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The Scramble in Africa: Reorienting Rural Livelihoods

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Summary. — Structural adjustment and market liberalization policies of the past 15 years have accelerated deagrarianization in sub-Saharan Africa. Peasant producers have veered away from production of traditional export crops and commercial staple foods in rural areas remote from roads and urban markets. Nonagricultural income diversification has been substituted in the search for much-needed cash earnings. Citing recent village survey evidence, this paper argues that the economic restructuring of African smallholders' work lives has been accompanied by deep-rooted social change. Divisions of labor and decision-making power within peasant households have altered and wealth differentiation between households has deepened. Depeasantization of the countryside is currently taking place, as rural household members of both genders "scramble" for viable livelihoods. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The "scramble for Africa" in the late 19th century involved Europe's major powers of the day annexing large tracts of the African continent (Pakenham, 1991). The colonial economies that followed represented a fundamental reordering of land and labor usage, shaping the agricultural peasant, settler farms, plantations and mining sectors for which the continent is identified with to the present. In development theory, the African continent has long been associated with agrarian modes of livelihood and an underlying assumption that its abundance of land and relative shortage of labor, especially skilled labor, provides it with a comparative advantage in agricultural production (Boserup, 1990).

Recently, however, the World Bank (2000) has subjected this assumption to revision, labeling Africa's agriculture as backward and unproductive. [1] This view appears in the wake of two decades of World Bank-instigated structural adjustment policies pointedly aimed at stimulating smallholder agriculture, reducing urban bias and getting the prices right. IFAD (2001) has taken issue with what is perceived as international financial agencies' complacency about rural poverty. Donor positions aside, African rural smallholders have responded to prevailing circumstances by edging away from traditional export crop production over the past two decades. Amidst high levels of material uncertainty and risk, African rural populations have engaged in widespread occupational experimentation. A century after the scramble for Africa, a "scramble *in* Africa" has been unleashed with profound ramifications for the continent.

Three recently published books have discussed this new era from different angles. The World Bank's (2000) *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?* is a curious combination of new policy imperatives, including heavy emphasis on poverty alleviation and African government's scope for setting policy agendas, while the axiom of economic liberalization and well-rehearsed analyses of past African governments' corruption and economic reform implementation failures are retained. The significance of widespread rural income diversification away from agricultural pursuits is largely ignored. Mkandiriwe and Soludo (1999) *Our Continent, Our Future*

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calls the World Bank position into question, providing a penetrating examination of structural adjustment's negative impact on Africa's industrial and agricultural sectors, but stopping short of analyzing the implications of income diversification on these same sectors. Ellis's (2000) *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*, by contrast, places income diversification centerstage, with a cogent exposition of the many facets of economic decision-making involved in households' efforts to diversify their income sources. Ellis demonstrates why expensive large-scale surveys generating masses of income and expenditure data nonetheless have failed to record, let alone generate, an understanding of the groundswell of livelihood diversification now taking place. All three publications represent new lines of thinking which are strikingly different in terms of their premises and research orientations, yet they are similar in overlooking: first, the role of structural adjustment policies in catalyzing income diversification; second, the extent of smallholder commercial agricultural sector collapse; and third, the *social* implications of economic diversification on intra-household labor patterns.

A growing body of literature has examined the economic impact of structural adjustment and market liberalization on African peasant agriculture (e.g., Barrett, 1998; Bigsten & Kayizzi-Mugerula, 1995; Ponte, 1998, 2002; Sarris & Shams, 1991). My concern in this paper extends to a consideration of these policies' effects on African peasantries *per se*. Certainly, the importance of the noneconomic sphere has not been lost on policy-makers. International financial institutions (IFIs) and donors have turned their program efforts to "democratization" and "good governance," and the institutional dynamics of an "enabling environment." Most recently, they have directed enquiry into "social capital" networks. Nonetheless, there has been a reluctance to consider how neoliberal policies impact on African rural social structures. The tendency has been to see African social institutions, especially those associated with rural peasant societies, as constraints on the implementation of economic policies inferring that vested interests and traditional conservatism cannot rise to the market challenge. This paper argues the opposite: African peasant societies have been extremely responsive to neoliberalism with far-reaching and as yet unclear implications for the social and economic fabric of African countries.

Reviewing the qualitative and quantitative findings from village studies undertaken by multidisciplinary teams of African researchers during 1996–98 in different parts of the continent under the auspices of the Deagrarianization and Rural Employment (DARE) research program, [2] this paper provides a broad comparative overview of trends and changing patterns in a variety of smallholder rural settlements. Section 2 presents a schematic consideration of agricultural trends as a prelude to Section 3's more detailed examination of recent rural livelihood patterns. Section 4 considers some of the structural changes taking place in African peasantries' social institutions. The final section argues that the uncertainty and wasted energy embedded in trial-and-error, income-earning efforts could be alleviated with a more directional policy approach taking account of rural producers' pressing current aims and long-term occupational futures.

