hope to sell to passers-by. A constraint on the women is the limitation on freedom of movement of married women; their husbands object to their going to market if it means spending a night away from home. Accordingly, speed of access is crucial.

Guyer found minor differences between the work patterns of the women and the types of fields and crops planted which indicated that the women in Nkometou were orienting a greater amount of their efforts to the market. This was translated into a major difference in the income from sales of food

crops - the women in Nkometou earned four times as much from sales of food crops in the two months sampled as did the women in Nkolfeb. In general, amounts earned from food crop sales were small and regular, however, certain women in Nkometou were beginning to earn substantial lump sums from food sales.

Some women had earned 30,000 francs CFA¹ over a six week period from the sale of green leaves grown on a *bilobi* field (these are small plots planted along the river in a period of limited rains and require hand watering). Others had earned a similar amount over a three month period from the production and sale of *cous-cous* (a cassava product which is in particular demand in urban markets when supplies of maize are low - it also shows considerable forward planning on the part of the women as the variety of cassava used is a "bitter" one which is planted 15 months before harvest, and planting was timed so that the harvest could coincide with the period prior to the maize harvest). These amounts are approximately half of the sum the average man receives annually when he sells his cocoa crop.

The men's economy in Nkometou was also more prosperous than that in Nkolfeb as they had greater opportunities for salaried work, and the Nkometou husbands made larger contributions to the household budget. Hence the women of Nkometou had twice as much to spend as the women of Nkolfeb, and this was reflected in a substantial difference in the standard of living, in particular a much greater amount was spent on meat and fish. In both villages, the women's contribution met approximately 40 per cent of the cash expenses of the household (not counting the value of the food provided).

1. CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine) francs are the currency of Cameroon and other former French colonies in Africa. The following information on CFA francs is derived from *Africa South of the Sahara - 1979-80*, London: Europa Publications Ltd., 1979, p. 172. CFA francs have a fixed rate to the French franc; 50 francs CFA = 1 Franc. Since 1973 when the French authorities have ceased to maintain a fixed franc-dollar rate, the value of the CFA franc has fluctuated in line with the French franc. In April 1979, its value was $\text{fl} = 452.25$ francs CFA, $\text{\$ U.S. 1} = 225.79$ francs CFA.

Guyer noted that women whose husbands provided them with larger amounts did not work less hard, in fact those with more resources tended to earn more themselves. This result is not too surprising when one remembers that women expect to support themselves and those with more resources are likely to do so with more success.

Guyer also reviews the results from a number of household budget studies made in the forest area over the last thirty years. The first was made in 1954 and found that only two per cent of the family's cash income had come from sales of agricultural products other than cocoa, and that on average, women's incomes from food sales were only one thirtieth of the men's income from cocoa.¹ A follow-up study in 1964-65 found that the women's food crop sales had reached 25 per cent of the value of the men's cocoa sales.² Another study made in the early seventies had found that the women's food crop sales had reached one-third of the men's sales.³ In Guyer's own sample, the women of Nkolfeb earned only one-sixth the men's cocoa sales while the sales of the women of Nkometou now amounted to one-half of their husband's cocoa income. Overall, the evidence is unmistakable; women's incomes from the sales of food crops have been growing rapidly and are now an important factor in the family budget. In addition, Guyer's data suggests that the greater contribution from women has improved family welfare.

It is very difficult to determine the impact of the women's increased financial power on their overall situation (though such a major change must

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1. Binet, Jacque, *Budgets Familiaux des Planteurs de Cacao au Cameroun*, Paris: ORSTOM, 1956, p. 57. Quoted by Guyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.
 2. Societe d'Etudes Pour le Developpement Economique et Social (SEDES). *Le Niveau de Vie des Populations de la Zone Cacaoyere au Centre Cameroun*, Yaounde: Direction de la Statistique, Yaounde, 1964-65, p. 167. Quoted by Guyer, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
 3. Weber, Jacques, *Structures Agraires et Evolution des Milieux Ruraux. Le Cas de la Region Cacaoyere au Centre-Sud, Cameroun*, Yaounde: ORSTOM, 1974, pp. 19-21. Quoted by Guyer, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

be having some effect) as so many other factors have also changed (increased education, conversion to Christianity, etc.). Guyer noted that there was a tendency by both men and women to play down the amounts the women were earning; possibly this was due to the desire of women to keep the funds for their own use, and lack of knowledge on the part of men. There is substantial evidence, however, that women definitely prefer their present situation to that in the past; the women Guyer interviewed made this clear as did the sixteen elderly Beti women (the Beti are also Pahouins) interviewed by Jean Vincent.¹ However, both groups of women noted also that they had to work much harder than they did in the past and that there were many fewer feasts. Increased independence and responsibility/decision-making power in the family had been acquired at the cost of much more effort.

Agricultural Extension Programmes

Most of the agricultural extension programmes in the forest area have concentrated on export and industrial crops, but a few projects have been organized in recent years which include food crop production. In most cases, women have not been reached by agricultural extension programmes, and this failure has been criticized by researchers and by the women themselves. For example, Tissandier described how extension agents came into Zengoaga each month to post a listing of the dates on which various tasks related to cash crop production were to be carried out. The men, who were new at cultivation, were often uninterested in this advice, considering it too much work. On the other hand, the women food producers who had been farming all along, received no such help despite the fact that food availabilities were low in many months.²

1. Vincent, Jeanne-Francoise, *Traditions et Transitions, Entretiens avec des femmes Béti au Sud-Cameroun*, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1976.

2. Tissandier, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

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Rural women have been expressing their desire for agricultural training, and the women's wing of the Cameroon National Union Party (the sole political party in Cameroon) have also taken up this issue. The document on agricultural methods which was prepared for the Fourth National Council Meeting, held in January 1977, noted that the only programmes which had been made available to women were of a home economics type designed to improve their skills as wife and mother. It went on to say that while the importance of these social roles of women was recognized, the committee deplored the fact that the advice of agricultural agents had not been given to women who formed the majority of the agricultural labour force, and continued to use an archaic system.¹

However, certain projects which have been designed to increase the commercialization of food crops have met with mixed success in involving women, even when this was one of the goals of the activity. For example, the Pan-African Institute for Development (P.A.I.D.) which has its Africa headquarters in Cameroon, has been running the Ombessa Project in the forest area for several years. The project agreements indicated that particular attention was to be paid to women since women were the food crop farmers in the area, and local women accounted for most of the project participants in the early stages. The project supervisors noted that the numbers of women involved had been falling steadily, and they were being replaced by men, often by their husbands. Students evaluating the project had described how the men did not spend the money earned on their families, and were somewhat concerned as to the project's impact on the standard of living in the area.² This result might have been expected as men consider "cash crops" to be their province, and suggests the difficulty of assisting women

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1. Cameroon, Organization des Femmes de l'Union National Camerounaise (OFUNC). "Papers of the second and fourth OFUNC Council Meetings" held in Yaounde in January 1971 and 1977. *Mimeo.*
 2. Personal communication P.A.I.D. Douala staff.

with projects of this type.

The experience of other projects is also instructive. The Z.A.P.I. (*Zones d'Action Prioritaires Intégrées*), are major development projects operating in the Central South and Eastern Regions which receive support from the French technical assistance programme; programmes were started in seven areas between 1967 and 1971. Each zone comprises approximately 20,000 people, and the Z.A.P.I. organization is to provide a means of integrating all development activities for the population. The original goal of the programmes was to increase agricultural production and sales, so that development activities for the area could be self-financed from the trading profits of the Z.A.P.I. marketing organization (this goal has now been relaxed as it was recognized that it will be some years before the Z.A.P.I. can be self-financing).¹ Export and industrial crops are the primary focus of the Z.A.P.I. activities, but food crop production and sales are also promoted though the emphasis placed on this activity varies from zone to zone, as does the extent to which women are reached by the programmes.

