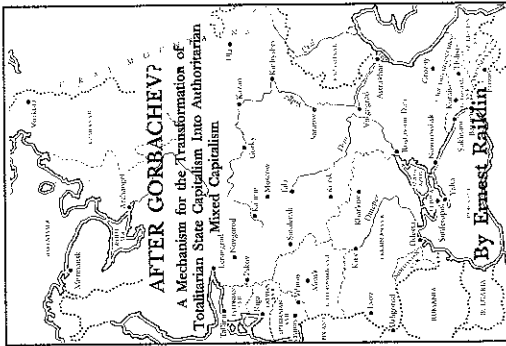


After Gorbachev? A Mechanism for the Transformation of Totalitarian State Capitalism into Authoritarian Mixed Capitalism

by Ernest Raiklin
University of Northern Iowa



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Expanding Women's Role in Rural Development: The Case of West African Sahel

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In the Third world, vast amounts of resources have been devoted during the post-World II decades to the promotion of rural development. These resources have been disbursed through various outlets - host governments, multinational agencies, private volunteer organizations, foreign governments, and international banks. The beneficiaries are even more diverse. While there have been a few success stories in aggregate terms, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as scattered small scale accomplishments in many developing nations, the overwhelming majority of the rural Third World population has experienced relatively little improvement in living conditions. And for some groups - women in particular - traditional rights to land and other resources, often disregarded in the design and implementation of rural development projects, have been lost or severely compromised (see, for example, Jacobson, Rocheleau, and others, listed with References at the end of this article).

In the countries of the West African Sahel (which includes nations such as Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Niger, and Burkina Faso), the wave of promise that was ushered in with independence from colonial powers in the late 1950s and early 1960s never crested. There has been little change in per capita incomes, or in income-wealth distribution (Todaro, 1961; World Bank, 1984). Further, asset ownership is often concentrated in urban-industrial centers, and agency sectoralism, official mismanagement and corruption have too often become institutionalized (Baker, 1976, p. 246; Baker, 1984, pp. 59-60). Urban migration increased demand for natural resources, exacerbating environmental degradation as indicated through

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desertification – a combination of overcultivation, overgrazing, deforestation and erosion (Grainger, 114). Coupled with drought, this human-fueled process has marginalized vast land areas and the farmers and herders who use them.

Addressing these growing concerns will eventually require mobilization of the rural population. The role which women can play must be expanded such that it reflects more closely their substantial contributions to rural production. In much of rural Africa women are involved in all phases of agricultural production, and do most of the processing and all of the cooking of harvested produce (Lele, 202). Yet because much of their production is for household consumption, its importance is rarely reflected in official records, and is consequently understated (Fortmann and Rocheleau, 253; Hill, 141). This "statistical invisibility" leads planners to underestimate women's role in rural development for both agricultural and forest-related production. Women are major users of forest products – the collection of fuelwood is their most visible resource activity (Kizerbo, 5), although they use many other secondary products also (Miller, 1). Women are the principal gatherers of wild foods and fodder (Fortmann and Rocheleau, 255). In Mali the kernels from the fruit of the shea nut tree are processed into a butter, sold in local markets, resold and exported as far away as Northern Europe and Japan (Irvine, 587).

However, most of women's production is destined for household use, and as such often goes unnoticed by project planners. Even market activity suffers from the same invisibility, as few rural women have the time or resources to venture beyond weekly markets in the non-agricultural season (Lele, 203; Sawyer-Turritin, 1-2).

Whether or not women's participation is solicited in the development planning process, at a minimum their substantial efforts merit consideration in project design. Moreover, if development policies are seriously to address problems such as declining food production, women's input must be sought and their participation expanded to reflect their real involvement and contributions. The effects of policies which favor urban development at the expense of overall economic vitality and environmental sustainability will be felt throughout the society. For example, expanding economic opportunities for women may significantly increase the opportunity costs of having large families, thereby helping to curtail fertility rates.

Land is central to much of women's productive activity, and their ability to participate in rural markets is also often related to land (Grigsby, 43-47). Thus, our purpose in this paper is to explore and evaluate the obstacles and opportunities relevant to rural Sahelian women's participation in rural development. This dual task will be pursued from three

perspectives: (1) women's land-use and tenure; (2) women's labor and possibilities of organizational and technological improvements; and (3) women's access to investment capital.

