WOMEN FARMERS AND COMMERCIAL VENTURES

Increasing Food Security in Developing Countries

edited by Anita Spring

DIRECTIONS IN APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

Women Farmers and Commercial Ventures

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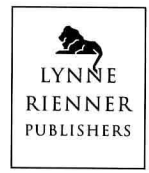

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Women Farmers and Commercial Ventures

Directions in Applied Anthropology: Adaptations and Innovations

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Preface

Women and subsistence crops, women's crops. It's natural. It's an ideology based on both the stereotypes and the reality of the ages, but it's too simplistic in the modern context.

This book began as a session organized for the Culture and Agriculture Section of an American Anthropological Association meeting, titled "Agricultural Commercialization: Its Positive Effects on Women Farmers." At the meeting and during the following year of trying to convince scholars to write additional chapters for the volume, the contributors and audience—for the most part—approved of the topic. But some contributors and scholars debated whether there could be any positive effects of commercial endeavors on women. They said their data only showed that commercial endeavors harmed women or that women did not participate in such ventures on their own.

My original intention of pulling together case studies was the result of some experiences in Kenya. I had been schooled in the Boserupian tenets of women in development (WID). I was a devotee of Boserup's female and male systems of farming (Spring 1995; see the references cited in Chapter 1 for citations) and a believer in her notion that the development process usually harms or overlooks women farmers and that men often garner the development "goodies" (land, capital, technology, project services, and so on) for themselves and restrict women's access. I wrote extensively on this subject for more than twenty years concerning cases where this happened in Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Malawi, Somalia, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Jamaica, and the United States, based on personal fieldwork, and about other countries and continents based on the literature. I monitored these events and tried to overcome them with policy changes and project programming in countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Near East that I supervised as chief of the Women in

Rural Production and Agricultural Development Service at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (*Women in Agricultural Development: FAO's Plan of Action,* illustrated version, Rome 1990). I helped to move the service's focus away from women in food systems to women in agriculture.

What I saw in Kenya and then realized that I had seen in many places all over the world was women doing more than basic subsistence agriculture. They were not helpers and appendages of their spouses and male kin; rather they were own-account commercial producers, marketers, entrepreneurs, and workers. For the most part, they were doing well, in fact, better than their peers who were not involved in these commercial endeavors. (I did realize that things were not always rosy for all women.) Therefore, I conceived of their commercial ventures as having a positive impact and concluded that women were not always as negatively affected as we had believed. An edited volume on African entrepreneurship by Barbara McDade and me in 1998 also included cases of successful women entrepreneurs who used methods similar to and different from those of men; as well, women were stratified by class, wealth, and education and operated in the formal or informal sectors based on these differences. Women who were involved in commercial production and sales had more food and more money to buy food (of better quality and in greater quantities), as well as other commodities, including land. The so-called natural link of women and food systems was played out in more complex ways.

In Swaziland, I studied women and men who participated in a U.S. Agency for International Development project on commercialization. One of the most successful farmers with the largest landholdings was a woman; many of the smallest landholders were women as well. The smallholder women especially made use of the project's technical services, marketing structures, and project equipment, which they could never hope to own (unlike the large landholders, who had their own).

In Kenya, as elsewhere, WID practitioners and scholars, as well as policymakers, spent much time bemoaning women's lack of land titles; at the same time, women's groups multiplied at a variety of levels, mostly fostering small-scale enterprises. However, my research showed that thousands of women were linking up with commercial companies that gave them technical services, and they found ways to get around their traditional lack of access to land and inputs by using new mechanisms. Samuel Mwale, a young economist, had figured it out, but it was a radical thought. Data from the chapters of this volume's contributors document other cases of changes in gender ideologies in which patriarchal views were being undermined or changed by women's market participation; the chapters also provide other cases in which gender ideologies are egalitarian.

It was clear from my own interviews with women in commercial production that women were thinking about their enterprises in terms of sourcing and selling, what to do with profits, how to reinvest, and how to increase their quality of life. One standard measure was food security at the household level, which was not achieved by subsistence production alone; rather it was enhanced by commercial sales that generated income to purchase food and a wide range of commodities and services. Women were making decisions at farm and household levels based on the income they had generated. They were educating their children, buying appliances and houses, and participating in enterprise-related networks and organizations.