One of the Z.A.P.I. in the Eastern Region has been somewhat successful in reaching women farmers as 300 out of the 1,900 women actively farming in the area were being reached by the programmes for improved food crop production when it was evaluated in the early 1970s. However, the evaluators of the project noted that men in the area were attempting to take over the activities of producing and selling food crops although they had previously been involved in food crop production to a limited extent only. The men were especially concerned that the women would use the money earned to pay back the bridewealth, and opposed the women's activities for that reason. Their concerns were unfounded, as the evaluators also noted that the women were spending their earnings immediately on disposable necessities (interestingly the evaluators, some of whom were Cameroonian men, found it remarkable

1. Lele, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-200.

that the women did not attempt to accumulate sufficient money to purchase more durable household goods¹

The Food Traders

The Lekie area has also been the subject of a number of studies of the food marketing system due to its importance in the provisioning of Yaounde. Three major studies² based on this area were in substantial agreement on most points, and especially on the importance of women in the system. The following description is based on the work done by Dieke Buys in 1974 as it provides the most detailed account of the women's activities.

The sales system Buys outlines appears to have developed based on the needs of the women involved, and despite its somewhat chaotic appearance, it is well-organized and efficient. It is a network of contracts which assures that at each point, the producers are guaranteed a market for their produce and the traders are guaranteed a supply. Buys distinguishes between three types of traders (called "Buyem Sellem" in Cameroon); village women, the itinerant traders who operate in the regional markets and those who operate in Yaounde.

Village women who decided to begin trading in foodstuffs had the three outlets outlined above for the Nkometou women: local markets, regional markets, or the central market in Yaounde. Due to the drawbacks associated with the first two, less demand in the village market, travelling and time

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1. Bah, A., Milosevic, M. and Tiotsop, B., *Stratégie de Développement Régional Intégré: Le Project Vivrier Des Z.A.P.I. de l'Est*, Douala: PAID, 1973.
 2. The three studies are: (1) Arouna, N'Sangou, *Secteur Refuge et Développement Economique au Cameroun*, Yaoundé: ONAREST, ISH No. 6, 1977; (2) Buys, Dieke, *Les Buyem-Sellem - Une Etude sur la Commercialisation Des Vivre Par Des Buyem-Sellem Dans la Lékié*, Yaoundé: E.N.S.A., 1975; (3) Diarra, Fatoumata A., *Perspectives de développement des départements autour de Yaoundé: Commercialisation des produits vivriers de la Lékié par Les Buyem-Sellem*, Yaoundé: United Republic of Cameroon/ United Nations, 1974.

away from home for Yaounde, they normally preferred to operate in the regional markets. The village women did not require much initial capital beyond what they could save in a relatively short time by selling their own produce. Buys found that most of the women belonged to savings associations and when their turn came to collect, they could use the lump sum realized to start in trade.

The new trader establishes contracts with women producers she is associated with; often they are members of her family or close friends. She does not pay these suppliers in advance for their produce, but takes them on credit and pays on the day following her return from market. The credit system operates very well at this level - the producers only have to wait a few days for payment, and they are assured of receiving it by the close-knit social structure. The traders also make purchases for the women and run other errands while they are in the regional centres which helps to secure the favour of the producers.

Buys states that at the original point of sale, the price desired by the producer is generally fixed in terms of a specific item which she desires. This suggests that the women are still thinking in barter terms rather than commercial terms; however, Buys' study was focused on the traders and she did not collect information on the producers, so she does not present data to support this contention. It is somewhat at odds with Guyer's data, as her information suggests that the women do calculate the returns from different types of activity and choose the most profitable among them.

For example, for earnings in November, the women in Nkometou stated that they could either work an especially large groundnut field, or assist in their husbands' cocoa harvest (the women are paid for this assistance either in cash or in lower grade cocoa which they sell), or process *cous-cous*. This latter activity was the most popular among the women who had sufficient

time; the second option was the larger groundnut field, and none of the women in Nkometou, except two widows who had their own cocoa plantation, worked in the harvest. By contrast, in Nkolfeb, almost all the women worked in the cocoa harvest.¹ It seems unlikely that the women are valuing the different activities in terms of how much salt or kerosene they desire, but rather are seeking the highest cash return for their labour which is essentially their only production cost. This information is only suggestive, however, and as this issue has a bearing on the planning and implementation of effective development activities, it should receive further attention from researchers.

Given the expenses of transport and the time involved in going to the regional market, both the village traders and the itinerant traders find it is to their advantage to establish contracts. These are generally not based on credit as the village traders need to be paid immediately in order to pay their suppliers. Generally, the village traders would make contracts with several itinerant traders as the latter tended to specialize in one or two products.

In Yaounde, there are two types of resident traders, those who sell in the central markets in relatively large quantities, and those who sell in the smaller markets or on the streets. The resident traders purchase their supplies from the itinerant traders, and also from village traders who come down to Yaounde with their produce but wish to sell it quickly so they can return to their village the same day. Most of the itinerant traders sell a portion of the produce they have collected in the urban markets themselves, but they generally sell a portion in bulk to the resident traders in order to minimize the risk of being left with spoiled goods.

It is to be noted that all the women involved, except the itinerant traders are able to comply with the desire of their husbands that they do

1. Guyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

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not spend nights away from home. Buys found that some of the itinerant traders were widows and divorcees, but usually they were the wives of unemployed or poorly paid men. Living in the city or towns, these women often do not have access to agricultural land for subsistence agriculture, so must earn money to purchase food by other means. There were few options for unskilled women other than trading, and the pressure of necessity must have been sufficient to overcome their husbands' objections..

Attempts to replace this system by some official organization (as is often suggested to overcome the imagined abuses of the "middlemen") would have a number of unfortunate consequences. Most obviously, it would deprive a large number of people who have a limited number of ways of supporting themselves, of their means of livelihood. Secondly, the itinerant traders have an intimate knowledge of the needs of the urban markets and of the farming calendar of the surrounding areas (this last is very complicated due to variation in the topography and the rains) which it would be difficult for a less flexible organization to replicate. At the village level, it would be nearly impossible to replace the village women, as the need for working capital and the difficulties of bulking small amounts from scattered producers would be totally uneconomic.

The experience of two recent programmes designed to provide the same services as the traders is a clear demonstration of the validity of these points. The first is that of an organization within the Ministry of Agriculture, MIDEVIV (an acronym for the French equivalent of "Mission for the Development of Food Products"), which has as one of its goals the improvement of the commercialization of food crops. Despite the funds and transport facilities which MIDEVIV had at its disposal, the organization found that it was impossible for them to match the prices of the traders, let alone sell at lower prices, without subsidizing the sales price from government funds.¹

1. Buys, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

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Even more telling is the experience of FEMEC (The Federation of Evangelical Missions and Churches in Cameroon) as their efforts were made with the most altruistic of motives. They attempted to set up direct links between producer groups in the countryside and consumer groups in the cities for the mutual benefit of both. However, FEMEC also discovered that they were unable to provide the consumer groups with food products as cheaply as those they could buy in the markets.¹

Buy's study indicates that the trading system is not characterized by monopolistic practices, as there is a multitude of traders, and it is an activity which almost anyone can accumulate sufficient funds to enter although not all are equally successful at trading. In these conditions, it is probably highly beneficial to all concerned. As the traders do not have the costs of organizations such as MIDEVIV or FEMEC, they are able to sell the commodities in the urban markets at a lower price to the consumers, and still make a return which they consider acceptable. Buy's found that the women traders at each level, made between 30 to 50 per cent net profit on their trading costs (she counted only the purchase price plus transport costs and made no allowance for the women's time or personal expense) with most falling in the 30 to 35 per cent range. The only traders who did better than this were men resident in Yaounde, who specialized in selling to Europeans or institutions such as schools, and hence could put a higher price on their produce.

As such, the traders are providing a service to the community rather than being parasites on it as they are sometimes portrayed. They are also an essential link in assuring that the agricultural sector makes its expected product contribution to the nascent industrial sector at the lowest cost. In addition, they serve as a conduit for channelling cash funds into the countryside, thus helping to make it possible for the rural sector to

1. Personal communication, FEMEC staff, Yaoundé.

perform its demand function for industrial products.

The Highlands/Savannah Zone

In these areas to the north of the forest, women are still the principal food producers, and the range of crops grown are similar to those in the forest area. Maize is a somewhat more important crop than it is further south, and it is also possible to grow Irish potatoes in the highlands. The principal differences in the agricultural systems between these areas and those in the forest, derive from five factors: (1) the traditional political system in the area; (2) the importance of bilateral descent ties (i.e. from both the mother's and father's families) in providing access to land; (3) the area is in the tropical wet dry zone, which results in a period of sharply lower rainfall thus limiting the cultivation possibilities of rainfed agriculture; (4) the much higher population densities and (5) the people in the highland/grasslands could not cultivate oil palms so have always had to be involved in trade to provide oil.

