

SECOND EDITION

Women & Development in Africa

HOW GENDER WORKS



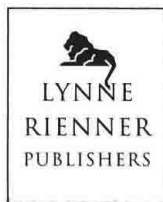
MICHAEL KEVANE

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Michael Kevane



BOULDER
LONDON

Published in the United States of America in 2014 by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
1800 30th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301
www.rienner.com

and in the United Kingdom by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kevane, Michael.

Women and development in Africa : how gender works / Michael Kevane.
— Second edition.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-58826-979-9 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-1-58826-980-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Women in development—Africa. 2. Sex role—Africa. I. Title.

HQ1240.5.A35K48 2014

305.42096—dc23

2014016145

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the United States of America



The paper used in this publication meets the requirements
of the American National Standard for Permanence of
Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1992.

5 4 3 2 1

Women and Development in Africa

Preface

The *randomista* movement in development economics, where randomized control trials (RCTs) are used to evaluate the impacts of policies and programs, has swept over much of economics in the years since the first edition of this book was published in 2004. Thus, this new edition integrates much research that uses randomized control trials to learn about how gender affects economic decisionmaking in African societies. In some chapters, such as those on intrahousehold bargaining and the gendered treatment of girls and boys, there are germane findings from RCTs. In others, such as the chapter on land tenure, randomized control trials have fairly little to say. But the field has been growing rapidly, and there are a number of large-scale trials being run that should yield considerable insight.

This edition also introduces the method of instrumental variables (see the appendix to Chapter 2). Several important publications pertinent to gender issues have used the instrumental variables econometric strategy; thinking about causality has properly become central to applied economics. It is almost incredible, in retrospect, to think that my undergraduate economics education and even much of my graduate economics program never really dealt with problems of causality in understanding the social world. It was presumed that variables that “could be causal” probably were so, and issues of endogeneity and self-selection were pushed off as advanced topics for specialized courses. Even now one reads journal articles from the period before the mid-1990s and wonders why causality was not taken more seriously.

The new edition features an updated introduction to the overall broad issue of gender and development, and the new final chapter incorporates current work by political scientists. Most of the other chapters have been extensively revised, and I have endeavored to include recent findings, but

not at the expense of short-changing “classics” and other important work in the field.

* * *

After the first edition of the book was published, I took a detour off the straight highway that is an academic career and started a small nonprofit called Friends of African Village Libraries (FAVL). Together with other dedicated colleagues and volunteers, and with some wonderful librarians in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda, I have tried to help share the joy of reading fiction and discovering knowledge with kids and adults in African villages. Since we started more than a decade ago, the libraries supported by FAVL have received hundreds of thousands of visits, and tens of thousands of books have been checked out. My involvement in promoting libraries and reading prompted me to start conducting research on these topics. As a result, I had opportunities to interview and observe readers and analyze survey questionnaires from villages in Burkina Faso and Ghana. The readers I spoke with have inspired me with their hope and ambition. These are girls and boys who live tough, frustrating, and often tragic lives. In addition to talking with young readers, I have read much of the young adult and children’s fiction produced in West Africa. Authors such as Fatou Keita, Marguerite Abouet, Ansomwin Ignace Hien, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, and Kwei Quartey, to name just a few, encourage this hope and ambition.

This new edition is dedicated to all those confident young readers and ambitious authors. I hope that the gender-equal worlds that authors create in their fiction replace the gender-unequal reality that is all too discouraging. And I hope that young readers are the ones who will make that change happen!

—M. K.

Women and Development in Africa

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1

Exploring Gender and Development

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden. . . . How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa!

—Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

I always knew I was a businesswoman. When I was in high school, I used to sell illegal sweets. And I made money. I made a lot of money . . . I am very happy and proud. When I was young, they said: A woman is a woman—a man should take care of you. But women are actually contributing a lot more than men. We always find ourselves multitasking.

