“Now it is an Easy Life”: Women's Accounts of Cassava, Millets, and Labor in South India

Abstract: Although coarse grains are considered underused and abandoned crops in much of India, they have gained increasing attention as having the potential to improve food security and positively affect small farmers' incomes. These trends offer the opportunity to examine the specific ways that contemporary declines in coarse grains are understood at the local level; in particular, it is necessary to consider how women in specific locales and at specific times view agricultural transitions in terms of their impacts on everyday time demands. I examine the decline of millet varieties, in favor of cassava cultivation, in the Kolli Hills, Tamil Nadu, through the lens of the experiences and workloads of women. A close examination of attitudes toward millets, in terms of field labor and household work, provides insights into the possibilities for local-level coarse grain projects.

Tags:
coarse grains, India, labor, women

Notes:
This journal article discusses the state of agriculture in rural India. In many areas, coarse grains (such as millet) have lost popularity due to their difficult and time-consuming processing requirements. These drawbacks to millet processing have allowed space for other grains (such as rice) to increase in popularity throughout rural India. However, women have acknowledged their preference for the taste of millet, and the author calls for small-scale mechanical processors that would allow women to choose their grains of preference and enjoy reduced labor loads. Although this source is specific to millet in India and we have been focusing our attentions on the processing of millet in sub-Saharan Africa, the conclusions drawn from its ethnographic data support our mission of designing a small-scale millet thresher. This article highlights the importance of our project and points toward its applicability and (hopefully) acceptance amongst women in rural sub-Saharan Africa.

Attachments

- Snapshot

Analyses of the Value-Chain of Priority Staple Crops for Research and Development Interventions in West and Central Africa

Type  Report
Author  Ernest Assah Asiedu
Date  April 2008
Institution  West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development
Staple Crops Programme
Date Added  Mon Jun 2 12:37:16 2014
Modified  Mon Jun 2 12:38:49 2014

Notes:
This report analyses the roles of multiple actors in staple crop markets (millet being one of these staples) in Africa, including producer groups and association, processing and marketing entrepreneurs, agri-inputs organizers, NGOs, agricultural extension services, and agricultural research systems/networks. The report estimates that the millet sector will generate $1.6 billion within the 10-year period from 2008-2018 to contribute (along with sorghum) to 5.8% of agricultural sector growth (2). The report argues that producers are constrained, however, by inadequate access to credit, insufficient access to seeds and planting materials, insufficient access to the output market, limited availability of technology and machinery, and weak producer capacity (10-15). The authors suggest the importance of appropriate technology and capacity building in solving these issues. Although this paper makes little mention of millet, it is important in highlighting the many issues that rural producers may face in addition to those that our project is trying to address. It is important to keep these other struggles, such as access to credit or poor infrastructure, in mind as we continue and to be aware of the ways in which the distribution and implementation of our thresher may aggravate or address the other issues that producers face.

Attachments

- SCP_MAIN_REPORT.pdf

Bridging the Gender Gap: A Stronger Role for Women in Senegal’s Fisheries

- Type Web Page
- Short Title Bridging the Gender Gap
- Date Added Mon Jun 2 12:55:53 2014

Notes:
This article discusses topics of gender, development and the formation of a woman’s cooperative in Senegal’s fisheries. Although women struggled to attain land and permits and experienced discrimination by local authorities, lobbying a key partnerships were successful in connecting women to the resources that they needed. Interestingly, communication and capacity-building was achieved through song, which is important in the daily work of women in Senegal.

Although this article is not specifically about millet, it does address important issues of gender and women’s organizing that are central to our project. Working with women’s cooperatives seems to be a plausible way for distributing our thresher, especially if women are the main actors involved in the processing of millet, as they are with fish. It is clear from this article that these organizations may still face discrimination and that innovative approaches, such as knowledge-sharing through song, are important to project success.

Attachments

- Snapshot

Cereal Supplies in Rural Families of the Senegalese Groundnut Basin. Who is Responsible for Meeting Family Needs?

