CHAPTER- III

WOMEN'S ROLE AT FARM (ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES)

Like all other Societies, the women of East Africa care for their families and are also engaged in economic activities. They have been constantly contributing to national economic development.¹ Probably more than some societies where economic burden is largely on men. These women are involved in production, processing (hoarding, marketing) preservation / storing.² They are expected to have their own sources of income and to assume part for the economic burden for the support of their household by providing for their own material needs as well as those of their children.

These women have always played an important and active role in food production (see figure: 1, p. 87), processing and marketing. They have the highest female participation rate in agriculture of all regions of the world. They do planting; weeding, harvesting and also carry the harvest home and store it.³ They have been engaged in this work since time immemorial i.e. Pre-colonial, colonial and even in independent era. Sometimes the society and government supported them. Often they were deprived of this assistance.

As there has not been a way out of this job, they just continued with it even if the resources were very limited and sometimes it was impossible to carry on with them.

Women are the primary producers of food in East Africa. They are responsible for over 80% of the food crops. But they reap only few of the benefits. Instraw News says-

"While toiling depleted soils with hand, hoe and plough, many women are chronically undernourished and anaemic. They are growers of the family’s subsistence food, but have little access and control over productive resources and services. Labour-saving technology, land, credit, training and agricultural inputs have been directed primarily to men." 

In view of the above we need to understand the position and role of women in East Africa in present day society but that cannot be done unless we study the process historically that is pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial states.

**PRE-COLONIAL**

In pre-colonial society women enjoyed high status and played a very effective and influential role owing to the communal ownership of land. Women were also the equal partners in the process and distribution of production.

Whenever men and women have been engaged in similar activities, women’s participation had given them equal access and control over their labour. When subsistence was the primary economic basis and distribution of resources was communally based that is, goods were distributed fairly equally. Thus women, who were engaged in agriculture or related activities, were active participants in the distribution of such goods. The above is substantiated by the data, which was collected through research

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conducted by Ester Boserup⁶ and Leith Mullings.⁷

REGARDING LAND RIGHTS

The study of Achola Pala suggests that in pre-colonial agricultural Economies (i.e. subsistence) women were usually well protected economically because their rights in land and cattle were well defined and they were actually more effective than individual ownership. These rights extended to other resources also such as fish, water, herbs, vegetables, fruits, fuel, clay etc. Since productive labour held precedence over formal ownership, the system guaranteed control over the product of the land and other resources to all those who were working.⁸

Ester Boserup supports Pala’s argument that each member of the community had the right to take land under cultivation. Women did farming so that they could make use of this right.⁹

Achola Pala points out the following characteristics of the traditional pre-colonial economy, which ensured women’s rights in production ¹⁰:

a) The emphasis on usufructuary rights to land, livestock and natural resources favoured the individual economic rights of women and men.

⁶ Ester Boserup, no. 2, pp.53-56.


⁹ Ester Boserup, no.2, p.57.

¹⁰ Acola O. Pala, no.8, pp.20-22.
b) Labour in productive work held precedence over absolute ownership. This ensured that as long as an individual worked to his/her capacity, would be guaranteed access to products of land and livestock.

c) The biological role of childbearing gave women the social responsibility of feeding and rearing children. This made women socially significant. Women commanded respect in the society.

d) The legal and moral obligations that governed the institution of marriage created marital stability.

Thus the land was communally owned and each member of the kinship group had access to land by virtue of membership to the group.\(^{11}\)

Historically land as a concrete entity was often perceived as belonging to the ancestor and was to be held in perpetuity. Kinship groups and individuals merely had use rights to land for as long as they lived. In many societies if land was not being cultivated by an individual or group or designated as fallow it could be reallocated to another holder. Once an individual died his or her control over a particular strip of land reverted to the ancestor, lineage group or family who had an obligation to transfer usufruct rights to a related individual or group according to prescribe rules that varied from one society to the next.

At the community level land was defined in terms of relations between kin, family members and neighbours. In the majority of cases a village or lineage head (chosen by his peers -either male or female or both depending upon the group for his knowledge of lineage history and land use patterns) was considered a trustee but not an

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owner of the group land.\textsuperscript{12} It was his responsibility in consultation with lineage elders to allocate land to heads of the families depending upon need and availability.

Among the matrilineal Luguru of eastern Tanzania, the \textit{Mwenyeissi} (head man) of a sub-clan controlled and allocated land. If he died one of the woman of the sub-clan appointed his sister’s son to control. He had authority over land but if he made unwise decisions the women had a right to remove him from office and appoint another \textit{Mwenyeissi}.\textsuperscript{13}

In those cases where a portion of land was held throughout a person’s lifetime, land rights were transferred to another person, or persons at the time of death. Usually though not always the transfer was to sons in the case of patrilineal inheritance or to a sister’s son in some cases of matrilineal inheritance.\textsuperscript{14} Among other matrilineal groups daughters inherited land from their mothers. Among bilaterally organised groups daughters and sons alike inherited land. Consequently, it depended on the degree to which females inherited land upon the way gender structuring was imposed through kinship ideology.