The highlands/grasslands area was notable for their large centralized chiefdoms, headed by a *Fon* who had considerable power. All land was considered to be owned by the *Fon*, but in practice he allocated it to lineage heads and rarely took it back except in cases of flagrant misuse or criminal activities. However, all food crop farming was the responsibility of the women, and they were said to own the "farms" meaning the crops planted on the land. Although many of the *Fons'* powers were pre-empted by the colonial and independent governments, they still play an important role in the social/cultural life in the area. In addition, recent research indicates that practices have not changed appreciably with respect to land holdings or the women's access to land.

Women are provided with land for farms when they are girls in their parental homes and they are not required to relinquish the plots when they

marry provided they live close enough to continue farming them. The land may come from either the father's lineage head or the mother's lineage head, and in addition, the husband can request land for his wife from his father's or mother's family. As a result, there is considerable flexibility in the provision of farm land, and women are more secure as they are assured of land to produce their subsistence requirements whether they are married or not.

Men in the area have always been heavily involved in trade in order to secure oil from the forest area and spend a large part of their time on such activities as the long distance traffic in kola nuts. Coffee has now become an important crop in the area and is cultivated by men with very little help from the women. Men have also taken up new jobs in the modern sector as well as continuing their trading activities.

The Tikar and Bamileke have been the subject of a number of studies. Unfortunately, the study which provides the most detail on farming among the Tikar, *Women of the Grassfields* by Phyllis Kaberry, was researched and written in the 1940s.¹ Despite this problem, Dr. Kaberry's account is so detailed and useful that it has been used for the description of the Tikar (a study² carried out among the Bafut, a Tikar tribe, in 1959, agrees with her on essential points). Two studies by Jean Huralt,³ one made in 1955 and a re-survey in 1968 have been used as the basis for the description of the Bamileke.

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1. Kaberry, Phyllis M., *Women of the Grassfields: A Study of the Position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons*, (No. 14), London: H.M.S.O. Colonial Research Publications, 1952.
 2. Ritzenthaler, Robert E. and Ritzenthaler, Pat, *Cameroon Villages: An Ethnography of the Bafut*, Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1962.
 3. Huralt, Jean, *La Structure Sociale des Bamiléké*, Paris: Mouton, 1962. Also by the same author, "Essai de Synthèse Du Système Social des Bamiléké", *Africa*, Vol. 40, London, 1970, pp. 1-24.

THE TIKARProduction System

In the Tikar area, men did the clearing of trees and heavy bush and gave some assistance at the harvests. In total, their involvement in food crop production required on the average, ten days work per year as compared with the 225 days spent by the women. The women practiced a system of rotational grass fallowing with the period of fallow varying from two to ten years, depending on the situation of the plot and its proximity to the compound. Good alluvial land might be planted for four to six years, while plots on steep slopes often lasted only two years. In the first year, crops such as yams, millet, sweet potato and bambara nuts were normally planted in pure stands with more mixtures of crops in the second and third years of cultivation. A rotation of crops was also practiced in some cases, and the order depended on what had been planted in the field the first year.

The principal crop was maize which covered 60 to 70 per cent of the 1.4 acres (approximately 5.7 ares) cultivated on average per woman, and once the maize plants were set, they were interplanted with a number of subsidiary crops: cocoyams, cassava, macabo, okra, spinach, cowpeas, dwarf peas, sugar cane, peppers, eggplant, etc. Accordingly, the "maize" plots were serving much the same function in the highlands of the "groundnut" fields in the forest. Millet covered the second largest area of cropland.

Most of the women were cultivating a number of plots which was partly due to the fragmentation of land holdings arising from the tenure system described above. In addition, as the highlands area had considerable variations in altitude, a number of plots was needed as the different plants grown required different elevations for their cultivation.

Agricultural activities were carried out in all months of the year, with

December being the lightest workload month when clearing and burning was done, mainly by the men. In all other months, beds for one or another crop were being prepared, or planting, weeding and harvesting occurring, with two or three activities usually ongoing for one crop or another. Kaberry pointed out that the complexity of the cropping pattern and the many different plots cultivated by the women at varying distances from their homes required considerable foresight and organization on their part. The women worked methodically, generally completing one task before starting another, e.g. weeding the entire maize crop before starting to plant yams. The women were proud of their skill and expertise as farmers and concerned to keep their fields "tidy".

Due to rainfall patterns, the only staple crop available for harvest from March through July was potatoes, and May-July was often a hungry period. In general, the yields of crops permitted a barely sufficient diet, with some additional amounts for sale. The crops were stored in the women's huts, and their distribution was considered to be the women's affair. In theory, however, if the women sold any of the crops, the money income should be their husband's as he was responsible for the provision of items which the family could not produce itself. In practice, the husbands rarely required that the women give them the small amounts of money earned, which were normally spent immediately on household needs.

Male Involvement with Food Crops

Men were involved with only one food crop, plantains, at the time of Kaberry's study, and men marketed plantains to supplement their incomes. In addition, certain fruits, oranges, pawpaws, pineapple, etc., had been introduced by the Europeans, and these were being cultivated and commercialized by men, as were tobacco and coffee which were being introduced as cash crops.

In recent years, rice has been introduced into the Tikar area, and in

some places, it has replaced maize as the staple food crop.¹ Men are involved in the production and sale of rice; they generally work the crop in partnership with their wives, and share the profits with them.²

Family Budgets

Dr. Kaberry carefully analyzed the budgets of eleven families, and included a figure for the value of subsistence production in the receipts and outgoings (some of the crops produced were consumed by the family and other amounts were given as gifts) as well as the value of marketing. This practice gives a better indication of the true value to the family of the women's activities. Kaberry found that the women's contribution was approximately 48 per cent of the total family income among the lower income groups, dropping to 40 per cent in higher income groups.

She further described the changes which were taking place in the women's marketing activities; more and more women were beginning to do at least a little trading in foodstuffs. Women who had no surplus to spare from their own production were also beginning to deal in processed food, examples were buying raw cassava in the markets for processing into *gari* and starch, or purchasing maize and brewing beer. The geography of the highlands created a variety of micro climates and there was considerable variation between places quite close together in crop yields from year to year, due to weather differences. Women were taking advantage of this fact, travelling to nearby markets to purchase items in surplus, and taking them for sale in areas where they were short.

Kaberry also described how women whose husbands were most progressive in taking up new opportunities, and generous in their contributions to their

1. Camerocon, Institute for the Reform of Primary Education (IPAR) - Buea. *Report on the Reform of Primary Education*, Buea, April 1977, p. 89.
2. Personal communication, USAID/Yaounde staff.

wives, were those who were earning the largest incomes. Here again, co-operation between spouses yielded a higher standard of living for the family. These families were usually those which had accepted Christianity and the men had received at least some education through the Missions. As a result, they desired a higher standard of living and welcomed the extra cash incomes their wives could contribute to the household.

In the years since Kaberry's study was made, the men's economy has expanded greatly, but so has the food economy (including the value of subsistence production) in light of the demand created by plantation agriculture to the south of the area, and the new urban centres. Accordingly, the women have probably maintained their contribution to the family budget at or near the share found by Kaberry, and their ability to do so was greatly assisted by an unusual development project described in the next section.

The Corn Mill Societies

Dr. Kaberry's study was commissioned by the British colonial government which had been concerned with the situation of women in the area (primarily with their workload as compared to men). The study was followed up by a series of development activities organized by a woman, Elizabeth O'Kelly, who was on the staff of the colonial administration. She described the history of the societies in detail in two articles and a book,¹ and the following account uses information contained in her three works.