2. THE CONTEXT: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA'S DECLINING AGRARIAN FORTUNES

Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa, the six countries covered in the DARE research program, represent a striking range of variation in population size, levels of urbanization, and agriculture's contribution to the national economy. Nonetheless, all are undergoing "deagrarianization" and, more specifically, "depeasantization."

Deagrarianization is defined as a long-term process of occupational adjustment, income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly agricultural-based modes of livelihood (Bryceson, 1996). This is a global process prompted by the industrial revolution of the early 19th century that accelerated in the 20th century but has been characterized by enormous geographical unevenness. Less than half of the world's population now lives in rural areas, and most are peasants. Somewhat paradoxically, deagrarianization in Europe and North America was accompanied by peasant formation in many parts of the nonindustrialized world colonized by the early industrial nation-states.

The European colonial intrusion in sub-Saharan Africa engendered processes of peasantization that facilitated colonial governments' agricultural commodity export aims. African

peasantries have varied in social composition and economic structures, but they have four main characteristics in common, as identified by Shanin (1976). First, they share the pursuit of an agricultural livelihood combining subsistence and commodity production. Second, their internal social organization revolves around the family as the primary unit of production, consumption, reproduction, socialization, welfare and risk-spreading. Third, they are externally subordinated to state authorities and regional or international markets that involve class differentiation and transfers of tax and profit. Fourth, they reside in rural settlements, be they widely dispersed or nuclear villages, and they are often identified with a traditional conformist attitudinal outlook relative to more urbanized populations.

Spurred by colonial taxation, African agrarian producers increasingly produced agricultural commodities in conjunction with their subsistence production, or alternatively exported male labor on the basis of circular migration. Following WW II, as African nationalism and the Third World gained ascendancy, African countries were identified as primarily agrarian countries with large peasantries that were developing toward a more modernized, industrial production base. In this context, African post-colonial governments and the international donor community pursued policies aimed at extending, capitalizing and modernizing peasant production to raise peasant productivity and living standards as a foundation for their industrialization efforts (Bryceson & Bank, 2001; Bryceson *et al.*, 2000).

After a century of colonial and post-colonial peasant formation, depeasantization has now begun, representing a specific form of de-agrarianization in which peasantries lose their economic capacity and social coherence, and shrink in demographic size relative to non-peasant populations.

While government policies were vital for fostering peasant commodity production, they are now instrumental in their undermining. By altering a peasantry's access to essential means of production, be it land, labor or capital, peasant producers' conditions of existence can be detrimentally affected. Certain policy amalgams could be termed "turning-point" policies because they chip away at peasantries' economic viability, social coherence and class position. Naturally, such turning-point policies, be they intentional or unintentional in their destructive impact on peasants, do not eliminate peasantries with a single blow. Far from it—peasantries, as historically rooted societies, are part of an on-going malleable labor process adapting to changing conditions of climate, local resource variation, or demography, as well as to external stimuli such as markets, taxation, and other forms of state intervention. Peasants' enigmatic status as subsistence and commodity producers provides staying power. Their commodity production may be continually eroding while elements of their subsistence production linger on.

The countries highlighted in this paper have all been subject to turning-point policies that have accelerated processes of depeasantization. South Africa's peasantries have been subjected to depeasantization for almost a century. In 1913 their access to land was decisively restricted when 80% of the national population was corralled into 13% of the country's land area. Peasant commodity production was largely nipped in the bud and the South African government ordained its African rural population to the functional role of a labor reserve. In Nigeria, turning-point policies came in the early to mid-1970s when the oil boom led to neglect of peasant commodity production and a massive exodus of rural dwellers to urban centers. Essentially, the sudden loss of rural labor caused severe disorientation of the peasant productive effort. The value of agricultural exports as a percentage of total exports in Nigeria declined precipitously.

Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe have experienced much more recent turning points. The imposition of structural adjustment programs (SAP) from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s amounted to a drastic undermining of most peasants' capitalized production through the removal of subsidies on improved inputs such as fertilizers, seeds and pesticides.

The six countries were not equally affected by the enforcement of SAP and market liberalization since their implementation varied in degree and timing. Furthermore, each country represented a different vulnerability in terms of the degree to which its peasantries were involved in agricultural commodity production. South African rural dwellers were the least affected. Very few produced agricultural commodities for domestic let alone export markets. Ethiopia, racked by recurrent famine and war, had a restricted peasant export sector, and a peasantry made wary by grain requisitioning under successive imperial and military

governments. Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe, on the other hand, had significant levels of peasant commodity production that were adversely affected by agricultural subsidy cutbacks.