Women's Land Use and Tenure

Many aspects of land tenure in the Sahel reflect communal relationships (Fortmann et al., xiii). While governments claim *de jure* ownership of most lands, customary rights are widely recognized. Bush fallow is the dominant land use for sedentary farming communities over much of the region (Ohler, 15). Ownership of land and its allocation among many ethnic groups rests with extended patrilineal clans (Government of Mali/USAID, D-83-84; Grigsby, 43). A woman is often allocated lands by her husband's family, and such lands are usually in some phase of fallow recovery (Luery, 17). She rarely has secure access to a particular parcel of land – a situation which tends to favor annual crop production over longer-term improvements such as tree planting. Small parcel size is also a factor limiting the range of possible production alternatives (Gladwin and McMillan, 357). The fallow cycle plays a central role in women's forest use as well as in their farming opportunities. In many areas of Mali it is a sustainable fallow period which assures the adequate production of fuelwood (which women cut and gather) and the regeneration of the shea nut tree, whose seeds are valued as a source of vegetable oil, and as such represent a marketable commodity of national interest (Irvine, 587; Marchand, 15).

As population pressure and introduction of basic innovations such as plow agriculture or permanent cropping techniques reduce or eliminate land in fallow, women whose access to land is most tenuous may be the first to suffer (Lewis, 90; Rocheleau, 261). Some studies reveal that even if women's access to land diminishes, and their share of its productive dividends declines, their labor contributions to household farming may remain constant or even increase (Gladwin and McMillan, 359). Thus, the options available to women for pursuing other productive activities – such as small-scale market ventures – may also evaporate.

There are several obstacles, however, which tend to prevent women from increasing their land-based production. A key element is the frequent lack of secure, long-term access to a given parcel of land. Parcel size and proximity to other inputs (e.g., sources of irrigation) can also limit production possibilities. As long as a measure of uncertainty attaches to their land and resource (e.g., tree products, forage) tenure – i.e., access to the land and resources it can generate, the two not necessarily being identical – there is little incentive for women to venture beyond annual vegetable or cereal crop cultivation.

Short of altering existing ownership and tenure patterns, women do have usufruct rights which represent niches of opportunity that are not always apparent to, or effectively exploited by, development donor agencies. These can vary from one area to another, sometimes even within the same village; but these niches of opportunity are not always effectively exploited. Where women have access to adequate-sized parcels, agroforestry innovations may increase land's productivity and fertility.³ For instance, many women report the right to plant trees on their land as long as they continue to farm it. Interplanting nitrogen-fixing trees might increase a field's productivity and lengthen the cropping rotation, while providing products such as fuel and fodder. A larger plot of land will improve the likelihood of increasing productivity by expanding the range of tree-associated interventions. Physical improvements such as tree planting may strengthen women's security of access and rights, creating a self-reinforcing incentive for longer-term land uses.

Perhaps governments could grant women (or other essentially landless peasants), in groups or as individuals, secure rights to deforested, unimproved land on which they agree to plant trees and/or take other productivity-increasing measures. Rights to land and a need for fuelwood may provide strong incentives. Such improvements would have impacts beyond the immediate rural environment. Productive land-based opportunities may soften the negative effects of urban migration on women who find themselves heading up households. It may also help shore up rural fuelwood supplies in the face of increasing urban demand.

Group land tenure may offer immediate possibilities for women. One can witness collective fields farmed by women's groups throughout Senegal and Mali. Group tenure can be particularly important among ethnic groups such as the Bambara, where women have extensive obligations to communal millet cultivation. By pooling their labor, they can farm a large area with a relatively minimum investment of labor. They are also less likely to lose their land to a male field owner — who can ask his wife to exchange fields with him but may be reluctant to challenge a united group of married women in the community.

Women's Labor: Organization and Technology

It is often assumed that because women's labor is largely devoted to domestic chores, little time is left over for contributions to developmental activities. Yet the literature is replete with examples to the contrary

³Agroforestry is the spatial and/or temporal combination of trees, crops and [potentially] livestock on land in a manner which uses growing space more efficiently and diversifies output.

(Fortmann and Rocheleau, 253-55; Jacobson, 36; and Lele, 208-09). This is despite the laborious nature of most of women's tasks, including domestic, market-related, and resource-based activities, and despite the fact that a village wife spends most of her fertile years alternating between pregnancies and nursing children.

For many women in polygynous societies of Sahelian Africa, the addition of a second wife to a rural household may be welcomed from an economic standpoint. While the resources to acquire a second wife (i.e., bridewealth paid and other gifts to the bride and her family) are diverted from direct household benefit, in fact there is often much separation of income by gender in rural Sahelian households. This offers women a degree of financial independence, leaving them free to fulfill their many household financial obligations (children's needs, cooking needs, etc.). A husband furnishes the grain used for household meal preparation (which his wives may have helped to cultivate), but his disposable income is more likely to be spent on personal consumer items than food or other essentials (Sawyer-Turritin, 8-9). The addition of a second or third wife may reduce co-wives' cooking, food-processing, fuel collecting and other domestic chores, thereby increasing the potential for women to allocate their time to income-generating enterprises.