Still, according to the gender ideologies recounted by male elders and leaders, women were not and should not be doing such things (gaining benefits and devising strategies instead of being victimized by commercial endeavors). In contrast, private business sector company heads often commented that their companies had many (thousands of) women as participants or growers and that women were appreciated in these capacities because of their reliability and farming skills. I also remembered an unusual example of the private sector changing patriarchal ideologies because of sales. In the 1980s, the Ford Tractor Company in the United States realized that U.S. farm women were doing more in agriculture, including buying tractors. As a result, the company changed four things: advertisements stopped showing skimpily dressed glamorous women on the tractors; the tractor's cab was beautified; a series of steps to the cabs were installed so women could climb up more easily; and the steering wheel was made easier to turn. This surely is a model that will be followed as the private sector begins to see women as participants and customers.

That women do commercial agriculture is mentioned in the literature about many places. But that it is a good or better strategy for food security and provides a better life for them and their families than subsistence production or dependency on spouses or male kin is not touted; this aspect needs more emphasis. It is my hope that this volume will give renewed emphases to the benefits of women's commercial agricultural efforts and ventures to their households, families, communities, and nations.

Originally, I wanted to produce a book electronically after the conference because many people were getting connected to e-mail. However, of the eight presenters, only Sarah Hamilton, Laurel Bossen, Alexandra Wilson, and I prepared our papers for the volume. Gracia Clark, who served as one of the discussants, subsequently contributed a chapter, and Christina Gladwin prepared another chapter with Deborah Roos. Economist Lawrence Grossman sent his paper to the meetings, and Villia Jefremovas was identified there as a contributor. All the other contributors were "discovered" in 1998 and 1999. It should be noted that a number of researchers

declined to participate, saying that there were no positive examples or results for women farmers. But the initial session accomplished other things. It allowed me to meet Bridget Julian of Lynne Rienner Publishers, as well as Timothy Finan, who was scouting for books for a series he edits for the press. Their responses were positive and supportive and helped generate the contract that enabled me to entice other contributors. So the meeting functioned as a catalyst.

I would like to thank the contributors for their efforts in doing electronic submissions, some for the first time. The Centers for Africa and Latin America Studies and International Programs in the College of Agriculture at the University of Florida provided some support to pay for typing. Caroline Leon, Margaret Joyner, and Melissa Denmark diligently helped with the reformatting and typing corrections. I would like to thank Bridget Julian, my editor, with whom it was a pleasure to work. Finally, I want to thank the women farmers who shared the stories of their successes.

—*Anita Spring*

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1

Commercialization and Women Farmers: Old Paradigms and New Themes

Anita Spring

Women farmers are often described as subsistence food producers, and in relation to the production of surplus or to commercial ventures, as helpmates or assistants at best. Yet women's involvement in commercial production has consequences for their own increased social power and decisionmaking within the household, for household food supply, and for national food security. This volume provides a paradigmatic expansion and case studies on women's participation in commercial agricultural production and the consequences to them, their families/households, and their societies. The ways in which women use strategies to succeed in spite of the institutional processes and gender ideologies that have been developed to exclude them are studied in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The "myth of the masculine market" versus the effects of the actual, modernized market are explored.

In the past several decades, case studies have analyzed agricultural intensification in which households, groups, and production areas have changed on their own or because of development programs, from food-based subsistence and household production systems to food and export production for local, national, and international markets. In these transitions, the effects on women usually have been negative; women have been (and are still) left out, marginalized, or overburdened; their access, control, and benefits from production and distribution have not been commensurate with their labor (Feldstein and Poats 1989). Ester Boserup (1970) wrote that colonial governments and development efforts focused on men as the recipients of new technologies and inputs. Women, she noted, were thought to do the drudgery of subsistence food production, whereas men were targeted for the intensified commercial cash crops. Much of the literature on