In Kenya during his or her lifetime a landholder could loan, lease, pledge or pawn a piece of land for temporary use.\textsuperscript{15} Land was pledged as a means of paying debts or as tributes. It could be pawned in exchange for cash or goods for a wedding, bride wealth or funeral. In some instances goods such as palm wine, yams or goats were exchanged for temporary use rights or part of the annual harvest might be given as tribute. However, in no sense the exchange of goods for land was viewed as a transfer of


permanent rights. Land was not alienated permanently without the consent of trustee
group be it a lineage, clan or community.\textsuperscript{16}

Men historically gained access to land largely as lineage members but in the
majority of cases women gained access to land as wives. In a few cases women inherited
land as lineage daughters. Among Gikuyu the practice of \textit{Gatheka} was prevalent which
symbolised some sort of private ownership rights. Under this system Gikuyu could own
the land or mortgage the land. The whole family including man and woman enjoyed this
right.\textsuperscript{17}

Among the Bukusu and Gikuyu (ethnic groups) land was perceived as
sacred, generative resources belonging to the ancestors. Historically, land provided
nourishment both spiritual and physical. Although land was perceived as belonging to the
ancestors, use rights for the Gikuyu and Bukusu were derived from patrilineages. Among
the Gikuyu land was held by the \textit{Mbari} or lineage and was administrated by a \textit{Muramati}
or guardian of the lineage land. He allotted portions to the male heads of the families
according to need and availability. Men who had a number of wives required more land
than those with only one or two wives. Male heads of the families were obligated to
provide each wife with sufficient land on which to raise food for herself, her family and
any visitor. Consequently women had guarantee rights to arable plots of land referred to
as \textit{Migunda}.\textsuperscript{18} Unmarried daughters were also given smaller plots to cultivate until they
got married.

Historically Gikuyu man who did not hold land through \textit{mbari} affiliation
were given land to use by \textit{mbari} members but it could not be inherited by their sons.
Referred as \textit{ahoi} (muhoi) such men are described in the literature as ‘tenants’ suggesting
an obligatory relationship between the landowner known as \textit{mwene} and the (muhoi) user
who cultivated the land. A further category of men, the \textit{ndungath} or voluntary servants,

\textsuperscript{16} Greet Kershaw, no.12, pp. 173-94.

\textsuperscript{17} Jean Davison, ed., no. 14, p.18.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.162.
stayed on the land of large landholders and eventually received heritable portions. In sum, pre-existing land tenure practices were based upon principles of obligation and responsibility which ensured that land held was cultivated within a certain time period and that all members of the society regardless gender or social status had access to land. Whenever men and women had engaged in similar activities women participation had given them equal access and control over their labour. When hunting and gathering were the primary means of subsistence the distribution of the resources was based on communal life and goods were distributed fairly equally. As women engaged in agriculture or related activities, they were still active participants in the distribution of such goods i.e. Land. This could be acquired by women through various methods as-

1) Birth

2) Marriage

3) Gift

According to Baumann, who conducted an extensive survey of the division of labour by sex in African culture, in such a system of subsistence agriculture men’s labour input on the farms consisted of clearing bush before the land was dug. It was confined to a short period whereas work done by women continued throughout the year. Baumann noted that women were in charge of growing the oldest root crops, kitchen vegetables and spices. They also tended to introduce new food crops. So, men were largely dependent on women producers of food. Among the Konde for example if a


20 Konde people originally occupied the northern part of Mozambique and Southern Tanzania but now live in different parts of Tanzania. Today they are better known as artists of the world. Famous Makonde Carvings, a dominant feature of their carving is the embodiment of folk religion. Achola O Pala, no.8, p.5.
man had no female relatives he could not grow essential vegetables (e.g., bear, peas or
maize) and had to forget to eat them.21

The entire responsibility of agricultural production rested mostly with
women who turned the soil, sowed, weeded and harvested. Men cleared land but that was
all. Their main task consisted of tending cattle. They also built storage bins and houses,
tanned hides and specialised in iron working or carpentry. Men worked with their sons,
herding and milking the animals while women worked with their daughters or son’s wife
(wives) in fields, women were also responsible for domestic works. During the busy
season women worked in the field from day break to late afternoon. Drying and storing
the food crops, brewing beer and weaving mats were additional tasks performed by
women.

Women as wives, mothers and daughters produced most of the food and
spent the greater part of the day on the farm. In this sphere of activity they enjoyed
considerable independence and had well defined rights. A woman was free to dispose off
crops from her fields as gifts to the friends and family without having to consult her
husband. However, a man in his turn had to consult his wife before he could make offers
or gifts from the family crops to his relatives or friends.

J. H. Driberg22 studied the Lango of Uganda who had revealed that men’s
work included herding, hunting. They stayed away from home for the greater part of the
day or for several consecutive days. Women’s work included hoeing, weeding, tending
vegetables and preparation of food. Men and women appeared equal in their daily work
and economic activities.