The societies were organized in the early 1950s following several years experience with literacy classes. Ms. O'Kelly realized that the women had difficulty attending classes as they were already fully occupied, and

1. O'Kelly, Elizabeth, *Ada and Self-Help, A General Guide to Overseas Ada*, London: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1973. Also by the same author, "Corn Mill Societies in the Southern Cameroons", *African Women*, No. 1, 1955, pp. 33-35 and "Working Women of the Southern Cameroons", *Corona*, February, 1961, pp. 66-71.

decided to start by alleviating one of their time constraints. She conceived the idea of introducing large hand-operated corn mills which the women could own and operate as a group to free them from the many hours of work involved in grinding corn by hand between two stones. The corn mills were not donated to the women but instead, loaned to them. Each society had to collect sufficient money from its members to pay for the mill within one year of receiving it, a total of £15-20. This had the advantage of giving the women experience with working in groups. Once they were organized, it was also easier for the limited number of agricultural and social welfare extension personnel to reach them with new information.

Starting with fifteen corn mills, the project gradually expanded until there were 232 societies with a total membership of approximately 15,000 women (membership in each society had to be limited to less than 100 women, based on the capacity of the mill to process the members' corn). Once contact was established between the women, they began to organize other activities around the corn mill societies including classes in soap making, poultry schemes using bran from the milling process, planting fuel plantations of eucalyptus trees, and the establishment of society farms.

The members all worked on the farms and sold the produce as a fund raising venture; some of the funds raised in this manner were used to purchase fencing material for their own farms as they were being destroyed by livestock. It was easier for extension personnel to persuade the women to try new techniques and seed on these fields when their families' subsistence was not being put in question. Successful innovations were often transferred to the women's own farms. A confederation of societies also set up a co-operative shop in the Kumbo area which was capitalized with two shilling shares sold to each of its 4,000 members. The shop stocked items which were difficult for the women to obtain in the local market.

Information on the present activities of the co-operative societies has

been gained from a series of unpublished papers prepared by the Cameroonian co-operative movement for a conference on the theme "Women in Development: Women and Co-operatives" sponsored by the Pan-African Women's Organization, held in Yaounde in October 1977. The Northwest and Southwest Provinces (these two provinces were created from former British West Cameroon when it joined French Cameroon) still have the most active co-operatives. The societies presently operate shops and/or market members' produce although some societies still operate corn mills and do joint fund raising by working on society farms. It appears from the papers reviewed that approximately 5,000 women currently belong to co-operatives. The larger societies are generally involved with buying and selling of palm oil and marketing food crops. However, certain societies are moving into non-traditional productive activities for women, for example, a coffee producers' co-operative,¹ and a co-operative involved in livestock and dairy production.²

The Bamileke

There is a diversity of cultivation practices in the Bamileke area due to the range of soils which vary from very rich volcanic soils in certain areas to sandy soils in others. In general, population densities depend on the richness of the soil, and in areas such as that of Boufoussan, had reached a density of 260 persons per square mile in the 1940s.³ The variability of population is shown by the fact that the West Province,

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1. "Women in Development: Women in Cooperatives". Papers prepared for a seminar organized by the Pan-African Women's Organization, Yaounde, November 7-17, 1977, mimeo.
 2. Personal communication, Ms. Barbara Scarlett, United States Information Service, Yaounde.
 3. Littlewood, Margaret, "The Bamiléké", in McCulloch, Merran; Littlewood, M. and Dugast, I., *Peoples of the Central Cameroons*, London: International African Institute, 1954, p. 89.

which includes most of the area inhabited by the Bamileke had an average density of 74.5 persons per kilometre in 1976. The cultivation systems are also affected by the elevation which is generally above 900 metres.

Where populations are dense, an intensive system of agriculture is practiced, with fields in almost permanent cultivation. This is achieved by a system of enclosures consisting of rows of trees bound together with bamboo to about six feet off the ground. Each family's area is divided into four or five portions by these enclosures; a system of crop rotations is practiced between these fields, and in addition, one section is left fallow each year and goats are placed on it to restore soil fertility. The enclosures cross several families' exploitations, and in general, go all the way round a hill so the goats can roam freely in this band without being able to cross into the cultivated fields. The enclosures also provide shade and combat problems of erosion.

As the fields are in continuous cultivation, there is no requirement for land clearing, and food crop production is totally carried out by women with the sole exception of the plantain crop which requires very little labour to produce. Hurait notes in his re-survey that the principle of using female labour exclusively in food crop production has been firmly maintained. The agricultural calendar and crops grown is similar to that described for the Tikar area.

The men's responsibility consists of maintaining the hedges which requires considerable effort, and in addition they tend all tree crops including plantain, bananas, and kola nut which was the most lucrative crop prior to the introduction of coffee. Hurait describes how, in the past, the *Foms* had enforced regular maintenance of the enclosures, but with the waning of traditional authority, there had been a tendency to neglect them causing problems with erosion and soil exhaustion. This may be one of the consequences of the new economic activities of men, as they have less

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time to devote to this activity. In the areas of poorer soils and lower population densities, a system of rotational grass fallow similar to that described for the Tikar is followed and the men assist with initial land clearing after a fallowing period.

Each family's concession is divided into a number of individual plots cultivated by women with a variety of connections to the man who "manages" the land. As Huralt describes it, a woman usually has access to several plots, for example, to one because she is a wife, another because she is a daughter, another because she is the daughter of a daughter. As a result, the amount produced depends more on the ingenuity and strength of the woman than on the amount of land her husband controls.¹

Women generally have complete control over the food crops, and their husbands do not require that they account for the income from any surpluses sold. Most revenues earned are spent on household requirements, and as a result the markets are almost entirely monopolized by women. Men sell palm wine, kola nuts, meat, and more recently, grow coffee as a cash crop and/or trade in European goods. Due to the pressure of population in the area, and the inheritance system which gives a sole male heir a father's property and land to manage, many Bamileke have left the area and may be found as traders in all parts of Cameroon. Bamileke women are also prominent among the itinerant and resident women traders in the major urban centres.

In recent years, coffee earnings have stagnated, and there have been reports that coffee plantings are lagging. At the same time, prices of food crops have been climbing and the areas committed to maize production by the Bamileke have been increasing, as has the portion of the crop marketed. Certain analysts have speculated that the men are producing

1. Huralt, "Essai de Synthèse", *op. cit.*, p. 20.

and marketing the crop but this suggestion has not been confirmed.¹

The studies of the Bamileke do not provide detailed information on the budgets of men and women. In addition, there were no descriptions of past programmes aimed at increasing the production and sales of food crops. Z.A.P.I. are being set up in the area which are to include food crops among their activities, but have not been in operation for long enough to permit an analysis of their effects. However, co-operatives have been operating in the area for some time which assist men in producing and marketing coffee.

North Cameroon: The Mandara Mountains

A similar range of crops is produced by peoples living in the north of the country, whether they are located in the mountains or on the plains. In this area, sorghum and millet form the staples in the diet, and groundnuts provide oil, while essentially the same secondary crops as those grown in the south, provide the balance of the diet. Rootcrops have been reported in the area in recent years, and are growing in popularity as are rice and maize. The division of labour in agriculture is quite different from that found among most tribes in southern Cameroon, as men and women make almost equal inputs into the cultivation of the staples, and women grow most of the secondary crops themselves.

In the first three months of the year, there is very little agricultural activity as it is the height of the dry season and the land cannot be cultivated. The only areas where this is not true are those portions of the plains area where dry season sorghum is grown as this is a very labour-intensive crop. In other places, agricultural work begins in April with the arrival of the rains and continues throughout the balance of the year. Industrial and export crops grown in the north include tobacco, cotton, rice and groundnuts (this last is also usually consumed by the producers).

1. Personal communication, USAID/Yaoundé staff.

As was indicated above, the discussion on North Cameroon will focus primarily on the Mandara Mountains.

The Mandara Mountains are the home of several tribes, of whom the Mafa¹ have been the most thoroughly researched, and it is their social/production system which will be described in this section. The tribes of the Mandara Mountains attracted considerable interest as they practice a system of intensive, terraced agriculture which is seldom found in Africa. At first it was assumed that the heavy concentrations of population in the mountains resulted primarily from the attempts of the inhabitants of the plains to escape the Fulani invasion of the area which began in the eighteenth century and concluded in the nineteenth century with the establishment of Fulani control over most of north Cameroon. This impression was strengthened by the fact that population densities increase as one goes further into the mountains; the foothills have concentrations of only 20-40 persons per square kilometre while the mountains proper have concentrations of up to 245 persons per square kilometre.