women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD) contains examples of how development activities and intensification services then failed to target women, as well as how women have been excluded from the transmission of technical-agricultural knowledge (Bernal 1988; Boserup 1970; Bukh 1979; Charlton 1984; Deere and León 1987; Escobar 1995; Gladwin 1991; Hanger and Moris 1973; Henderson, with Hansen 1995; Heyzer 1987; Monson and Kalb 1985; Rogers 1980; Safilious-Rothschild 1985; Spring 1986, 1995). However, there are a sizable number of positive cases, similar to the cases given here, in which women have done all right and even well in commercial endeavors, either on their own or with relatives, usually spouses (Agarwal 1994; Asare 1995; Arizpe and Arnanda 1986; Babalolo and Dennis 1988; Cameron 1995; Clark 1994; Guyer 1984; Sachs 1996; Spring 1995; Spring and McDade 1998).

This chapter begins with some background on the older paradigm of "women and subsistence food production and men and cash crops." It then proposes a number of factors that differentiate between noncommercial and commercial production in terms of how women may be affected. The focus is mainly on women in the smallholder and small- to medium-scale commercial sectors. The case studies are primarily concerned with cultivated commodities (although Chapter 9 covers wild flora and fauna—natural resource management), but studies of livestock (Chapter 8 mentions pigs, and Chapter 15 mentions dairying), agroforestry, and fisheries (although no cases are presented here) are equally germane (Sachs 1996).

The second half of this chapter explores the volume's three themes of the effects of commercial ventures on (1) gender ideologies and societal norms; (2) household food security, nutrition, and distribution systems; and (3) the introduction of new technologies, marketing opportunities, and organizational structures. Gender ideologies within societies (the "emic" perspective) affect the normative gender division of labor and any deviancy from it, as well as the ways in which women's and men's work are evaluated. Patriarchal attitudes may restrict women's access to and control over productive resources (Feldstein and Poats 1989; Gordon 1996; Poats, Schmink, and Spring 1988; Sachs 1996). In Part 1 of the book, chapters document how gender ideology has positively and negatively affected women's participation in commercial endeavors, from the intrahousehold level to government policy. In a few cases, egalitarian ideologies override patriarchal ones; in others, capitalistic modes of production may temper patriarchal attitudes that have restricted women's participation, and as a result, women gain access to and remuneration from the market.

It is argued in Part 2 that commercial production provides women and their families with better nutrition (more food and greater diversity) and increased household food security. Such production also enhances women's economic position (more income and decisionmaking power)

within the household and society. As women gain control of distribution networks of food and nonfood agricultural products, they and their family's well-being are much enhanced (Baer 1987; Blumberg 1995; Clark 1994; Daniels 1994; Engberg, Sabry, and Beckerson 1988; Spring and McDade 1998).

In Part 3, contributors assert that women's participation in commercialization requires that they receive new technologies and marketing opportunities. The ways in which women obtain these technologies and opportunities may be similar to the ways men get them, but women may use other strategies to bypass gender constraints to their quest for access and control of land, capital, and technology. Finally, participation in the market leads to the need for women to create and belong to farmers' organizations, unions, and social clubs; to become community leaders; and to form alliances and networks.

Standard Dichotomies: "Women in the Private and Men in the Public Domains" and "Women and Subsistence Food and Men and Cash Crops"

Concurrent with Boserup's arguments in the early 1970s, anthropologists and others used the paradigm of the public workplace as being associated with men and the private/domestic realm as being associated with women. This equation reflected and explained women's concomitant subordination (Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974). It was used as a starting point to analyze women's position in society and to judge how far they might come from that base as a result of development. The idea was that women would move from their traditional position and status in society to better positions of authority, power, and decisionmaking, toward the public, more valued, and higher status male sphere. This can be considered as analogous to the notion of women growing food crops ("the domestic") and moving into commercial production ("the public"). Also embedded in the argument was that capitalist, market-oriented modes of production regarded only cash-producing activities as work, so women's work in maintaining the household was not considered work and was relegated to the "domestic" and "private" realms, whereas men's public, external to the household, and income-producing work was visible and counted. Marxist feminists and others lambasted capitalist modes of production as leaving out household production and only considering private property and production between households as valuable (Sacks 1974).