Type Document
Author Sakho-Jimbira
Author Ma'am Suwadu
Author Michel Benoit-Cattin
Publisher French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development
Date 2008
Date Added Mon Jun 2 13:02:11 2014
Modified Mon Jun 2 13:07:29 2014

Notes:
This article discusses social relations and roles around traditional production-consumption in Senegal. The authors provide an overview of recent agricultural policy and evolution (4-5). The authors surveyed two villages and provide a wealth of data on production and lifeways, including family composition, farm size, income and cereal consumption (9). In surveyed villages, millet was grown for subsistence and groundnuts for commercial markets, and the Borom njël (or village chief) was found responsible for maintaining food security (based on ensuring cereal supply) for the family (1, 6). The Borom njël’s ability to provide security was found to be correlated with physical assets, wage labor employment, agricultural income and—increasingly—migrants’ remittances (13-15).

This article provides another useful case study of subsistence production and social relations/roles in rural sub-Saharan Africa. This is one of the first articles found to mention the role of men in maintaining food security, and this is an interesting dynamic (female domestic laborers and male decision-makers/responsibility holders) to explore further and keep in mind as we continue developing our design and field testing methodologies.

Attachments

- WP_4_2008.pdf

Cristina Kessler's My Great-Grandmother's Gourd on Season's Griot 2013

WHQR Reading by Joyce Grear

Type: Video Recording
Contributor: Frank Welfens
URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWFkTs2KeyE&feature=youtube_gdata_player
Date: 2013-12-31
Library Catalog: YouTube
Running Time: 1051 seconds
Abstract: A Season's Griot 2013. It was mid-October, but the two storytellers were planning for Kwanzaa in late December. Wilmington storyteller Joyce Grear and Madafo Lloyd Wilson, longtime storyteller and host of "A Season's Griot," were dickering over which story she should read this year. They sat in the wide, barren conference room between radio studios at WHQR Public Radio where "A Season's Griot" has been produced for more than two decades as the only nationally syndicated Kwanzaa radio show in the country. One was a Japanese tale; the other was a version of an Aesop's fable about the baobab tree. The baobab tree won. "Ahh, this is great," Wilson said after finishing his reading,
tapping the book with his finger. "This is the story." "How did you come to that," Grear asked. "The tree, the image of the tree, the little girl helping the elder," he said. "This is what the show's about." This year's one-hour storytelling show honoring the African-American holiday Kwanzaa features the theme of fatherhood and airs on WHQR 91.3 FM at noon Thursday (Dec. 26) on the first day of Kwanzaa and will re-air at 7 p.m. Dec. 29 on WHQR. Kwanzaa is celebrated from Thursday (Dec. 26)- Jan. 1. - See more at: http://wilmingtonfavs.com/2013/12/26/kwanzaa-public-radio-program-u-s-continues-tradition-20-years/#sthash.PgRky8vW.dpuf

Notes:

“My Great-Grandmother’s Gourd” is the story of the introduction of new technology (a water pump) in a rural African village. It beautifully and simply illustrates the interaction between new technology and tradition.

I have included it here as food for thought in our process.

Enabling Women to Participate in African Smallholder Irrigation Development and Design

Type Book Section
Author Felicity Chancellor
Place Oxford
Publisher Berg
Pages 155-172
Date 2005
Book Title Gender, Water and Development

Notes:
In this chapter from *Gender, Water and Development*, scholar of agricultural economics Felicity Chancellor discusses the importance of women’s roles in crop production in Africa and the necessity to consider these women’s roles in plans for development, particularly irrigation schemes. Different constraints include large workload of women, poor/gendered access to land ownership, and poor awareness of women’s struggles. Chancellor argues that a more conscientious approach to irrigation development that prioritizes women’s labor and needs could help reset some of these inequalities. Such an approach would include giving women access to decision-making and community participation in development.