21 H. Baumann, “The Division of Work According to Sex in African Hoe Culture”, Africa

22 J. H. Driberg, “The Status of Women Among Niloties and Nilo- Mamities”, Africa
The works of Gunter Wagner\textsuperscript{23} on the Luyia and Peristiany\textsuperscript{24} on the Kipsigis are important in this context.

Wagner noted that economic co-operation among the members of family in the Kitosh and Maragoli communities of the Balyia was important. Different families kept cattle in substantial numbers. Cattle did not change the economy from subsistence to exchange because only few things could be acquired with cattle. Men and boys tended goat and cattle herds. Men were responsible for trading cattle and maintaining the home by way of thatching the roof and erecting poles. Women and girls were responsible for the bulk of agricultural work, especially hoeing.

Peristiany observed that among the Kipsigis the village community operated as a co-operative economic unit. According to their myths, when cattle were dying of thirst during a drought, the women found grains of elusive growing in elephant dung. Tasting and finding it to be sweet, they planted grain.

Beside land, cattle were also the symbol of capital. Those who had more cattle were considered as wealthy and those who had fewer cattle were placed at lower rank. Like land women also acquired cattle by- Birth, marriage and gift.

So not only land a woman was allocated cattle also when she came to live with her husband’s kin and acquired the status of a full wife. A house (yard) was built to contain all of her possessions, including her granaries and stores. This was the place where she cooked, ate with her children and slept. It was her private domain.\textsuperscript{25}

A wife’s allocation (of cattle) was made primarily on the basis of her children’s milk needs. A woman received her milk allocation in sheep, goats, a donkey and an ox. Another means by which cattle could be acquired by a woman was through the marriage of her daughter. She could also acquire cattle by this way, her father, brother,

\textsuperscript{23} Gunter Wagner, \textit{The Changing Family Among the Bantu Kavirondo} (London, 1939).

\textsuperscript{24} J. G. Peristiany, \textit{The Social Institutions of the Kipsigis} (London, 1939).

\textsuperscript{25} Achola O Pala, no.8, pp.15-16.
sister's husband or daughter's husband could also make her a gift of an animal. Clear cut rules governing decision of input in the family determined everything for example, when a mother died, the eldest unmarried daughter kept the herds in trust for her brothers as long as she remained in her mother's yard. A son's wife also received an allocation from the 'house' herds. Woman had the right to the skin and meat of a dead animal that had been part of her yard herds. She made clothing, bags, and covers from the skin. She presented meat as gift to her women friends and other neighbourhood wives.26

**IMPACT OF COLONIAL ECONOMY ON WOMEN**

But their position or place in society changed with the coming in contact of Europeans with the East African society. In the forthcoming discussion we proceed to examine, analyse and understand the exact changes that occurred during the colonial period in the whole society in general and women in particular.

The pre-colonial society of number of African countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda suffered under the cruel system of slave trade. During this period some of the established practices and customs were tremendously changed to unrecognisable situation. It was the period when men and women running away from the slavers were concerned with their life rather than rights to land and cattle. Change came when Europe replaced the system of slave trade by direct colonisation where labour could be procured forcibly and land could be grabbed by the colonisers without any compensation to the original owners. Cattle also came to be the target - the argument being that excessive cattle lead to soil erosion as they eat away the top grass. There have been instances where European colonisers forced the Africans to bring their cattle to butcheries. Colonialism brought significant changes in economic patterns of society.

During colonial domination African societies were forcibly integrated into the expanding global capitalist economy dominated by the European powers. To extract the mineral and commodity wealth of Africa and to ensure cheap labour supply, radical changes were imposed. The commercialisation of agriculture through the introduction of

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26 Ibid.
cash crops altered the customary gender division of labour in ways mostly disadvantageous to women. Men were forced into the wage economy to work in the mines, on the plantations or in town. Women remained in the rural areas, assuming the responsibility which their absent men folk could no longer perform. Technological skills were made available only to men. All in all, although both men and women were exploited within the colonial economy. Men gained some access to important resources such as money, skills, land and education not available to women.

As it was not always possible for the men to raise enough income to feed themselves and their families in the urban industrial work situations, they were also permanently withdrawn from the rural areas and were unable to contribute to agricultural and related economic activities. While rural women were left with deteriorating food and nutrition facilities, which they were able to manage earlier with the help of men folk. The majority of able-bodied labour left in the rural areas was women and they had to do most of the work. The result was deteriorating conditions of nutrition and health, which led to serious nutritional deficiencies in children and mothers.

Women were heavily burdened with more work. As the creation of reserves particularly in Kenya and Tanzania, restricted the Africans to certain unproductive (without water) patches of land. Some of these were so barren that they hardly had any vegetation and water. It fell on the women to bring water and fuel from where they could irrespective of the distances and dangers. In pre-colonial East Africa settlements were usually near the source of water. Now often a woman had to spend 1/3 of her time in procuring these basic necessities of her subsistence. What used to be a productive piece

27 The Colonial government tried hard to discourage female migration by enacting specific ordinances and prompting the native authorities (particularly after Indirect Rule was introduced in 1929) to forbid or restrict the movement of women. Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (Translated by Nicolas Romano), Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression (London, 1983), p.22.