—Lovin Kobusingya, Uganda, 2012

Alizèta Ouédraogo is widely considered to be the richest woman in Burkina Faso, a small, landlocked country of 15 million people in West Africa. Burkina Faso is an oasis of slow and steady economic growth in war-torn West Africa, though the country is one of the poorest in the world. People eke out a living of less than \$500 per year growing crops, such as sorghum, millet, and cotton, and raising livestock. Burkina Faso is in the Sahel zone of Africa, just south of the Sahara Desert, which also favors transhumant livestock production of sheep, cows, and camels. Herders move from place to place with their herds, earning their livelihoods by selling milk, and by occasionally selling livestock for meat and hides. For al-

most 25 years, Alizèta Ouédraogo had a monopoly on tanning hides in Burkina Faso. Her company, Tan-Aliz, grew steadily, eventually selling \$10 million per year in hides to Italian luxury goods producers such as Gucci. Ouédraogo diversified into real estate development and infrastructure construction. That her daughter married the younger brother of President Blaise Compaoré, who has ruled from 1987 to the present, may have helped her obtain government procurement contracts. In 2011, she was elected president of the Chamber of Commerce of Burkina Faso. She succeeded Oumarou Kanazoé, Burkina Faso's richest man, who had passed away the previous year. Alizèta Ouédraogo became the face of business for Burkina Faso.

The success of Alizèta, as she is known in Burkina, has not been free of controversy. Tanning hides is a notoriously toxic industry, with lax oversight of disposal of chemicals used to treat the hides and other toxic wastes. Alizèta's tanning factory, on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, has been the object of frequent protests. Workers at the factory have periodically gone on strike, claiming that the factory does not follow worker health, safety, compensation, and employment practice regulations. The press has hinted that her government-granted monopoly on tanning hides was not motivated by sound economic policy to temporarily protect an infant industry from regional competition, but rather so that her family (and hence the president's) could benefit economically. Her construction company, according to rumors, benefited from a hasty and secretive privatization of a state-owned company.

For some, Alizèta Ouédraogo's rise, and the growth of her companies, encapsulate many of the controversies of African economic development: crony capitalism, corruption, environmental degradation, and disregard for workers. For others, her story is the shining example of the liberal way: self-made industrial powerhouse, capitalist with a human face (she is a well-known philanthropist and sponsors numerous charities), responsible citizen (being president of the Chamber of Commerce means she spends much time away from her business and represents one important sector of civil society). For still others, she represents a gender victory: a woman who succeeds and operates on equal terms with men.

Whatever the evaluation of Alizèta Ouédraogo, the issues raised are central to development. First, development is about investment. The actors of development are the individuals who foster investment. Young people want to grow up in a society with expanding opportunities for realizing their ambitions and utilizing their talents. Opportunities expand when individuals, as owners of companies and directors of organizations, undertake to forego consumption today and make investments for the future. Societies differ in terms of how their social institutions encourage investment. In many African countries, illegitimate and unrepresentative government,

powerful oligopolies, and mafia-like private militias and gangs thwart the best efforts of farmers, artisans, traders and small businesses, investors, and entrepreneurs. People and institutions use the power of the state, or sometimes private violence, for their own advantage. These “grabbing hands” are especially difficult to control in poor developing countries. A hard part of development studies is determining whether people like Alizèta Ouédraogo, and the social institutions she represents, are more like entrepreneurs or more like gangsters (Fisman and Miguel, 2009).

Second, the development process balances benefits to current generations with costs to future generations. Most development is toxic to humans, to plants, and to animals. A parking lot enables humans to travel conveniently using automobiles, but nothing grows under asphalt, water rushes off and carries away leaking oil, and the heat of the sun is added to the atmosphere, thus warming our planet. A factory that tans sheep, goat, and cow hides is a parking lot on steroids. It is proper for public policy to regulate these negative externalities.

Third, development may depend on using state policy to resolve certain well-understood problems with market economies, notably the tendencies of private investors to hesitate when many of the benefits of their investments spill over to others. That is, investment should be subsidized and guided by social institutions when there are significant positive complementarities. Granting a temporary monopoly of exporting hides to Tan-Aliz may not be a sign of corruption, but rather an indicator of good economic policy.

Finally, and of particular importance for this book, development is a process that erodes social institutions of exclusion. The shackles of status are replaced by a new conception of persons as equal citizens under the law. Development is about expanding freedom and ending discriminatory institutions that restrict the freedom of some to realize their ambitions and talents (Nussbaum, 2001). Alizèta Ouédraogo, as a successful female entrepreneur in a society where women’s roles remain sharply defined and circumscribed, has to be considered in this light.