However, a careful study made in 1965-67 which will serve as the basis of this description,² established that the Mafa occupation of the mountains had considerably antedated the Fulani invasion, and that the primary effect of the latter had been to cut off contact between the Mafa and the people of the plains, and generally to create a siege mentality among the mountain tribes. Accordingly, even after the French colonial government was established, and security improved in the area, the Mafa resisted efforts to

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1. The Mafa are often referred to as the Matakam; however, Mafa is the name which they use to describe themselves, and will be used in this paper.
 2. Several researchers of different academic specialities were involved in this study. The published reports of an agriculturalist and a sociologist have been used as the basis for the description in this paper. These are, respectively: (1) Boulet, Jean, *Magomas, Pays Mafa (Nord Cameroun)*, Paris: ORSTOM (Mouton and Co.), 1975; and (2) Martin, Jean-Yves, *Les Matakam du Cameroun*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

resettle them on the plains. Under the pressure of numbers, however, some of the Mafa have been migrating to the plains; the most popular destination is the plain of Mora to the north of the mountains in the area of the Mandara. The Mandara, like the Fulani, are a tribe which has accepted Islam, while most of the other peoples in the north have retained their native religions and have not accepted either Islam or Christianity.

The Mafa had no centralized political system which, along with the difficulty of attacking the mountains, assisted them in maintaining their independence. The French created a village system for the Mafa but these are essentially devoid of meaning; the real social units are the individual hills. Each of these is presided over by a "master of the mountain"; a man who is normally descended from the first man to settle in the area. He does not have great political power, but arbitrates in disputes, presides over sacrifices, and most importantly, determines when planting begins. In most matters, the individual household regulates its own affairs. Land owners are free to sell their land if they wish but only to members of the Mafa group.

The Mafa have a patrilineal descent system; although attention is paid to the relations of the wife, matrilineal relationships are much less important in terms of inheritance and support than they were among the tribes in the Grasslands/Highlands. Women marry outside their clan and move to the home of the husband's family. However, they do not become part of their husband's lineage, and as a result, they do not inherit property from either side.

As was found with the Bamileke, the Mafa exhibit the somewhat unusual inheritance system (among African groups) of naming a single male heir who is given the title to all the father's property upon his death. In this case, however, the single heir is always the youngest son who continues to live in the father's compound and works with him until his death. The

father attempts to find land close to the compound for the use of his older sons as the ideal is to have patrilocal residence of all his male descendants' families. However, if no land is available, the older sons have no choice but to migrate to other areas or to the plains in search of a place to live. Women's access to farming land is through their husbands, or they may borrow land from other proprietors.

The Cultivation System

There are two seasons in the mountains, a rainy season from May to September, and a dry season from October to April. The rains vary considerably between the months of the rainy season, and from year to year and place to place in the mountains resulting in a considerable variation in yields. Rainstorms also tend to be heavy and concentrated, creating problems with runoff. The agricultural techniques of the Mafa have been designed to deal with these moisture problems and with two other problems facing a dense population living in a mountainous area: (1) erosion, and (2) the maintenance of soil fertility. All the available land area is in continuous cultivation (with a few exceptional plots remaining uncultivated due to the personal circumstances of their owners); on average 48 ares is cultivated by each active person. Habitations are built as compactly as possible to take up the minimum land area. This is an adaptation to necessity: the Mafa who have moved to the plains area have much more space in their compounds.

The most noticeable and important technique used to cope with the erosion/rainfall problems mentioned above is the terraces. These extend from the top to the bottom of the mountains; the large amount of labour involved in the construction of the low walls of stone which support them has been carried out by generations of Mafa and the task of the current generation is merely one of maintenance (this is a purely masculine task).

Mafa on the plains have also been observed to build terraces in their fields wherever there is the slightest slope. The width of the terraces depends on the steepness of the slope; about ten metres is the maximum width found on gentle, nine to ten per cent slopes. These narrow progressively as the slopes grow steeper and are little more than giant steps on slopes of thirty per cent and above. Cross canals are dug on each level across the run off ditches, and various techniques are used to disperse the water over the plots, depending on the crop.

Other techniques used to halt soil erosion and preserve moisture content include leaving the stems of the millet standing after harvest to reduce wind erosion and baking of the soil during the dry season. Just before the rains begin at the end of April, these stalks and other vegetable matter are collected into piles, burned, and then worked into the fields as green fertilizer which assists in the process of maintaining soil fertility. All livestock are penned in at night, and certain cattle are stabled continuously in the compounds so the manure can be collected and used on the fields. The tending of most livestock is the responsibility of men; chickens (however, not the roosters) are the province of women. All household waste is also used on the fields, and a particularly extensive cleaning is carried out in April to provide the maximum amount (and probably also in recognition that there will be little time for cleaning once the farming season begins in earnest).

The principal remaining technique of assuring soil fertility is a two year rotation of crops. In the first year, "large" millet is planted in pure stands on most of the fields, and red sorghum on a small percentage of them. In the second year, "small" millet is planted in association with a number of other crops on most of the area with groundnuts on the remaining land. Essentially the same sequence takes place all over Mafa territory, i.e. everyone is planting "large" millet the same year, etc. In general,

the millet fields take up about 84 per cent of the cultivated area, ground-nuts thirteen per cent and "secondary" crops, three per cent of the land. Cultivation of all the secondary crops, with the exception of tobacco, is the responsibility of the women. The women's plots are essentially the areas where secondary crops are cultivated, plus a portion of the groundnut plots.

The year of "small" millet is resented as it yields only half as much as the "large" millet. Peas and beans are interplanted with the "small" millet to make up requirements, and efforts are also made to reserve a portion of the "large" millet harvest for consumption in this year. There are twenty varieties of "large" millet, and just four of "small" millet. The varieties have differing resistances to pest and moisture conditions, and are mixed together in the plots to ensure that acceptable yields are achieved in all but the most adverse of conditions. It is notable that the Mafa settled in fertile lands on the plains do not practice a rotation but plant "large" millet every year. Obviously, the mountain Mafa put up with the alternate lean years as they recognize that the rotation is essential to the maintenance of soil fertility.

January, February and March are months when no agricultural work is done in the mountains and generally represents a period of socializing and tending to household tasks. For the women, however, it is a period of heavy work in terms of water collection as this is entirely their responsibility, and becomes progressively more difficult as the dry season progresses. Towards the end of the period, twelve-eighteen kilometre round trips, and overnight waits for holes dug in river beds to fill up with water, are common. A dam building programme has just begun in the mountains which is aimed at alleviating this problem. Interestingly, a survey of Mafa attitudes to the dams found that men welcomed them as they would result in more regular meals which are disrupted by the women's water

collection trips; women welcomed them because they would have more time for money earning activities which would permit them to have their millet ground at a mill.¹ This last task also takes many hours per week and it is to be remembered that the time required for these tasks and others involved in meals and childcare are in addition to the women's agricultural work described below.

April is the period when preparations are made for the work ahead; fodder is collected for livestock, firewood for the house, hoes and terraces are mended by the men, while women collect termites for the chicken and work on the bags which are used to carry crops from the fields. The first work begins on the preparation of the fields. During this period, the number of hours of work per week in agricultural tasks is just 27 hours per week for the women against 24 for the men.

In May, June, July and August, the workload is very heavy for both men and women; however throughout the period, women work longer hours than the men. This arises because women work with the men on the millet and groundnut fields, and in addition, cultivate their own secondary crops. These last are generally worked intensively in the area around the compound; although the crops take up only three per cent of the land area, eleven per cent of the total time spent on agriculture is devoted to them (about a fifth of the women's time). They are highly important in the diet as they provide the basis for the sauces which accompany the millet, and hence most of the interest as well as vitamins and minerals in the diet.

May is the period of the most intense activity, involving approximately 56 hours per week on the part of both men and women (slightly more for women). The fields of millet are planted in the early part of the month,

1. Fikry, Mona and Tchala-Abina, Francois, *People and Water, Social Scumáness Analysis for the Mandara Mountains Water Resources Project*, prepared for USAID/Yaounde, March 3, 1978, mimeo, pp. 54-55.

and the first dressing commences at the end of the month. In June, the groundnut crop is sown, and it is also carefully tended. Essentially, individual attention is given to every plant; the millet crop is generally dressed three to four times while the groundnut crop is dressed twice or three times.