29 Achola O Pala, no.8, p.24.
of land on which her hut was built at the time of her marriage was often almost unproductive. Her dependence on lesser number of cattle and unproductive land, distantly placed water and fuel bounded her to look after her family. There were also occasions when women were subjected to payment of poll tax and hut tax.\(^\text{30}\)

So, colonialism brought unprecedented, irrevocable changes during its period of existence.\(^\text{31}\)

To put it precisely we can say that in East Africa the critical period was the late 19\(^\text{th}\) century when European powers “scrambled” Africa to gain control of the African continent. Colonial administration was imposed, taxes were levied, wage labour and cash crops were introduced, and cash systems were established. Peoples whose economies had been subsistence based and relatively isolated, participated in national and world market economically. Leacock points out that in the wake of this transformation social relations of all kinds that had their roots in the process of production were also profoundly disturbed. Among these social relations were those between men and women.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^\text{30}\) All girls above puberty were subjected to these taxes. The European settlers had acquired fertile land leaving the unfertile land to the Africans. Land, the major means of production, became the central issue in all-political, social and economic conflicts of Kenya. Four thousand European farmers enjoyed the monopoly of 16700 square miles of the most fertile land in the Kenya Highland. The European occupied land was estimated to contain not less than 30 percent of all good land Kenya. Thus a little over one percent of the total population on Kenya owned 30 percent of the best-cultivated land. British land policy was directed to the maintenance of colonialism and the safeguarding of imperialist interests, including a constant supply of cheap African labour for plantations. Vijay Gupta, *Kenya’s Politics of (In) Dependence*, (New Delhi, 1981), p.26.

\(^\text{31}\) Leith Mullings, no.7, pp.239-64.

The colonialism seriously undermined the position of women. Scholars like Leacock, Rodney and Boserup have asserted that colonialism resulted in the deterioration of the status of women relative to that of men. The effects of colonial rule on women can be summarised in the following points—

1) In view of the development of dual economies under colonial rule, African women were confined to subsistence production, while men migrated to European farms to work as wage earners for paying taxes.

2) In the absence of men, women became overburdened.

3) A shift in the division of labour occurred and women began to do jobs formerly considered men’s job, but this did not mean liberation for them.

4) Although the subsistence economy remained necessary, women’s role in the household diminished in importance.

5) Earlier political power was fairly diffusive, divided as it was among priests, elders, and male and female heads representing the lineage grouping. But now her political role was undermined.

6) Titling of land to male owner left women landless, without credit and technological facilities. In other words women’s status was greatly affected by the

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36 E. Boserup, no.2, p.53.

37 Ibid., pp.53-56.

38 Kelly M. Askew, “Female Circles and Male Lines: Gender Dynamics Along the Swahili Coast”, Africa Today (Denver, 1999), Vol. 46, No.3/4, pp.81-85.
introduction of new property laws.  

By imposing new forms of labour organisations, colonial exploitation had profound effects on the traditional African families. The exploitation of women’s labour in the traditional family framework was increased because of the need to ensure an economic surplus, which subsequently entered mercantile circuits and weakened family structures. African women therefore had an active role to play in production helping to lessen the social responsibilities of capital through domestic craft and productive labour.  

The settlers used the idea of racial superiority to justify their position of economic and political dominance. For this purpose land was especially reserved for their settlement. By 1929, the demarcation of African areas (reserves where Africans were required to live) was concluded by the establishment of Native Reserves. This was a logical sequel to the 1915 Crowns Lands Ordinance, which in effect made Africans tenants-at-will of the British crown. The effect of the reservation policy was to restrict the internal migration by Africans, which was still in process where the area was annexed by Britain in 1895. Together with the 1915 enactment, it denied Africans the opportunity for expansion and access to some of the best agricultural land. 

Due to the creation of reserves, Africans were compelled to feel the pressure of population growth and shortage of land. The reserves that had forests within their boundaries had to go according to the regulations of not cutting forests. Clearing more land for settlement and agriculture was not permitted. The Africans were also not permitted to cross the reserves boundaries and move across so called tribal boundaries. While Africans were not permitted to cross their tribal boundaries and clear more land for cultivation the Europeans were permitted to expand these areas of plantation. 