There are examples from Mali and elsewhere indicating women organizing themselves into informal groups in order to perform some of the more difficult of their labor-intensive tasks (Grigsby, 26-29). Such informal groups, often referred to as reciprocal labor exchange groups or rotating labor associations (RoLAs), serve both social and economic functions. They provide women with informal outlets for congregation and conversation. They take advantage of economies of scale as well. As a rural woman might put it, a group of ten could do more work in one day than one could do in ten days (Grigsby, 29). Tasks such as weeding, which by hand must be done quickly during a critical time-period, are often effectively managed by RoLAs. Other labor-intensive tasks to which RoLAs are commonly employed include fuelwood collection, and the sometimes arduous processing of fruits or nuts, such as the aforementioned shea nut.

While these labor-intensive tasks (as well as such time-consuming domestic chores as child care, water and fuel provision, washing clothes, cooking, etc.) are somewhat facilitated through the RoLA mechanism of organization, they still take up a large share of women's labor supply, casting uncertainty over the degree of substitutability of women's domestic labor for other activities, whether agriculture or forest-related, market or even leisurely pursuits.

This lack of substitutability may be a primary factor limiting women's

participation in rural development, but several socio-cultural factors are at work as well. In fact, differences in communal farming obligations between ethnic groups may help explain differences in access to land. For instance, Bambara women in Mali have extensive communal farming responsibilities and thus little time to devote to individual parcels. On the other hand, Malinke women, with fewer communal obligations, report more secure land access and greater control over production decisions (Grigsby, 44). Planners must be sensitive to the level of social organization at which interventions may have the best chance for adoption. Malinke women might be more inclined to invest in farming as individuals, whereas a lending program targeting individuals might not appeal to Bambara women, who may be largely limited to collective farming.

If domestic and reproductive roles were preventing women from taking advantage of gainful ventures outside the home, smaller families could make such ventures become more accessible because the opportunity cost of having children would be higher if women had more opportunity to earn outside the home. However, fertility statistics at this time do not reveal such tendencies in the Sahel (United Nations, 92, 123, 151, 174; World Bank, 164-65), nor are such possibilities necessarily rational, given broader cultural values and the lack of a social safety net otherwise provided by larger families.

However, short of taking a value-weighted approach as to how women should allocate their time, one can suggest the adoption of low energy labor-saving technologies which will reduce the drudgery of women's daily routines. In the Sahel, several such technologies already exist which could improve women's labor substitutability. Grain mills, nut presses and grinders, plows and animal traction, offer considerable promise. These innovations presently could only be adopted collectively by women with access to credit, allowing them to share the relatively substantial costs of repayment and maintenance. This collective approach would also depend on women's capacity to develop acceptable system of distributing benefits (West, 47).

Yet sharing a community donkey cart for collection of fuelwood, or transport of goods to market, by women within a village-wide group or some lesser subgroup may have many traditional precedents (e.g., RoLAs), suggesting women's willingness to organize around labor-intensive tasks. Labor-saving technology may also expand the opportunities available to older women. The arrival of a co-wife, daughter-in-law, or the help of a daughter may give an older wife more time to pursue non-domestic activities. Yet she may be less physically able than in her youth to exploit such opportunities, especially where they involve labor-intensive work. Low-energy technologies offer to ease both the physical constraints faced by

older women and the time constraints of younger women. Building new activities around established and enduring social structures (such as reciprocal labor exchange groups, or age-graded groups) may increase chances for adoption and lead to greater economic efficiency of resources, especially labor.

Women's Access to Financial Capital

Rural women's access to capital is generally recognized as low in the Third World and the Sahelian women are no exception (Lele, 212; Lycette, 1-5). Even where agricultural inputs such as seed, fertilizer, herbicide (often made available on credit), as well as extension information, have been made more accessible to farmers, such resources have often been associated with the promotion of commercial crop farming, which has remained almost exclusively the domain of the male population (Gladwin and MacMillan, 349-50). Cash crop farming has historically led to expanded production, further reducing the availability of land to women and hence undermining their ability and motivation to make capital investments in land-based production. Since many extension programs are established to cater to more capital-intensive commercial farming needs, and because more extension agents are males who may be culturally constrained from working with women, extension work is often biased in favor of its male beneficiaries (McCorkle, 15). Further, women's general lack of mobility deprives them of information sources which could potentially expand their production and market options.