Organization of the Book

This book gives the reader the tools to understand the context and relevance of women in African economic development. Not just wealthy and politically connected entrepreneurs like Alizèta Ouédraogo, but also poor women who eke out a living hawking bananas on street corners. This introductory chapter defines some key terms—*development*, *gender*, *gender equality*—that are used throughout the book. The focus of the book will be on Africa south of the Sahara Desert, which means that the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern-oriented countries of Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco

are excluded. Henceforth, *sub-Saharan Africa* shall be shortened to just plain *Africa*, in accordance with common usage in the social sciences. Africa remains home to the poorest countries of the world, and social institutions that affect economic and development outcomes are profoundly gendered. The primary aim of this book is to trace the links among development, economic activity, growth, and gendered institutions.

The approach adopted throughout emphasizes the feedback loops between the choices that individuals make and the social environment that structures those choices. Men and women make differing choices. These choices in turn constitute part of the gendering of economic activity. But the motivation for those choices is in part the differing opportunities that men and women experience. The structure of an economy—rights over property and persons, organization of market transfers of property and persons, and rules regarding nonmarket transfers of rights—is itself gendered. There is a pithy saying that economics is all about how people make choices, while sociology is all about how people do not actually have any choices to make. There is no need to reduce the social sciences to such gross stereotypes, but the saying does capture the essence of how to think about the feedback-style relationship between structure and agency.

If Africans were rich, the analysis of the economic dimensions of gender would be less urgent. Unfortunately, African countries are the poorest of the world. Chapter 2 offers a broad overview of the problem of poor economic growth performance in Africa and tempers that assessment with more encouraging news of steady and sometimes dramatic improvement in many indicators of well-being, such as infant mortality and schooling attainment. The chapter introduces multiple regression analysis, a key tool of statistical analysis. The technique of multiple regression analysis is applied to examine correlates of economic growth, across the world and among African countries. Attempts to explain variation in development trajectories across countries reveal a major challenge: there can be little confidence that an estimated relationship constitutes a causal relationship. Regression analysis of country-level data suffers from the problem of endogeneity, where the outcomes to be explained are themselves explaining or causing other variables.

The endogeneity problem has increasingly led social scientists to turn to experimental methods to try to measure the importance of gender in shaping economic outcomes. Chapter 3 introduces the method of randomized control trials (RCTs). The chapter reviews a number of representative studies using RCTs. Subsequent chapters note RCTs designed to address specific gender questions.

Chapters 4–6 describe three structures that are deeply gendered in rural Africa: land tenure, labor allocation, and marriage markets. The system of land tenure (Chapter 4) is a basic structure of an agrarian economy. Tenure

rules determine the allocation of rights to use and transfer land. Most African societies give women far fewer land-use rights than are given to men. Labor allocation is discussed in Chapter 5, which provides evidence of the gendering of labor markets, principally in the form of norms that enforce patterns of time allocation and occupational segregation by gender. Rural women typically have limited rights to choose how much time to spend on tasks of their choosing; they may be subordinate to the instructions of their husbands or fathers. Moreover, many African societies classify certain activities as "male" and others as "female." In the past, it was rare for men or women to cross those occupational boundaries, but those boundaries are eroding rapidly as economies urbanize and diversify. Chapter 6 investigates marriage markets, which in many African societies are major economic structures determining the economic possibilities of women. Marriage traditions are constantly being reinvented and reinterpreted, but the marriage institutions of most social groups and countries remain lopsided in favor of men.

Subsequent chapters look at important choices that men and women make in the context of the structures that they find themselves in as they enter adulthood. Chapter 7 discusses the organization of households. In rural Africa, many significant economic choices concerning production are made in the context of households. The vast majority of people in Africa do not work in factories or for large organizations. They work with other members of their household. The structure of household production is constituted by the choices made by household members. Chapter 8 focuses on one important household choice, investments in the health of children, while Chapter 9 reviews the economics of household investment in educating children. If investment choices in health and education are themselves gendered, then right away there is a feedback mechanism between structure and choice. Parents make different investments in girls than they do in boys, which affect the skills, outlooks, and opportunities that girls take with them into adulthood. Because of this, young women will make choices that are different from those of young men. People view the social patterns that emerge from these choices as part of the economic structure of their society, which in turn shapes the choices of the next generation.

Over the past two decades, microfinance has come to be known as the single most important gendered development program promoted by governments and nonprofit organizations. Microfinance organizations tout their effects on women and claim that microfinance may have dramatic effects in reducing poverty. Chapter 10 addresses some of the many issues surrounding microfinance and shows how evaluations of impact suggest that the effects may be quite modest.