41 R. M. A. Van Zwan-en-berg with Anne King point out that up to 1940 colonial government’s policies towards African producers were based on the following principles-
There was persistent discrimination against Africans who tried to grow cash crops i.e. coffee. All producers had to obtain a licence to plant cash crops and the government simply refused to grant licences to African growers under the pressure of political hegemony of European planters. In 1934 license were offered to a very small number of growers in the Meru and Kisii areas of Kenya. This had little effect, as Africans were afraid that the Europeans would alienate their land if they planted coffee.\(^{42}\)

There was also little opportunity for Africans to grow sisal, tea, wheat or sugar. In these cases expensive machinery was required for processing or growing, which could only be afforded by large companies. The only export crops to be grown of any quality by African producers were cotton and wattle bark (used in tanning leather). Both these offered low cash returns and Europeans did not find them worthwhile.\(^{43}\)

At this time European farmers welcomed the movement of Africans on their farms. These people were looking for land and European farmers were looking for cheap labour. Many white farmers although they had land but lacked capital and could not afford to pay wages to European workers permitted migrants to settle on their land in exchange for labour. The Africans were given the description of squatters which in practice meant little and law was passed to the effect that a resident labourer had to work a minimum of 180 days a year for an employer in exchange for a plot of land and

1. That there should be no opportunities for competition between African and European producers.

2. Efforts should be made to increase food crops as an anti-famine measure and that crops surpluses could be sold on the domestic markets.

3. Demonstration plots should be set up to teach African farmers how to grow new crops.


\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.
a small wage. Though these regulations were not very effective many white farmers did not offer any cash payment at all to such labourers. Instead they often charged rent from these people in the form of milk, manure or even animals.\textsuperscript{44} Land became a major issue for political groups and movements (working for national Independence) i.e. Mau-Mau movement in Kenya.\textsuperscript{45}

During late 1948s and 1950s there was intense struggle demanding land to landless. The struggle took the form of militancy involving use of arms. Under the pressure of growing discontentment the government of Kenya was forced to introduce changes in land tenure (ownership) system and from these decisions emerged East African Royal Commission\textsuperscript{46} and Swynnerton Plan.\textsuperscript{47}

In 1954 Royal Commission was appointed to examine the land issue which recommended:

1) All land barriers and the safeguards to sectional interests, i.e., the boundaries of tribal reserves and white Highlands should be removed.

2) Land throughout East Africa should be bought and sold in the normal way.

3) Private ownership of land should be encouraged.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p.42.

\textsuperscript{45} Mau Mau was for the return of land to the original owners that is the Africans.John Carlsen, \textit{Economic and Social Transformation in Rural Kenya}, (Uppsala, 1980), p. 27.


\textsuperscript{47} R. J. M. Swynnerton (Complied by), \textit{A Plan to intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya} (Nairobi, 1954).

Swynnerton Plan proposed major Land Tenure system with greatest impact. The Plan aimed at intensifying agriculture through promoting cash cropping, mixed farming through land reform, training and extension. It was thought that individual titles would provide farmers with incentives to improve farms and with collateral for loans. In a sole paragraph, the plan called for women instructors at Farmer Training Centers (FTCs) to secure women's cooperation in agricultural development.49

Land was consolidated and registered largely in men's favour. Officials neglected women farmer's need for incentives to improve productivity, security and obtain loans.

Thus the plan undermined women's relative economic stability in rural areas for three reasons –

1) It gave precedence to individual ownership invested in male heads of household and in turn marginalized the usufruct rights of women formerly guaranteed under lineage tenure.

2) Because land as collateral was required for credit and few women held in their own name, the plan created problems for women to gain credit for agriculture.

3) The plan encouraged cash crops production for the first time that further marginalized women involved in food production.

Bukuso scholar Ruth Nasimiyu contends that colonial administration failed to understand the significance of indigenous land tenure system. According to him, Swynnerton Plan undermined the position of women. He concludes-

"Since the production of cash and subsistence crops were directly linked to the access to land, women were confronted with a whole range of handicaps in fulfilling their role as producers. Lack of control over land and all that goes with it became a major cause of women's economic dependence.

49 R. J. M. Swynnerton (Compiled by), no. 47, p.53.
With out land, women were reduced to a state of dependency with no security and only provision of labour.\textsuperscript{50}

Both plan’s recommendations with various modifications were put into practice by 1960 and led the way toward settlement between the outgoing colonial authority and the leaders of the newly independent country (basically these policies have been followed even in the present time).

The result was that all land in East Africa could be legally defined as private property and could be bought and sold like a commodity by any member of the community. Naturally the rich male farmers got the benefit. Poor farmers as well as women were dispossessed but women suffered the most. The system of private property had a negative impact on society. A new system of rule of private property replaced the communal ownership rights of all members of the society.