September is a slack month as the fields are all properly cared for by this time, and the crops are not yet mature. This is the one time in the agricultural calendar when the hours spent by men exceeds that of the women (24 hours per week for men as against 15 for women). Harvesting begins in October and continues through November and December when agricultural work is essentially finished until the following year.

Family Budgets

The millet harvest is stored in the granary of the household head; only he, or in his absence, the youngest son, may enter it. The harvests of the women's fields are placed in granaries in their own rooms and are at their disposal. Surpluses may be sold, and in addition, women sell poultry and eggs. Nutritional studies have shown that the production system, including that for livestock, provides sufficient calories and protein, but that there are deficiencies with respect to certain important vitamins.

Household budget studies carried out at the same time as the studies of the agricultural and social systems indicated that the average family living in the mountains was earning a cash income of merely 6,000 CFA per annum, and sales made by the wife amounted to only 13.5 per cent of that total. Nearly 40 per cent of revenues are made up in sales of groundnuts. In the past, these were cultivated on small fields by the women, but at present, much larger areas are cultivated and men have taken over sales of the crop in order to pay the taxes of the household. Incomes of the Mafa on the plains were considerably higher and amounted to an average of 22,000 CFA

per household. The wife's share had increased to 22 per cent of the higher total due to the fact that Mafa men on the plains had taken up the growing of cotton as a cash crop, and left the production and marketing of groundnuts to their wives.¹

Extension Programmes

There have been a variety of extension programmes in the north, most of which have concentrated either on cash crops or on resettlement programmes. One programme at least recognizes the importance of women in agricultural production in the area, the Young Farm Families Training Centre which is in the area of the Massa/Toupouri on the flood plain of Lake Chad. This centre was originally concerned with teaching bullock ploughing to young male school leavers but follow-up evaluations found that it was having little impact. Unmarried males had little responsibility in farming, and required the presence and labour of a wife to set up their own households. It was decided to train whole families, and while young families are selected, they are ones which are well established. Women attend all agricultural classes with their husbands, and are taught nutrition, sanitation and home science during the periods when their husbands are learning the techniques of bullock ploughing and care of the animals. Men in the area have always been totally responsible for any cattle owned by the household.²

1. Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

2. Project Description, Young Farm Families Training Centres, USAID, 1977, mimeo.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The data presented in Chapters II, III and IV above support the contention that, in the conditions imposed by African social systems, women's responsibilities for providing the family's food supply are not likely to be diminished by men's productive activities, whether these are inside or outside agriculture. Indeed, Cameroon has already reached the condition specified by B. Van Bath as characteristic of the economic stage of "indirect agricultural consumption", i.e. over half the working males are employed in activities other than food production, without the other characteristic of that stage being apparent, i.e. "the whole non-agricultural population and at least part of the agricultural population satisfy their needs through a market in which farm goods are sold".¹

Instead, although 57 per cent of active men are involved in activities other than subsistence production, most observers agree that food crop marketings amount to approximately 25 per cent of total production only.² Rural women are still providing the family food supply (and most of the food crops marketed) regardless of their husbands' activities. The development implications of these conditions will be considered first in the context of a two-sector 'agriculture-industry' division of the economy, and then with respect to the potential for future development in Cameroon. The final section discussed the development activities which

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1. Van Bath, B.H.S., *The Agrarian History of Western Europe A.D. 500-1850*, London, 1963, pp. 23-25. Quoted in Morgan, "Peasant Agriculture in Tropical Africa", *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246.
 2. Green, Reginald H., "Economy" in the Cameroon section of *Africa South of the Sahara - 1979-80*, London: Europa Publications Ltd., 1979, pp. 218-219.
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would be most useful in the light of the social and other constraints imposed on the women.

The Development Process - "Agriculture-Industry"

In the conditions which result from women's involvement in agriculture in Cameroon, a two-sector division of the economy into agriculture and industry becomes almost a two sex division. This is especially true if the sectorization chosen places modern manufacturing and production of export crops in the "industrial" sector and includes all other economic activities in "agriculture". Women are producing the food, and are also heavily involved in the marketing activities. As a result, the difficulties involved in assuring the food supply while male labour is drawn off into new economic activities have been minimized.

In addition, it has not been necessary to pay full world market prices to induce men to take up production of export crops, as these activities do not have to provide sufficient return to meet the men's subsistence costs (and those of their dependents). The "export tax" on these crops, which amounts to the difference between the price paid to producers and the price secured by the government in world markets, was an important source of revenue for the colonial government, just as it is for the independent government. These funds have been used to build up an infrastructure of roads, railroads, power and communications as well as to finance the education system, development projects, etc. Thus, the fact that men are involved in food production in only a minor way over much of the country makes it easier to squeeze the agricultural sector to finance the development of agriculture and other sectors, as the "opportunity cost" of men's new activities is very low.

However, while the women have helped to make it possible to mobilize the "hidden savings potential" of the agriculture sector, they also benefit

from the establishment of new productive activities, especially the growth of urban centres associated with government, industry and foreign trade as these result in a demand for the sale of food crops. I.e., although the women continue to provide the subsistence of the producers of export and industrial crops (their male relatives), once markets are established, they can both meet the subsistence needs of urban workers and increase their own consumption by selling food crops in the markets and using the income derived from the sales to purchase new industrial products whether home produced or imported (and also semi-processed or fresh local food stuffs).

In this regard, it is important to note that the preceding description of the changing situation in Cameroonian agriculture created by the development process, and its consequences for the incomes and status of the women does not conform to the description of the deteriorating condition of women in the LDCs which is held to be a general phenomena in the writings of many development theorists and feminists. Although there are variations in women's incomes depending on ease of access to the market and production constraints, most women have been able to use the opportunity provided by an expanding economy to improve their financial position and their independence.

However, this circumstances does not alter the fact that the women's situation is still far from acceptable, or that they have to work relatively longer hours for lower earnings than do the men. Women are also vulnerable to male take over of their more profitable activities, as men have the social status to do so, and power over the women's access to land in many cases. Whether or not women are able to maintain and improve their positions will depend on the future course of development and to a considerable extent on government action, points which will be discussed below. In addition, consideration needs to be

given to whether the extra workload women have undertaken to gain their improved incomes can be sustained, and whether they could undertake the additional work necessary to meet future demands.

As the production system has not been mechanized and still uses traditional inputs and techniques, one would expect that the production gains per worker registered in the agriculture sector over the last fifty years has been achieved primarily by additional labour inputs (the suggestion that labour slack exists in the traditional agriculture sector for whatever reason is important to the successful operation of the agricultural-industry development models). The only data available which provide a comparison of the same ethnic group in the pre-colonial and post-colonial situation is with respect to the Pahouin women in the forest area. The data should, however, be treated with caution as the hours worked by any particular woman varies greatly depending on the number of persons she is supporting, her age, the ages of her children, her work habits, etc.

P. Laburthe-Tolra collected information from elderly Beti women on their activities in the early years of the twentieth century which suggests that their working week averaged 45 hours. This total was divided between 32 hours of domestic labour and thirteen hours of field work. In times of peak agricultural work, the total was closer to 59 hours per week and at other times dropped to essentially the 32 hours of domestic work.¹ Guyer's research into the situation of women of the same tribal group in the forest area suggests that the average time spent on the agricultural work necessary to provide subsistence for the family now totals 21 hours per week. In Nkolfeb where there were difficulties in

1. Laburthe-Tolra, Philippe, *Miniaaba: Histoire et Société Traditionnelle chez les Beti du Sud-Cameroun*, Thèse, University de Paris V, 1975, p. 652. Quoted and discussed in Henn, Jeanne K., *Peasants, Workers and Capital: The Political Economy of Labor and Incomes in Cameroon*, Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 1978, unpublished.

marketing any surplus, women worked an additional three hours a week producing for the market. In Nkometou, however, women were working around ten hours per week above the amount required for subsistence, a total of 31 hours a week in the fields. These are average figures and the Nkometou average suggests labour peak requirements of approximately 50 hours per week on agriculture alone.

The extra work involved was spread throughout the year, and derived from working a larger "groundnut" plot in the first growing season and planting small fields in speciality crops whose labour requirements did not conflict with that of the "groundnut" field. Although these amounts are still supportable, they are daunting when combined with the women's domestic responsibilities. Guyer states that these take more than six hours per day (including collection of water, firewood and food preparation). This would suggest an average working week of 73 hours in Nkometou and a much higher peak figure.¹ In the latter instance, however, one would expect that the women would shortcut certain of their household duties. These figures suggest that the time required for domestic labour has also increased substantially, possibly due to the loss of assistance from other females; the numbers of co-wives have fallen and daughters are now likely to be attending school.