Although Chancellor’s article is specific to irrigation development, it includes many lessons for working with women and rural development in Africa. In highlighting the ways in which rural development is often taken control of by men and ignores the needs of women, this article supports the goals of our project to ease the work loads of women in rural areas. However, the execution of this goal will require conscientious distribution of the thresher, likely by ensuring control of/access to the thresher by women in the community.

**Attachments**

- H021517.pdf

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**Gendered Fields: Rural Women, Agriculture, And Environment**

- **Type**: Book
- **Author**: Carolyn E. Sachs
- **Place**: Boulder
- **Publisher**: Westview Press
- **ISBN**: 9780813325200
- **Date**: March 15, 1996
- **Library Catalog**: Amazon.com
- **Language**: English
- **Abstract**: Applying a feminist and environmentalist approach to her investigation of how the changing global economy affects rural women, Carolyn Sachs focuses on land ownership and use, cropping systems, and women’s work with animals in highly industrialized as well as developing countries. Viewing rural women’s daily lives in a variety of circumstances, Sachs analyzes the rich multiplicity of their experiences in terms of their gender, class, and race. Drawing on historical and contemporary research, rural women’s writings, and in-depth interviews, she shows how environmental degradation results from economic and development practices that disadvantage rural women. In addition, she explores the strategies women use for resistance and
survival in the face of these trends. Offering a range of examples from different countries, Gendered Fields will appeal to readers interested in commonalities and differences in women’s knowledge of and interactions with the natural environment.

Short Title  Gendered Fields  
# of Pages  224  
Date Added  Mon Jun 2 13:00:51 2014  
Modified  Mon Jun 2 13:00:51 2014  

Notes:

These excerpts from Gendered Fields give an introduction to feminist theory in anthropology, specifically around the topic of women in agriculture. In chapter 1 (“Situating Rural Women in Theory and Practice”), Carolyn Sachs, professor of rural sociology at Pennsylvania State University, discusses the difficulty of writing about rural women—including definitions of rural, women’s relationships to the environment, patriarchal structures, the affects of global restructuring, and strategies of rural women to shape their lives. In chapter 2 (“Feminist Theory and Rural Women”), Sachs discusses the intentions and principles of feminist theory and the ways that these relate to writing about rural women’s lives and knowledges (see especially “Colonizing Third World Women” pg. 22-23 and “Women’s Resistance” pg. 25-28). An excerpt from chapter 3 (“Colonial and Postcolonial Land Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa” pg. 52-54) gives a brief overview of issues surrounding land policy, access, and gender in sub-Saharan Africa. Chapter 7 (“Women on Family Farms: A Reappraisal”) places women within a unit of a family farm and discusses gender roles in production systems (see especially “Family or Peasant Farming in Developing Regions” pg. 126-128).

This book provides an important reference for writing ethnographically about rural women in many contexts. As feminist theory is based on principles of equality and representation—necessary goals of our project—it is an important theory to keep in mind while reading ethnographies about women and their labor in sub-Saharan Africa. This text also offers a useful framework for doing ethnographic research in our field testing and is an important read for anyone participating in fieldwork.

Attachments

- Amazon.com Link

Healthy Harvest: Enhancing Educational and Economic Opportunities for Women Agriculturalists in Namibia

Type  Document  
Author  Pennsylvania State University College of Agricultural Sciences  
Publisher  Pennsylvania State University
This presentation discusses the formation of women’s cooperatives in Namibia by giving an economic overview in regard to cooperatives, reporting on a survey of possible members, and giving a case study of the Eyambulepo Lyomahangu Cooperative. There were many key players who gave expertise, particularly the University of Namibia Small Business Development Center. Challenges to establishment of the cooperative were described as “forces of nature,” bureaucratic, and operational.

This case study offers an important overview of the potential for women’s coops in Namibia. Such a model may be helpful in distributing our thresher, and it is important to see how a cooperative may best be of help and the challenges that it faces if we are to avoid the same pitfalls. This project also includes potential partners with whom we may work.