Women were dispossessed in this manner, as it is evident that during colonialism land became a commodity that could be afforded by Europeans. But for the large masses of Africans in many areas land was in fact community owned and utilised; however, in a ritual or traditional sense it was vested in a chief or group of male elders. Through indirect rule colonialists often modified traditional offices to facilitate the acquisition of land, those supervisory rights sometimes could assume ownership in the sense of private property and sell the formerly unalienable land. Because women were not usually in the category of formal ownership they often fell into the lower strata as stratification based on land ownership developed.\textsuperscript{51}

Thus, women in addition to having to support themselves and their children when compulsory labour took the men away from home found themselves in such an


\textsuperscript{51} Leith Mullings, no.7, pp.247-48.
economic system where the products of their labour were inferior and they no longer had access to the resources of the society. 52

Thus Private ownership of land radically altered the nature of the means of production and thereby generated a redefinition of the rules of property ownership. When the land was partitioned, titles were distributed to individual adult males and it was assumed that land inheritance would follow the same rules as customary law provided for the inheritance of cattle. 53

This meant for women the sudden emergence of a situation in which they were denied access to land. Women perceive, though they rarely express it in words, that their traditional rights in land have been undermined, they have reacted against it in many ways with the currently popular argument that women should have inheritance rights under certain circumstances and with a clear sense that women have the right and duty to block the sale of land by their husband. 54

With the system of cash crops, production products traditionally grown for domestic use (rice, maize, cotton) were gradually replaced not only on small plantations but also on larger plots. Men then kept the earnings from the sale of cash crops. As a result women opposed the growing of cash crops, which meant the impoverishment of the basic traditional crops from which they obtained their personal income, since it was they who had to provide for the family food needs through agricultural labour.

Women held a passive position in the society, accepting the status imposed on them by a whole family system based on private ownership becoming producers without rights at the service of the husband proprietor or the father proprietor.

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
Under colonialism there was increased exploitation of women labour and therefore social discrimination. The penetration of the values of market oriented colonial society led to the use of women labour power in traditional sectors. Those sectors became essential to the development and ultimate survival of the new mixed system of production. Under this system women labour power was used for very precise tasks, especially in the subsistence economy.

WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT EAST AFRICA

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter that women continue to be deprived of the essentials of economic activity even after independence of their countries from colonialism and little efforts have been made by the government machinery to change the policies in favour of women, which had been laid down by colonialists. These efforts hardly had any practical impact. Men continue to be the benefited while women remain on the back seat. Their position remain low and they have been deprived to enjoy the fruits of freedom. At present, women in East Africa are involved in subsistence agriculture in order to meet the basic needs of the family. They usually do planting, weeding and harvesting of crops. They are expected to produce a surplus for sale to earn some extra income with which to purchase other basic necessities such as soap, salt, children’s clothing and medication. They cannot reduce the number of hours on household work.

In East Africa economic role of men and women is governed by traditions and customs. Some traditions and customs date back to Pre-colonial period while others have emerged during the last century. These cultural norms prescribe that certain expenditures must be made by males and others by females as a result of which women are expected to provide a disproportionate share of overall and daily family resources, i.e. mothers/wives are expected to supply staple foods while fathers/husbands are expected to


pay intermittent, visible expenses, such as state-mandated school fees. Fathers sometimes divert a large portion of their income to personal uses, such expenditure patterns unnecessarily intensify mother's share of economic responsibility for children. But this is only theoretical part, reality is somewhat different.

Given the fact that a mother's wage-earning work is as vital to family's survival as her equally demanding domestic work, it seems logical that families would facilitate the integration of mother's dual roles.

The effects of sexual division of labour on the household are also significant. Women's responsibility for the care and provision of food for the members of their household effectively remove men from liability in these matters. Migration of male as labour to mines and plantations becomes possible on a semi-permanent bases because women can by only slight extension of their traditional role, take over the task of family support in its entirety.

The system of male migration has developed in to movement of male labour to the towns to search for work in the growing non-agricultural sectors. The search is often in vain, often unemployment being so high, so that the families remaining in the rural areas cannot be sure of receiving cash remittances from their male members. This increases the burden on women who have to produce more for unemployed town dwellers.

E. Stamp noted that men, even if they remain in the homelands, have many places in which they can eat outside their homes, so they do not bother for their wives


58 Ibid., p.33.


60 Ibid. Also see Instraw News, Women and Development, No.6 (Spring, Summer, 1986), p.20.
and children. At the same time men's social activities, particularly the consumption of alcohol, become separated from lineage activities and family responsibilities. Regardless of the employment success of male migrants to the towns in East Africa, the consequences are a high proportion of de-facto female-headed households in the countryside. It has been estimated that in East Africa most of the rural households are female headed where women take the entire burden of running them in terms of economic and social responsibilities.

Thus women continue to be identified culturally with the production of food crops, while cash crop production is largely a men's affair.

It has been estimated that between sixty and eighty percent of the total agricultural work is done by women and that in some areas they produce as much as ninety percent of the food. This does not include strictly household maintenance work, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, nor fetching fuel and water, all of which are also predominately done by women. Women's total average workload is significantly higher than men's as a result. Not only this, pottery, mat making, basket making, making of sisal ropes are also undertaken in the homes.

Furthermore these women are deprived of resources of production. In order to grow or process food, women need a number of inputs, most basically land, other

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64 Susan P Jokes, no.59, p.66.

