

Men's Crops and Women's Crops: The Importance of Gender to the Understanding of Agricultural and Development Outcomes in Ghana's Central Region

EDWARD R. CARR *

University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA

Summary. — The study of gender and development is an area of inquiry fraught with tension between “theoretical” and “practical” concerns. This article seeks to intervene in the standoff between these concerns by examining the mismatch between the conclusions one can draw about gendered patterns of agriculture in Ghana if one adopts either a “mainstream” or a feminist post-structuralist approach to gender. By illustrating the ways in which mainstream approaches to gender and development conceal important variability in the vulnerabilities experienced by those often lumped into the categories of “woman” and “man,” this examination shows how contemporary writing on gender and development might inform “practical” development efforts in a manner that results in measurably improved project outcomes.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Key words — gender, agriculture, vulnerability, Ghana

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of development contains an uneasy tension often characterized as a division between “theoretical” and “practical” concerns. Practitioners have long grumbled about the seeming irrelevance of theoretical and conceptual literatures to the everyday practice of development, while conceptual writers often complain about the apparent thick-headedness of the practitioners who seem destined to repeat the errors of the past. One important area in which this tension plays out is gender and development, where a number of writers (e.g., Ferguson, 1994; Geisler, 1993; Jackson, 1993a, 1993b, 1998; Peters, 1995) argue that the common use of gender in the development literature not only fails to move development toward its most liberatory goals, but also reinforces, at least in some cases, the very systems of oppression that a focus on gender in development was meant to address. Though such critiques seem to cut to the heart of the development project, to judge by the sizeable majority of work on gender and development that

has been undertaken in the wake of these writings, these authors have had little impact on the overall use of gender in either development studies or development practice.

This article seeks to further the goals of this critical literature by illustrating how these often-theoretical critiques might provide a conceptual basis for “practical” development efforts that result in measurably improved project outcomes. To do so, this article examines a

* I would like to thank the people of Dominase and Ponkrum, Nana Kwamena Ansah IV, the Paramount Chief of the Eguafio Traditional Area, and Francis Quayson, my field assistant, for all of their help in conducting this research. The story is theirs, and I am privileged to tell it. I would also like to thank Monica Fisher, Marcia Castro and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments, and Therese Gleason Carr for her copyediting efforts. The research represented in this article was funded through a grant from the Walker Institute for International and Area Studies at the University of South Carolina. Final revision accepted: May 4, 2007.

specific area of inquiry, gendered crops. Generally speaking, the work on gendered crops (such studies include Arndt & Tarp, 2000; Cloud, 1986; Doss, 2002; Ezumah & Di Domenico, 1995; Gladwin, 1992; Sachs, 1996; Shiva, 1988), like other work on gender in the mainstream development literature, ignores the concerns of contemporary conceptual writing on gender and development in important ways. Studies of gendered crops usually treat the category of "woman" as singular, and by implication suggest that the experience of, for example, all women in a particular country or agroecological zone is the same. If gender categories are indeed place-specific, this assumption is untenable. Therefore, by ignoring current arguments that gender categories take place-specific forms, this literature risks overgeneralizing gender categories and getting the scale of analysis wrong.

The issues of theory raised by the example of gendered crops are not a mere quibble with a particular approach to gender, for by failing to consider the contemporary literature on gender and development in favor of mainstream assumptions, this mainstream literature risks analyses that are little more than exercises in identifying patterns that have no meaningful connection to gender and only a tenuous connection to vulnerability for much of the population under investigation. Gendered vulnerabilities are not the simple outcome of a social categorization, but are created and recreated through social practices that operate at scales as small as the household. The aggregation of these experiences into the general categories "woman" or "man", can erase very real and practical differences between those contained within these categories as well as across them.

To illustrate the claims above, I will employ a feminist post-structural approach to gender in an analysis of data I have gathered on gender and agriculture in Ghana's Central Region. This approach brings forth the lived experiences of women masked by the sorts of gender and development research of which the literature on gendered crops is representative. The highly variable agricultural practices and vulnerabilities of women in the context of two villages in the Central Region illustrate that, in this case, research conducted under mainstream gender approaches in development capture the experience of only a fraction of the population. Further, these mainstream approaches to gender conflate two disparate

groups of women, and in so doing further obscure the particular vulnerabilities of an even larger percentage of the population in the research context.

2. GENDERED CROPS AND DEVELOPMENT

The role of gender in agriculture production has been an important focus of the "women in development" literature since the 1970s (e.g., Barrientos, Kritzinger, Opondo, & Smith, 2005; Barry & Yoder, 2002; Bassett, 2002; Bhuyan & Tripathy, 1988; Boserup, 1970; Bryceson, 1995; Carney, 1996; Carr, 2005a; Chikwendu & Arokoyo, 1997; Creevey, 1986; Dixon, 1982; Egharevba & Iweze, 2004; Feldman & Welsh, 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Gairola & Todaria, 1997; Goebel, 2002; Goheen, 1988; Grier, 1992; Harrison, 2001; Harriss-White, 1998; Jackson, 1993a, 1998; Jha, 2004; Leach & Fairhead, 1995; Mama, 2005; Mbata & Amadi, 1993; Moser, 1993; Peters, 1995; Riley & Krogman, 1993; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wangari, 1996). This literature has presented compelling evidence for the argument that we cannot simply lump agricultural producers together, regardless of gender, and hope to model their behaviors, land uses and crop choices in such a way as to gain meaningful information. After more than three decades of research, it is clear that men and women play different roles within particular systems of agricultural production, and occupy different socioeconomic positions as a result of these different roles. Of particular concern is the fact that, by virtue of often farming different crops or farming the same crops for different reasons, men and women experience different vulnerabilities to such things as climate change and shifts in global markets for the crops under production, shifts that can filter down through households and other social units to impact the long-term well-being of affected communities and individuals.

To highlight the different labor, incomes, and vulnerabilities of men and women who rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, many authors have focused on the idea of gendered (i.e., men's *vs.* women's) crops (such studies include Arndt & Tarp, 2000; Cloud, 1986; Ezumah & Di Domenico, 1995; Gladwin, 1992; Sachs, 1996; Shiva, 1988). The hope of many studying

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/991073>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/991073>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)