Attachments

- Namibia%20report.pdf

Overcoming variability and productivity constraints in Sahelian agriculture.

Type: Journal Article
Author: M. Mortimore
URL: http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Output/53485/Default.aspx
Date: 2001
Library Catalog: r4d.dfid.gov.uk
Abstract: Research for Development Overcoming variability and productivity constraints in Sahelian agriculture.
Date Added: Mon Jun 2 12:56:41 2014
Modified: Mon Jun 2 12:56:41 2014

Tags:

agriculture, constraints, drylands, environment

Notes:
This chapter in *Politics, Property, and Production in the West African Sahel: Understanding Natural Resources Management* by British geographer Michael Mortimore discusses constraints to agriculture in the West-African Sahel. Mortimore finds that agriculture is largely limited by uneven rainfall, poor soils, inconsistent labor/labor shortages, and lack of capital; and that management of these constraints determines food security for a family. This management includes decisions of capital investment, as there is limited capital to go around and tradeoffs must be weighed carefully (241-42). Mortimore concludes by arguing that external interventions to revolutionize inefficient indigenous systems often fail and that communities have developed innovative ways to address these constraints internally or with the use of some external aid (250). As our thresher project seeks to address a constraint in West African production systems (regarding efficiency, labor, and access to capital), it is important to be aware of the multiple constraints that farmers may face and the ways in which our thresher will interact with these. It is also necessary to ensure that our thresher does not become a tool to “revolutionise ‘backward’ or ‘inefficient’ indigenous systems” and that it instead works with creative community solutions to sustainably address issues of gender dynamics and production (250).

**Attachments**

- Snapshot

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**Senegal Finds the Cooperative Way to More Food**

- **Type**: Newspaper Article
- **Author**: Souleymane Faye
- **Place**: Dakar
- **Publication**: Inter Press Service News Agency
- **Date**: October 18 2012
- **Date Added**: Mon Jun 2 12:48:32 2014
- **Modified**: Mon Jun 2 12:49:37 2014

**Notes:**
This article describes the work of the Agricultural Value Chains Support Project (PAFA) with two farmers’ collectives in Dya, Senegal. The project offers financing and technical training to farmer collectives involved in the production of millet, sesame, sorghum, black-eyed beans, vegetables and poultry. Members of the collectives include “women, young heads of households, people with disabilities [and] small producers unable to guarantee their own food security.” After obtaining access to fertilizer, one community has produced a large surplus of millet and plans to sell it to a distributor. The article argues that these cooperatives have given farmers access to self-sufficiency in food by increasing yields, which it frames as the largest issue that farmers face. This article is important in considering the distribution and ownership of our thresher. The author argues that farmers’ collectives are helpful in addressing the issues of the most disenfranchised rural actors, including women. However, the article also frames low yields as the most significant issue that farmers face, and this raises an important question regarding threshing and efficiency: are we expecting farmers to thresh surplus grain for storage or sale? If so, perhaps the distribution of our product must go hand-in-hand with other agricultural development programs to increase yield (although ideally not through the use of artificial inputs, like expensive/subsidized fertilizers).

Attachments

- Smallholder Mapping and the Syngenta Foundation

Type  Presentation
Presenter  Yuan Zhou
Presenter  Cristianne Close
Presenter  Marco Ferroni
Meeting Name  The Syngenta Foundation
Date Added  Mon Jun 2 13:11:53 2014
Modified  Mon Jun 2 13:13:02 2014

Notes:
This report highlights the mission of the Syngenta Foundation to better understand the characteristics of smallholder farmers and details the status of their understanding of these individuals, including reports of income, land in production, trends in production, and the threats that these farmers face.

This information is important in helping us better understand our potential user and in understanding how our thresher may fit into their current lifeways. The report reveals that these individuals do not utilize much technology or have access to “know-how.” However, the report does not discuss why this may, and this is therefore a question for further research.