The private-public dichotomization has since been noted as too limited (Lamphere 1997). Since women in most places participate in community activities, the home has come into the workplace, and women's roles vis-à-vis

the family have changed with the cash economy. Furthermore, the importance of women's work in provisioning the household, carrying out reproductive as well as productive activities to maintain the household, and participating in extrahousehold and community events and decisions is now better recognized (Beneria and Sen 1981; Blumberg 1995; Moore 1988; Moser 1993).

The association of women with household production and subsistence crops and men with income production and cash crops is a legacy of the Western construct of the "farmer and his wife." This construction of gender roles has been reinforced by policies and programs of colonial and neocolonial governments. Although there are scattered examples in which the gendered division of labor did not "conform" to the standard ideology, there have been few attempts to look at patterns globally. This volume attempts to help conceptualize the reality of production and distribution strategies in terms of changes in gender roles and ideologies concerning the gender division of labor, acquisition of resources and technology, and patterns of income production and remuneration. The cases do not negate the fact that many women are still in subsistence production and/or are involved in marketing small surplus foodstuffs for cash, as opposed to being involved in commercial ventures, producing or processing specifically for sales.

Roles for Women Farmers in Commercialization

Women have expanded from subsistence to smallholder commercial production by becoming (1) farm owners and enterprise managers; (2) individual or group contract growers/processors; (3) marketers of agricultural products; and (4) agricultural wage laborers and supervisors. In some cases, this "expansion" has been a natural progression into intensification and a response to the market, both in terms of needing to obtain cash and needing to purchase nonagricultural commodities and services. In other cases, government and donor-financed projects have developed commercial capacities. In still other cases, private sector and local entrepreneurial development has fostered commercialization. Usually both men and women have been participants, with men predominating, except where there has been extensive male out-migration or movement into off-farm wage labor. Once households become involved in commercial production, there is a tendency to continue and intensify, although women's participation may be tempered by health, age/life cycle event, marital status, and ability to commandeer family and hired labor.

Rather than the so-called women's income generation projects that are microlevel, communal, and unsustainable, women's entry into commercial

agriculture is often individual and sustainable (as it has been for men) and requires increased technical knowledge (Spring 1995). Participation produces lasting changes at the household level. These include women being able to (1) employ agricultural or domestic workers because of the change in scale; (2) provide better food and clothing, leading to increased food security and household well-being; (3) increase educational/training opportunities for themselves and their children; (4) have greater input into household decisionmaking and spending; and (5) have increased social status in the community.

These entries into the so-called male world of commercial agriculture and the commoditization of small-scale agriculture often has required women's resistance to male bias and normative gender ideologies; sometimes women's participation has changed gender ideologies altogether. Women's roles in commercial ventures may thrust their communities into increased agricultural intensification with concomitant changes in household food security and children's education, often without the trauma that abounded in cases where they were excluded.

Factors Affecting Women's Noncommercial and Commercial Production

Table 1.1 summarizes various factors that may be used to differentiate between women's involvement in subsistence/noncommercial agriculture and commercial agricultural endeavors, especially in the smallholder sector. These include (1) types of enterprises women are engaged in; (2) markets/trade, entrepreneurial activities, and business skills; (3) access to land; (4) access to technical knowledge and skills; (5) access to inputs (improved seed, agrochemicals, and farm machinery) and transport; (6) access to credit and capital; (7) cash and income received from commercial endeavors; (8) effects on household food security; (9) gender division of labor and control of labor; (10) participation in organizations, unions, and networks; (11) agricultural wage labor; (12) effects within the household and changes in household composition; and (13) gender ideology and economic systems. Each one is briefly discussed, after which the three major divisions of the book are presented, along with a summary of the chapters and how they relate to the themes.

Types of Enterprises

Data from a number of countries and regions show that subsistence households have fewer total livelihood enterprises (an enterprise is each separate