Chapter 11 concludes the book with reflections on the gendering of politics in African societies. Political structures are enormously influential

in determining economic structures. African governments are increasingly mandating greater representation in political structures. It remains an open question whether these initiatives have large positive effects, and whether they will lead to more equal gender representation.

Defining Development

Development is a catchall word that refers to the process by which societies increase the possibilities that people have to realize their potential (Sen, 1999). A society develops when it expands the range of possibilities for people to be fulfilled. Children survive the many life-threatening illnesses of infancy and childhood. They spend their childhood learning, in nurturing educational settings, and enter adulthood with the capabilities and freedom to choose how to realize their potential.

A developed society reduces poverty, so that people are less frequently faced with a lack of effective choices. People in a developed society seldom confront discrimination and social norms that curtail their choices. Humans, as social creatures, realize their potential when they are increasingly free to engage in the life of their community, however defined. Development is economic, political, and cultural, and is a process through which freedom in these domains is enhanced. Of course, development is relative. Most people, even those living in poor countries today, would curl their lips in distaste if they were confronted with the living conditions and lack of basic freedoms for people in the most developed societies of 1700.

This gloss of development perhaps conceals the many controversies of development. For example, one corollary of development is degradation of the environment. As stewards of the planet, human aspirations for sustainability are often in conflict with aspirations for development. A related point is that development is a process of change, and persons who value tradition often find their sense of identity and well-being threatened by development. Development also often involves growing inequality in access to power. There is much to be learned from the radical critique of development (Escobar, 2011). This critique holds that the language and rhetoric of development obfuscate and mystify in order to forestall questioning of relations of power and oppression that exist around the world. At the risk of sounding blithe, however, this is not the place for an extended commentary on the controversies and rhetoric of development. Development involves many processes and many choices; there is a universe of ambiguity, nuance, and complexity to be explored (Watts, 1993). This book will be a lengthy treatment of just one aspect of development, the gender dimension, where the development process changes some things for the better and others for the worse.

Africa at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains the least developed region of the world, in this sense of offering people possibilities to

realize their potential. Proportionally more infants and children die in Africa than elsewhere. Children who survive are malnourished and have limited opportunities to go to school. African economies offer few opportunities for fulfilling and rewarding work. African societies shackle marginal groups with oppressive and degrading stereotypes. African political systems, though changing rapidly, deny many people essential freedoms.

That Africa alone occupies the bottom rung of the development ladder is a recent phenomenon. Thirty years ago, Africans had plenty of company at the bottom. Most of the world's poor, in fact, lived in China, India, and Bangladesh. But these countries have seen amazing growth in income per capita for several decades now. Hundreds of millions of people who were living on less than \$1 a day in 1980 are now earning ten times that amount. The poor in these countries have also experienced significant improvements in living standards that have outpaced their increases in income. Many of these societies have also seen considerable improvements in freedoms to participate in cultural and political life. Unfortunately, most African countries have only seen growth in income since the early 2000s. Income declined or was stagnant for the previous twenty-five years. Moreover, recent African growth has been due to oil and mineral extraction, without sizable spillover benefits for the bulk of the poor. A recent wave of democratization has not been accompanied by deep changes in respect for human rights and opportunities for civic engagement. Africa has seen economic growth without much development.

Growth in income, also commonly known as economic growth, is a key component, though by no means the only component, of development. Income growth is measured using statistics on national economic activity. Virtually all countries of the world regularly calculate the value of goods and services produced in the country in a year, known as gross domestic product (GDP). Most also report gross national income (GNI), which measures how much of domestic and foreign GDP accrues over a year as income generated by nationals of a country. GDP is increasingly diverging from GNI. Many Africans earn very high incomes when they are abroad, and much income produced in Africa takes the form of mineral and oil extraction by multinationals. Since a significant share of income earned abroad is remitted, and since much income earned by multinationals is repatriated, GNI might be a more suitable measure of well-being. GDP might, however, still be a good indicator of the future or potential earnings of Africans born in their countries. Another measure that might be considered is net national product, which subtracts the considerable depreciation of capital and infrastructure from the total product produced in a year. If depletion of natural resource assets were also subtracted from total production, by the argument that sales of existing assets are not really "goods produced," then incomes would be lower (Winter-Nelson, 1995).