With regard to investment capital, formal lending agencies - mostly banks located in large urban centers - have tended to be particularly unresponsive to women's credit needs. Lenders encounter relatively higher unit-costs with small-scale borrowers, a category which encompasses rural women. Further, otherwise creditworthy women may be severely limited by factors such as expense of travelling to borrowing sources, a general lack of mobility, high illiteracy rates, etc. Yet without access to steady and reliable credit sources, borrowers are less able to take advantage of bulk discounts in purchasing goods. Women in this situation often must limit their inventories as well as sales on credit (Lycette, 5). In the face of such obstacles, Sahelian female marketgoers have often organized around scarce capital, forming informal rotating savings and credit associations (RoSCAs). Each member of a RoSCAs periodically contribute funds to be allotted on a rotating basis. This makes possible larger consumptive purchases or investments than individuals could afford independently (Miracle, Miracle and Cohen, 709; Sawyer-Turrittin, 6). RoSCAs operate much as the RoLAs, with cash or goods serving as the currency of exchange rather than labor.

dation (Helmore, 12-13; Otero, 16). Similar innovations include mobile and branch banking (Miracle, Miracle and Cohen, 717-19), and easing of government policies favoring artificially low interest rates, allowing rates to reflect the scarcity-value of financial capital, would reduce the need to ration cheap but scarce credit. This may open doors for willing and credit-worthy small-scale borrowers (Gray and Hickock, 71-73).

Local management of basic educational programs may be self-reinforcing on the part of women. Revenue generated from productive group endeavors (e.g., collective farming) could finance activities believed useful by the communities themselves, such as functional literacy and numeracy, or health-related educational efforts. Such initiatives may allow village women to manage their own practical education and adapt it to local realities. Vocational opportunities for extension agents and supportive institutions may be inexpensive relative to their potentials for empowering women. However, with empowerment come increased obligation and responsibility, and both the risks and consequences of participation in a market economy must be conveyed to rural women if they are to make informed choices in their best interests.

Finally, technical studies aimed at the development of appropriate capital-saving technologies, supported through government incentive programs, should be actively encouraged. Such technologies should specifically focus on the needs of small-scale farmers in general, but more specifically on the labor-intensive activities common to women's daily routines (e.g., millet grinding, nut processing, water drawing, fuelwood gathering, etc.).

Conclusion

The constraints on productive activities which tend to limit women's participation in rural development relate to the use of land and labor resources. While formal financing offers the potential of substituting physical capital for labor, however, the fact that women generally have limited access to land and related resources diminishes the possibilities for any labor-saving investment tied to land-based production.

Where a productive factor (e.g., capital, land, or labor) limits the efficiency of women's work, they have tended to organize to overcome the constraint. This is evidenced in women's collective agricultural fields, their reciprocal labor exchange groups, and the rotating savings and credit associations. The accommodation of new activities, such as a community woodlot, or a grain mill, or a village-wide women's credit union, may be greatly facilitated where they incorporate these traditional organizational themes.

The obstacles to expanding women's role in rural development are

Where non-governmental agencies and lending institutions are making investment capital more accessible to women, the latter themselves often lack the human capital necessary to fully avail themselves of the opportunity. However, the development of human capital, through simple literacy and numeracy programs as well as increased opportunities for women in technical, educational and extension fields, is often a low priority on the part of government planners. Further, even where financial capital is available to women, a lack of familiarity with the pros and cons of various investment opportunities, including their profitability, may preclude participation. Another factor discouraging land improvement is limited duration of women's access to a given piece of land within the prevailing use patterns. In addition, women may also have a smaller scale of need, often dictated by their domestic labor obligations, which may prevent them from taking advantage of economies of scale.

There is frequently a separation of incomes among a husband and his wife (or wives) in rural Sahelian households (Hill, 79; Sawyer-Turritin, 12). Women often face numerous financial obligations, such as providing the condiments for household meals (the men normally provide the grain), buying clothes for themselves and their children, seeing to medical needs, and purchasing household utensils (for themselves and as part of their daughters' bridewealth) and replacing them. Such obligations may necessitate that a woman seek a source of income independent from her husband. Expanding the range of possible income-generating opportunities would therefore seem to be a forward step towards expanding women's participation in a cash economy, increasing opportunity for agricultural production, reforestation, and a host of other activities.

It is clear that access to capital, given viable investment opportunities, should enlarge women's role in rural development. Their inclination to organize around labor suggests that possibilities exist in production, management, and perhaps marketing, which could be effectively exploited. Where individual women face productive limitations, there may be strength in numbers. Linking up with a formal market economy will demand new skills of many women and functional literacy and numeracy lie at the heart of such a transition to self-empowerment. Strengthening existing social structures, rather than imposing untested, often locally irrelevant concepts, offers promise to real community empowerment independent of a "project approach" to rural development (Romm, 230).

If banks value the potential of women as savers and investors, they must devise new ways to accommodate them. Formal group lending may incorporate traditions both of local sanctions and risk-sharing to encourage repayment (World Bank, 116). Village banks such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh can enhance access and minimize bureaucratic inti-

many. It is the planner's challenge to increase opportunity, and women's own activities suggest possible strategies for meeting this challenge. The crises facing the Sahel and its people must be met by Sahelians themselves, and there is no justification for considering women as a mere appendage to development and modernization in the Third World generally and West African Sahel particularly.

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