65 John Carlsen, no.45, p.112.
inputs are also required, especially credit, improved technology and training or extension services (see figure no.2, p. 88). These inputs help not only in carrying out the work smoothly but also efficiently. The inputs/essentials of economic policy need to be discussed in detail. We would also like to highlight their importance for improving women’s earnings along with their perception in East African society. These inputs play an important role in social relationship of the members of East African society as well as relationship between men and women.

1. LAND-

Whether inherited, allotted, purchased or seized, land is the most basic resource of agricultural production. Land provides not just the basis of production for the farm, small holding or vegetable strip but the source of water, fuel wood, food and materials used in non-food production such as clay for pots and dyes for cloth.66

Not only land in East African society is considered to be sacred and precious, it plays the role of structuring relations between people both living and dead. It structures relations between groups within a society and between people and the supernatural world. As soil, it is used as a material resource in symbolic rituals to express a society’s attitude toward sex and gender. Land is both sacred and profane.

Some categories of land are viewed as more sacred than others. Forests and some types of trees are viewed as living entities. A species of fig known as Mugumo is a sacred shrine to the Gikuyu (Kenya). Hence, the sacredness of land extends to certain products growing from it. Apart from it earth and its people are linked in numerous ways for e.g. among the Gikuyu earth symbolises women, blood and man. Formerly the symbolic interdependence of earth and blood, woman and man is ritualised in a ceremony preparatory to marriage referred to as guthinjiro. A Gikuyu elder performs the ritual that

links a woman’s family with a man’s by mixing soil brought from the bride’s home with blood from a goat belonging to the man’s family.\textsuperscript{67}

Soil is also linked symbolically with fertility i.e. Bukusu boys in western Kenya are smeared with mud at the time of initiation to ensure their future fertility as adult males.\textsuperscript{68}

As stated earlier, land is the most essential of the resources of production but unfortunately today a large number of East African women find themselves without sufficient land to feed their families or still worse without land at all.

\textbf{Many factors from colonisation to current land reform} – i.e. cash cropping, mechanisation, population growth and land erosion have brought about profound changes in land use and land management. The ultimate result of all these causes had led to the deprivation of women from the ownership of this resource. Land policies have remained the same as first formulated by Swynnerton Plan. Technical inputs and agricultural extension services have continued to favour male rather than female producers. The result is that women’s economic status has moved from one of relative self-sufficiency (which they enjoyed in pre-colonial society) to one of relative dependency. Women continue to be confined to subsistence food production; men exercise an increasingly dominant role in the management of property (including agricultural inputs) control of land and the distribution of goods and services. As a result women have failed to gain socio-economic advantage in the independent era.

Elisabeth Croll reaches at similar conclusion for the women of Tanzania. She concludes that women here form the bulk of farmers but they have very little control
over the allocation of resources and products of their labour.\textsuperscript{69}

A research report on Uganda says that in Uganda women constitute nearly 75\% of the agricultural labour force and account for over 80\% of the food production. They are responsible for 60\% harvesting, 90\% preparation and processing. However, women's contribution to the production process is not matched by their access and control over the productive resources such as land, capital and technology. Although over 90\% of rural women have access to land, only 8\% have leaseholds, 7\% actually own land, and only 30\% have access to and control over proceeds.\textsuperscript{70}

2. CREDIT-

The availability of credit is essential for improving productivity, enhancing income and also at times for making up seasonal shortfalls. Short-term credit may be for seeds and fertilisers, longer-term credit for tools and animals and perhaps to set up small-scale enterprise, such as poultry farm. An analysis of credit scheme found that women receive less than 10\% of the credit directed to small holders and just 1\% of the total credit directed to agriculture.\textsuperscript{71}

3. TRANSPORT AND MARKETING FACILITY-

Neither land nor credit can ensure that you are able to sell what you produce, let alone get a fair price for it. East African women's access to the markets is obstructed by

\textsuperscript{69} Elisabeth J Croll, "Rural Production and Reproduction: Socialist Development Experiences", in E. Leacock and Helen I Safa, ed., Women's Work (South Hadley, 1986), p.239.


\textsuperscript{71} Susan Bullock, no.66, p.47.
the operations of agents and middleman, lack of information, management skills and contacts.

4. SMALL RETURN OF FEMALE CONTROLLED RESOURCES-

Women control any cash gained by the sale of produce from their vegetables, gardens but since there are few outlets for vegetables, the income is small. Women also keep chickens mainly for domestic consumption and they can sell eggs and chicken when they need extra cash. But the local market for poultry and eggs is even more limited than the market for vegetables and since other markets are difficult to reach and hardly worth the return of the amount of profit that can be made. Chickens and eggs are not at all a good source of income for women. The incomes that can be derived from male controlled resources (maize, milk and tea) are far greater than those from female controlled resources (vegetables, chickens, sale of a part of the household milk, brewing). 72

5. EXTENSION SERVICES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE –

Women also lack access to inputs that can improve their yields and relieve some of their burden. The assistance provided by agricultural extension services, foreign aid and even NGOs is available only to men because men are often seen as farmers and household heads and women as the partner and helpers.