Guyer's statement with respect to the time spent on domestic work seems somewhat high, however, especially when compared to the figures collected in the Zengoagu study of Tissandier. His was the only study which presented detailed information on the total working week of women for both agricultural and non-agricultural work, although some of the other studies, especially that of Kaberry, discuss women's other duties

1. Guyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-53. Guyer does not present her data in terms of working weeks but instead provides an estimate of the working days required to cultivate the fields in the area, and discusses the different sizes and types of fields cultivated in the two villages. The writer arrived at the above figures based upon her presentation.

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but do not indicate the time required to carry them out. The data in the Tissandier study do indicate that the time women spend on household work fluctuates with their agricultural workload, dropping to a low of ten hours a week when they are spending 40 hours a week in the fields, and rising to 25 hours a week when agricultural work is less demanding (the average time spent on domestic work was 17 hours per week).¹

Tissandier also noted the impact on family nutrition: consumption levels dropped at times of peak agricultural work even when food stocks were available, suggesting that the women were too tired to prepare the customary family meals.

The question of the women's workload is a serious one as additional agricultural output would probably require further inputs of time on their part. If the women are overworked, it could be harmful to them and to their children (especially those under five). This issue is one on which much more data needs to be collected in the Cameroon. However, it should be emphasized that while the women and their families could benefit from shorter working hours for women, this does not mean that women necessarily have to spend less time on their productive role. Assistance with their domestic responsibilities could have the same effect, and would result in improvements without lowering income.

The Implications for Future Development

Although Cameroon has been moderately successful in its development efforts (it is classified among the "Middle Income" countries by the World Bank, a distinction it shares with only nine other countries of sub-Saharan Africa), the growth of domestic production has slowed in recent years,² and food crop production has been one of the slow growth

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1. Tissandier, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
 2. World Bank, *World Development Report, 1979*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1979, p. 128.

areas. Production increases have kept up with population increases, but little more; the index of *per capita* food production for 1975-77 is 101 when the *per capita* food production of 1969-71 is taken to equal 100.¹ Accordingly, increases in demand among the urban population have not been fully met, a fact which is reflected in persistent newspaper reports of food shortages and rising prices.

Attempts are also made to apportion blame for the situation (e.g. traders are frequently accused of smuggling food out of the country, mainly to Nigeria). However, most analysts agree that the main source of the problem is the failure to reach rural food producers with effective development activities. As the data presented above indicate, agricultural production has risen, but with respect to food crops, this has been achieved primarily through reorganization of production efforts accompanied by longer hours of work for farmers, without substantial changes in the technical base of production. Although further production response could be expected to result from improved market integration (as indicated by the different levels of production in Nkometou and Nkolfeb), it is highly possible that any substantial progress will require significant changes in technology and improved inputs in the production process.

Allied to this production problem is a demand problem - while urban demand will probably be sufficient to make technological change in production possible and profitable in areas immediately adjacent to the cities, transformation of the rural sector must depend upon the growth of demand among producers themselves. Anthony *et al.*, analyzed the possible markets for foodstuffs in Africa and came to the conclusion that

"Any sizable increase in agricultural production for domestic sale must look for its market among consumers

1. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

who already have or will substitute purchased foodstuffs for those they grow themselves and who will increase the amount they spend on food purchases as their incomes grow."¹

It is suggested here that the solution to the demand problem depends critically on the female food producers. Rural men do not consider themselves responsible for assuring the family's food supply in either the forest or highland/grasslands areas of the country; accordingly, increased food crop production and marketings by men will not lead to early and substantial increases in rural market demand for food. The men will spend most of their incomes on other items and family food needs will continue to be met primarily by women's subsistence production. Demand growth would be further restricted by the drop in the women's incomes and other problems are likely to occur with respect to the rural standard of living.

For example, if men were to take over more of the farming land to produce speciality crops for urban markets, the problems of feeding rural families could increase. Even if part of what the men produce is consumed by their families, it is unlikely that they would produce the broad range of crops required for a balanced family diet. At present, women still appear to have access to sufficient land for food crop production although certain observers have noted that food crop fields are often three to six kilometres from the villages as closer fields are occupied by cash crops. There are also indications of nutritional problems in the highlands/grasslands areas which are highly populated and important producers of arabica coffee which suggests that the areas remaining for food crop production may be inadequate. There are reports that the coffee fields originally planted in pure stands by the men are encroached on by the food crops cultivated by the women, however, so women at least are parti-

1. Anthony, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

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ally successful in retaining use of the land. It is questionable whether this situation would continue if the men's land requirements were to be considerably increased; as a minimum women would probably have to walk further to their farms, thus increasing the burdens and time involved in farming.

It is not suggested that transformation of the agricultural sector would never occur if programmes concentrate only on males, and the problems which would arise with respect to rural diets if women's access to land was restricted would be one factor forcing changes to occur. What is suggested is that change would come about much more slowly as each adjustment would come up against social expectations concerning women's contribution to the family. On the other hand, as women are responsible for the food supply, if means can be found to increase their incomes, they will be encouraged to specialize, and to buy the rest of their requirements thus creating a larger market for food products. For example, women in the Lekie are often short of groundnuts, but rather than planting more of that crop, they sell other food products and buy groundnuts.

The current situation in agriculture in which women have been able to maintain and improve their position has arisen largely because men specialized in other areas and considered food crops "women's work" and the incomes to be derived from them less attractive than the alternatives open to the men. If the women's position is to be protected (and it is argued here that this is essential to rapid change) development efforts should concentrate on ensuring the men continue to have sufficiently attractive options, e.g. programmes which attempt to improve the activities of small-holder producers of export and industrial crops are preferable to investments in large scale plantations. Small-scale industrial development located in rural areas as opposed to concentration of pro-

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duction in large units in the cities is another example of helpful activities.

If men are involved in a mix of activities, it is likely that women will both be able to command sufficient land to meet family needs and sufficient independence to control the incomes derived from food crop sales. If men's activities are sufficiently profitable, they will be less concerned also about the rising incomes of the women. Indeed, in these conditions, separate and growing success in both men's and women's activities could lead to mutually reinforcing benefits, with men demanding and receiving a fairer share of the value of the export and industrial crops they produce, and women seeking to enhance their position by working to increase their incomes in line with the men's. As recent research has indicated that raising the incomes of rural small-holders has powerful multiplier effects in that the demand for the products produced by industry (and agriculture) is increased,¹ such a strategy would benefit the entire economy.

Although this result is obviously to be preferred to one where change is slow and difficult, it must be recognized that careful attention will have to be paid to the manner in which this outcome is achieved. As was noted above, further increases in productivity will probably require technical change in agriculture, and when the rising demand associated with population growth and urbanization (Cameroon's total population grew at the rate of 2.2 per cent per annum between 1970-77,² while the urban population grew at an annual rate of 8 per cent between 1970-75³) is combined with the demand associated with rising incomes, the need for

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1. World Bank, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

technical change and capital investment is even more apparent. This is further reinforced by the land demands of export and industrial crops which can be expected to increase, particularly as Cameroon attempts to produce locally more of the raw materials required by industry (most of these are imported at present). Technical change in agriculture will probably have to be fostered by government, and the approach taken will be critical to the impact on the women's productive activities. These problems and other issues, e.g. will educated women wish to remain in agriculture, will be considered in the concluding section of the paper.

Government Activities and Agricultural Progress

Technical change in agriculture is generally associated either with mechanization which is land-enhancing and labour-saving, or with biochemical innovations, e.g. improved seeds, fertilizers, which are also land-enhancing but are labour-using. It is the latter type of change which is generally considered most appropriate in the African context, both due to the employment effects and the problems with meeting the costs of mechanization discussed in Chapter II above. If the benefits of biochemical change are to be realized, there is generally a requirement for investments in land enhancing fixtures such as irrigation, enclosures, etc. Improved infrastructure is generally also required, e.g. roads, storage facilities, markets, both to make it possible to sell surplus production, and to reduce the costs of marketing.