Attachments

- SFSA_Smallholder_Mapping.pdf

Smallholder Market Participation: Concepts and Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa

- **Type**: Journal Article
- **Author**: Christopher B Barrett
- **Volume**: 33.4
- **Pages**: 299-317
- **Publication**: Food Policy
- **Date**: 2008
- **Date Added**: Mon Jun 2 12:41:09 2014
- **Modified**: Mon Jun 2 12:42:05 2014

Notes:
This article, like the study by Baba and Maina, discusses the market behavior of small scale farmers, although this article is specific to farmers in eastern and southern Africa and does not specifically reference millet. Barrett details the characteristics of households involved in markets (often wealthier households) and discusses the impacts of food aid and policy, which are largely ineffective. Barrett argues that more equal market integration will ease poverty, though his understanding of poverty reduction is narrow and draws from neo-liberal economic theory. In the section on “markets and technologies,” the author finds that a household’s market participation is often correlated with its adoption of technology. This implies that communities likely to adopt technologies such as our thresher may be more involved in formal or informal markets and may involved in activities other than subsistence. Our thresher would fall under what Barrett considers “productive assets,” which he argues would help small scale farmers achieve entry into the market. These ideas are important to keep in mind—how our thresher will fit into market participation and the many positive, negative, or in-between effects that this will have on communities.

Attachments

- Smallholder%20market%20participation.pdf

The Good Wife: Struggles over Resources in the Kenyan Horticultural Sector

Type Journal Article
Author C. Dolan
URL http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220380412331321961
Volume 37
Issue 3
Pages 39-70
Publication Journal of Development Studies
ISSN 0022-0388
Date 2001
DOI 10.1080/00220380412331321961
Library Catalog Taylor and Francis+NEJM
Abstract This paper examines how the contracting of French beans has engendered conflict over rights, obligations and resources in Meru District, Kenya. In response to pressure for agricultural diversification and the expanding European market for "gourmet" vegetables, horticulture, the historical domain of women, has been rapidly intensified, commoditized and in many cases, appropriated by men. Women have responded to the erosion of their rights in
ways that appear paradoxical – some undergoing Christian conversion while others poison their husbands – practices that simultaneously affirm and contest the prevailing norms of the "good wife". In Meru, gender relations are key to the negotiation of household resources and the potential for capital accumulation in the export horticultural sector.

**Short Title** The Good Wife

**Date Added** Mon Jun 2 12:46:38 2014

**Modified** Mon Jun 2 12:47:07 2014

**Notes:**

This ethnography addresses issues of agriculture, gender roles, increased activity in commodity markets, and inequality in the French bean industry in Kenya. Dolan, professor of anthropology at Saïd Business School, describes the division of labor in commodity markets and the response of women to this unequal access and incomes—some of whom respond by converting to Christianity and others who respond by poisoning their husbands.

Although this text does not address millet specifically, it is important to keep in mind issues related to commodity markets in sub-Saharan Africa, as millet has been targeted for commodity market development by many international agencies. Even if millet remains a subsistence crop, relations to horticultural commodity markets are likely an important part of the lives of our users and may become more so if women choose to pursue market-based activities with time saved through mechanical threshing. Our thresher, if controlled by women, has the potential to positively affect the market participation and access of women, thereby addressing issues of gender rights, equality, and resource control.

**Attachments**

- Snapshot

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**Women and Millet Processing in Nyamadzawo Village**

**Type** Web Page

**Author** Stanford Mahati

**URL** [http://www.academia.edu/3598902/Women_and_Millet_Processing_in_Nyamadzawo_Village](http://www.academia.edu/3598902/Women_and_Millet_Processing_in_Nyamadzawo_Village)

**Accessed** Mon Jun 2 12:54:34 2014

**Abstract** Women and Millet Processing in Nyamadzawo Village

**Date Added** Mon Jun 2 12:54:34 2014

**Modified** Mon Jun 2 12:54:34 2014

**Tags:**
This article discusses the presence of technology in a rural village in Zimbabwe and the reluctance by some women to adapt this technology over traditional methods. The authors argue for the strengthening of more traditional rural livelihoods, which have traditionally been attacked and dismantled by development plans.