6. Allocation of land to the men has far more serious long-term consequences on male and female assets and sources of income than the mere grant of formal title would

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72 Regina Smith Oboler, no.53, pp. 229-30.

7. While cultural factors designate economic activities of women as the choice of jobs. Furthermore, denial of training in modern methods leads to low productivity and wastage of both produce and labour power. It should also be noted that adoption of modern technology on a commercial scale has contributed to the displacement of many women from the agricultural sector.

8. When a new industry is introduced to which people are not accustomed, e.g., fisheries in certain areas of Kenya, their training has not included methods of persecution, marketing and consumption of the produces, explaining the difference that it could make to the family’s life, e.g. nutritional value of fish for children and mother.

9. Market trends in East African region discourage women’s role as traders and market women. As discussed, it is because of the lack of easy and cheap transport to market centres, non-availability of credit, lack of access to the techniques of preservation, packaging, and pricing and sales promotion hinder the opportunities of rural women.

10. Sometimes due to lack of their own farms women work on other’s fields. They face low wages, seasonal fluctuation of earnings, migration, chronic indebtedness, malnutrition, and vulnerability of exploitation and ill treatment by employers. Their basic needs are-

A) Protection of minimum wage, discrimination against women being the general rule.

B) More rewarding alternative and supplementary earning opportunities to increase their bargaining power.

Trenchard also has the view that the women’s mother role in providing food for her family has been retained but her previously adequate access to the means of
production on the land has been reduced. Cash cropping does not support subsistence but competes with it for land, labour and resources.\textsuperscript{74}

Some scholars argue that the separateness of women's agricultural activities from men's give East African women some autonomy in economic terms.\textsuperscript{75} Though it is fact that women sell food superfluous to their own needs and have much control over the income generated in this way. But female autonomy does not extend to full control of their own activities by any means, let alone to economic equality. Men retain decision-making power over agricultural resource allocation and output even while absent. Furthermore owning to the patriarchal nature of the society women's role as producer does not get acknowledgement.\textsuperscript{76}

The most unfortunate thing about these women is that their work or contribution is not counted. They cultivate, weed, harvest, process and store food crops, along with household chores, yet the long hard hours that rural women work are statistically invisible. They are considered as 'economically inactive home makers' who only produce food for home consumption or they are too young or too old to be recorded - this is a familiar concept.

Their work being carried out in the home tends to be undervalued and classified as 'subsidiary activities' or even dismissed as having no value at all. In most cases if the same work performed outside the home would be recognised and compensated at much higher rates.

UN reports also indicate the same trend that inspite of their significant contribution to African economy their activities are not reflected in the national economies both in terms of production and distribution. Women's agricultural labour is

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.153.

\textsuperscript{75} Susan P Jokes, no.59, p.66.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
over looked because of their domestic work.\textsuperscript{77}

Policy makers and development planners do not place them in their programmes, thus depriving them of the benefits generated by development policies. Their subsistence work has been labelled as “domestic” and therefore to be dismissed as trivial.\textsuperscript{78}

Susan quotes Ruth Dixon who rightly argues-

“The reluctance to ‘see’ women farmers comes not from their invisibility, but from a reluctance to share scare resources with them -including women in labour statistics in proportion to the amount of work they actually do is an essential first step in making female farmers visible to planners and policy makers.”\textsuperscript{79}

To sum up, in the pre-colonial society women enjoyed economic security owning to the communal ownership of the resources of production. But with the introduction of new economic and political forms, agriculture was increasingly commercialised. Land, credit and training were oriented primarily to men rather to women. Unfortunately, this trend continued even after independence. Men are considered to be breadwinner and women are relegated to the domestic rather than productive sphere. Naturally agricultural services are initially and predominantly delivered to men, a result of administrative structures comprised of men who implement policies with strong gender-specific patterns.

\textsuperscript{79} Susan Bullock, no.66, p.49.
THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

- Food production and availability in society
  - Percentage by women
    - Food production: 70
    - Animal husbandry: 50
    - Marketing: 60
  - Production for home use
    - Importance of women's income
      - Domestic food storage: 50
      - Post harvest processing: 100
      - Cooking: 100
      - Water supply: 90
      - Fuel supply: 80
  - For breastfed infants and just weaned children mother's (or other caretakers) time is important to ensure adequate intakes.
    - High energy expenditure as a potential stress for women's:
      - Low birth weights
      - Impaired lactation

POLICY ISSUES ARISING FROM WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

Food production and availability in society

Food availability within the household

Utilization of food by the family

Utilization of food by the individual

Nutrition/health status of individual

Low productivity, lack of access to credit, neglect by extension services, consumer orientated prices, lack of research into traditional crops etc.

Limited access to cash (income generating schemes)

Appropriate technology for storage and processing, improved water supply, conservation schemes (for wood) and alternative fuels.

Any time-saving innovations potentially increase women's time for childcare and leisure.

Any energy-saving mechanization potentially reduces 'requirements'.