Farmers have neither the finance nor the incentive to undertake the research and investment required themselves. Private industry also has little incentive to undertake the task (except possibly with respect to mechanization) until change has progressed to a stage where most inputs and outputs of agriculture enter the market and substantial demand exists for seeds and fertilizer. Accordingly, technical change in traditional

agriculture generally has to be financed and directed by governments. Their activities include agricultural research, the importation of or arrangements for the local production of inputs, and extension services, as well as infrastructure improvements.

It should be recognized that funds for these efforts are derived primarily from taxes on the agriculture and industrial sectors (although a certain portion will be available from bilateral and international aid agencies) and, as a result, there will be a connection between the success of government efforts and what they can achieve in the next round. I.e. it is suggested that there is a connection between growth in the size of the tax base and the resources the government will have at its disposal, not that specific taxes will be tied to specific projects. Here again, if government builds on the competence of women, it is suggested that transformation of the agricultural sector will be achieved more rapidly, and the likelihood of success for the entire effort will be enhanced.

However, conflicts with the women's husbands are likely to arise if the extension efforts are undertaken by males in the context of commercialization of food crops. It is suggested here that the best approach would be to use a female extension staff with the stated purpose of improving the family's food supply, while making efforts to ensure that the women have ready access to markets to dispose of any surplus.

In this regard, the benefits to be derived from improved food processing and storage should not be overlooked, as this would have the same effect as increased production of the basic product (as well as anticipating solutions to the "second generation" problems of increased agricultural production). What is referred to here is improved ways of processing and possibly packaging traditional foods such as *ccous-cous* or *garé* in small-scale rural units, not industrial processing and packaging. These items already move through the trading channels and it would not be

difficult to arrange for the sale of village production through the traditional marketing system.

Extension of these techniques is also within the competence of existing home science extension agents and could be undertaken at once, while research into improved inputs to production and training of extension staffs will take some time to accomplish. (Some of these activities are already in progress.) Processed foods are also likely to be more attractive to consumers, and will result in the producers retaining for themselves a larger share of the final market price.

It may be questioned whether women will be able to meet the labour demands for all these increasing activities themselves, and it is possible that they cannot do so. However, it is suggested that the possibilities of women retaining the incomes resulting from their labours will be increased if men are drawn in by the growing success of the women's activities, and join already well-established and prosperous wives in their efforts. In addition, as women's cash incomes increase, they could well hire male labour to assist as required, and the possibility of this is already suggested by the cash payments made for land clearing by certain of the women Guyer studied.

The women's husbands could be called upon to organize and manage these labourers and would probably be willing to do so if the women could pay them for the service (i.e. in the same way that wives are paid if they assist in the cocoa harvest). The success of women in retaining control of production will probably depend on whether the men's involvement is restricted to a few labour peaks and especially to areas where women's involvement has always been limited, e.g. land clearing. On the other hand, weeding has been primarily the responsibility of women, and efforts to lessen the burdens of weeding (which can be expected to become an even heavier charge when fertilizer is used) would be particularly helpful

to the women in meeting the expanded requirements from their own labour. Studies of the crop production systems should be made with these constraints in mind, so that solutions could be found within the women's management capabilities.

In addition, efforts by the government to reduce the women's domestic labour could free them for the extra demands of productive activities. O.F.U.N.C. has already noted this, and is campaigning for facilities such as day care centres in rural areas, recognizing that the women no longer have the labour of young girls to look after babies when they become too heavy to carry to the fields (and too active to stay out of trouble). Rural water supplies, grinding mills, and improved arrangements for cooking fuels are among other activities which would have considerable benefit, as would health services. In particular, immunization programmes for young children would reduce the amount of time women spend caring for sick relatives.

Traditional women's associations which can be found in most parts of Cameroon, also offer possibilities for support and mutual assistance between women in meeting changed circumstances. These groups include working parties, rotating credit associations (tontines), clan organizations, and secret societies (these last have largely died out, but they have been replaced by women's church groups). Although these groups might not be directly adaptable to the requirements of development, they offer a basis for co-operation to solve mutual problems. Accordingly, it is suggested that solutions to this issue, and others which might be raised with respect to women and the development of agriculture and the economy, could be found by using the options available within traditional social arrangements.

Another important issue needs to be considered; that of the effects of education and increased employment opportunities outside agriculture

for women, as it might be argued that if women are going to wish to leave agriculture, there is little point in focussing programmes on them. It is suggested here, ~~however~~, that two likely development trends may provide a solution to this apparent issue.

First, historical experience with the structural change which occurs in a developing economy indicates that, as output per worker increases in the agriculture sector, the relative size of the labour force in agriculture falls. Given population increases, however, the absolute size of the agricultural labour force may continue to increase for some time, and only shrinks in absolute numbers in the final stages of development. At the same time, although the need for agricultural labour is falling, labour demands from other sectors are rising. The evolutionary nature of both this process and that of education suggests that educated women who no longer wish to farm, can be spared from agriculture and will be able to find employment elsewhere.

Another problem which might arise in this respect is the women's role in maintaining usage rights in land; i.e. will it be possible for women to leave farming when their activities are essential to their husbands' claims to rights in land? This problem may be met in a number of ways. For example, rising population may result in the demand for land registration, so that individual ownership is maintained whether or not the land is used. Alternatively, Cameroonian families may meet the problem by internal specialization, e.g. certain wives may farm and assure the rights to land of an entire lineage group. Polygamy may also survive and if it does, one wife may specialize in farming all the land allocated to the husband while the other works at different jobs.

However, if technical progress makes agriculture much more profitable, and possibly less physically demanding, there is no reason to assume that educated women will find it any less attractive than do educated men in

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the developed countries of Europe. Agriculture as a vocation fits in well with women's other responsibilities and provides them with much more flexibility in organizing their lives than does most other types of employment. The peaks of activity are demanding, but women can still leave their work for a few hours to deal with domestic problems, for example, when they are responsible only to themselves. Peak requirements can also be anticipated in advance and arrangements made to cope with them. In light of these considerations, modern agriculture could well be a highly attractive occupation for educated women.

It is recognized that a development path which builds on women's traditional role in agriculture is only one among many options which are open to Cameroon. However, it is suggested that development which makes use of the potential benefits to be derived from enhancing the women's activities has the best prospect of rapid and sustainable success. Other approaches will have less success and a problematic impact on rural standards of living. In sum, they represent a denial of Cameroonian potential and Cameroonian culture.

APPENDIXA NOTE ON THE METHOD EMPLOYED TO SELECT THE SAMPLE
OF SUB-SAHARA AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES
DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER II OF THE PAPER

The data presented above was selected in accordance with the method suggested by George P. Murdock in his discussion of the "Uses of the Atlas". The method is:

1. Formulate an hypothesis according to which two sets of tabulated data should be expected to reveal a positive or negative association. [In this case, H_0 : There will be no difference in the division of labor between the sexes in intensive as opposed to extensive cultivation systems in sub-Sahara Africa. Significance level: 0.05.]
2. Rearrange the 412 clusters in a new rank order by some method of pure chance, e.g. a table of random numbers. [A random numbers table was used to rank the 85 cultural clusters of sub-Sahara Africa.]
3. For each cluster containing more than one society, select by chance, e.g. by a cast of the dice, a particular society to represent it.
4. Discard any selected society for which the tables do not contain the needed data, and select by chance a substitute from the same cluster. Eliminate entirely any cluster for which information is lacking on all member societies.
5. Check the geographical coordinates for all remaining societies, and eliminate the second ranking one of every pair which violates the "three degree rule". Substitute, if possible, another society of the same cluster which does not violate the rule; if there are none, eliminate the cluster. [This instruction is designed to insure that the observations are independent of one another and is referring to the necessity to insure that they are located at least three degrees latitude or three degrees longitude away from each other.]
6. When all necessary eliminations have been made, tabulate the results and employ any suitable statistical technique to assess the bearing of the results on the hypothesis. [Use of this method resulted in the selection of 57 societies, 5 of whom had no agriculture so were eliminated. A χ^2 significance test was performed on the different division of labour found in extensive versus intensive systems of agriculture, which resulted in the acceptance of H_0 .]"¹

1. Murdock, "Ethnographic Atlas: A Summary", *op. cit.*, p. 114.

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