In discussing millet processing in Nyamadzawo Village, the authors describe methods of traditional processing, where millet is threshed by pounding and is followed by dehulling and grinding (4-5). Where modern threshers have been developed, they are out of reach due to distance and cost (4). Much of the discomfort and rejection was in regard to mechanical dehullers, which were perceived to produce a product of lower quality and be too expensive. In this, cost, accessibility, and central location seem to be key—all issues that our thresher hopes to address. Furthermore, as our thresher does not include mechanization of milling, issues of flour quality do not pertain. However, it is necessary still to determine what is considered to be quality threshed millet.

The article also mentions the use of organized labor groups, or ‘nhimbe’ (8-9). Although it does not discuss how this organization and labor exchange is expressed in threshing, the ways in which threshing work may be shared by multiple individuals at a time is important to keep in mind as creating an easily scaled design.

Attachments

- Snapshot

"You just look at our work and see if you have any freedom on earth": Ghanaian women's accounts of their work and their health

- Type: Journal Article
- Author: J Y Avotri
- Author: V Walters
- Volume: 48
- Issue: 9
- Pages: 1123-1133
- Publication: Social science & medicine (1982)
- ISSN: 0277-9536
Research on women's health in the developing world has focussed on reproductive issues and has defined women primarily as wives and mothers. Moreover, women's health problems have typically been defined by experts such as health care professionals and policymakers. The research reported here aimed to capture women's own views of their main health problems and how they explain them. The study was conducted in the Volta region of Ghana, West Africa and it involved interviews with 75 women of varying background and social circumstances. Reproductive health problems did not figure prominently among the problems women described almost three quarters of them spoke at length of psycho-social health problems such as 'thinking too much' and 'worrying too much'. These, in turn, were often linked with problems such as tiredness and not being able to sleep. Headaches and bodily aches and pains were also mentioned by many of the women. In explaining the source of these problems, one of the strongest themes in women's accounts was the importance of their work roles. Women spoke of the gender division of labor, their heavy workloads, the 'compulsory' nature of their work, their financial insecurity and the considerable financial responsibility they assumed for their children. These contributed to the worry they experienced and led them into many different work activities. They also talked about specific links between the nature of their work and the health problems they experienced, in particular, the physical toll of their work. We suggest that it is important to document the content of women's work, both paid and unpaid, showing the ways in which it influences their physical and mental health. Women in developing countries have too long been defined as childbearers and their important roles as workers have too often been neglected.

Short Title  "You just look at our work and see if you have any freedom on earth"
Date Added  Mon Jun 2 12:39:25 2014
Modified  Mon Jun 2 12:39:25 2014

Tags:  
Adult, Female, Gender Identity, Ghana, Humans, Middle Aged, Stress, Psychological, Women's Health, Workload

Notes:  

This ethnography paints an economic portrait of women in a particular region of Ghana by describing in detail their daily work schedules (as reported directly by the women interviewed) and how these heavy workloads affect their health. Women reported struggles in terms of their psycho-social health (tiredness, thinking, sleeps) as well as related physical symptoms (headaches and body aches, fevers). These health issues were described as being directly linked to gendered labor and control over resources, heavy workloads, the compulsory nature of work, and the assumption of financial burdens and insecurity.

This resource is incredibly useful in providing a glimpse of a woman’s daily life, activities, and associated struggles in a part of sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly to Finnis’ article “Now It Is an Easy Life…”, Avotri and Walters’ ethnography serves to justify and legitimize our project as one that may be worthwhile and important to women in the developing world. This source is unique in its use and inclusion of first-hand interviews that we may now interpret based on our work. The interviews included in the article would suggest that a small-scale millet thresher would allow women to provide preferred and nutritious food for their families while relieving them of some of the time-consuming and physically demanding work that causes their health to suffer.

Attachments

- PubMed entry