SAP policies largely dismantled African marketing boards and parastatals that had serviced peasants' input requirements, enforced commodity standards, and provided single-channel marketing facilities and controlled prices. The private traders who replaced them varied in performance through time and space, but mounting evidence suggests that they have not lived up to the hopes vested in them by the IFIs. Farmers were faced with a more uncertain market environment, producer prices were subject to wide fluctuations, input prices skyrocketed and supply became tenuous as most traders did not have the rural outreach of the parastatals they replaced (e.g., Jambiya, 1998; Madulu, 1998; Meagher, 2000, 2001; Mung'ong'o, 1998). Traders avoided farmers in areas off the main road where transport costs were too high and many did not enforce adequate quality control checks. African export crops lost further market share as importers came to expect below-standard products and Asia's modernized plantations started exporting traditional African crops such as cocoa and palm oil (Raikes & Gibbon, 2000).

Increased market uncertainty and peasant farmers' reduced access to agrarian subsidies generated a switch to crops with quick or regular year-round returns. Preference was given to "fast crops" such as tomatoes, potatoes and bananas with lower fertilizer demands (Ponte, 1998, 2002; Yunusa, 1999). Crops harvestable year-round like cocoa were adopted in areas that had hitherto not produced them (Mung'ong'o, 1998; Mwamfupe, 1998). Larger-scale farmers became prominent in the production of traditional export crops that smaller-scale farmers found hard to finance (Berkvens, 1997; Iliya & Swindell, 1997; Meagher, 2001). In some areas, smaller-scale farmers attempted to carry on with production with reduced inputs, but their yields became disappointingly low. Some reverted to traditional varieties of staple food crops rather than the high-yielding improved varieties requiring expensive inputs (Mung'ong'o, 1998; Yunusa, 1999). Agricultural income dropped. Mung'ong'o (1998) cites a decline of 71% in annual mean household income from agriculture during 1979–92. Not surprisingly, he also notes land being taken out of cultivation.

Curiously, the Nigerian government departed from standard SAP package prescriptions with its ban on staple food imports in the early stages of SAP implementation and again more recently. This provided a window of opportunity for peasant producers, primarily larger-scale farmers who produced for Nigeria's huge urban market without the threat of being undercut by cheaper foreign imports (Meagher, 2001). SAP also held out promise of revitalizing agriculture in rural areas facing a closing land frontier. Even small-scale peasants stood to gain in the short run by selling or renting out their land to bigger farmers and engaging in wage labor on the bigger farmers' newly consolidated larger holdings (Iliya, 1999). In stark contrast, farmers in areas of central Tanzania that had become the grain heartland of the country under the post-colonial state's policy of pan-territorial pricing and input subsidies experienced decimation of their market. Private traders ignored their existence off the main road (Mung'ong'o, 1998).

South Africa represented the only country where rural incomes experienced an undoubted upturn. The country's political transformation following apartheid's demise led to the removal of racial imbalances in pension payments. The scaling-up of African rural pensions to parity with those received by whites increased rural disposable income for the elderly who constitute a sizeable portion of the rural population and boosted rural purchasing power and investment generally (Bank & Qambata, 1999; Manona, 1999; McAllister, 1999). There is little evidence that this inflow has reversed the decades-long trend to ever more subsistence-based African agriculture. All three study sites witnessed a decline in field agriculture and a concentration on smaller residential garden plots whose output was oriented to domestic production and gift-giving rather than commercial sale. Acreages had declined over the years. Bank and Qambata (1999) note that male cattle-keeping largely disappeared and the older female population, who dominated village settlements, reared pigs that were considered "women's animals" requiring less labor than cattle. In the more remote South African case study area, McAllister (1999) found farming households achieving remarkably good maize yields, although they had no infrastructural support to produce for the market.

There were signs that the aging of the countryside is not restricted to South Africa. In various case study areas, the older generation

was found remarking on youths' lack of interest in commercial farming (Jambiya, 1998; Mwamfupe, 1998; Mung'ong'o, 1998). Yunusa (1999) notes that agricultural production in his Nigerian Middle Belt village was concentrated among an older cohort of people between 46 and 65 years of age. Mustapha (1999), also in Nigeria, records advanced ages for farming heads of households and the tendency for youth to be engaged in activities outside agriculture.

Evidence suggests that peasant adjustments prompted by increasing capital costs led to a reallocation of land and labor away from commercial agriculture. A broad spectrum of poor and middle-income peasants, particularly younger peasants, were deterred by the lack of economic returns from growing Africa's traditional export crops. These crops were subject to deteriorating world prices, reflected in their countries' declining net barter terms of trade, external competition in staple food crop production, and private traders' patchy marketing services. IFIs called for export diversification into nontraditional crops such as horticulture but their highly demanding production and marketing requirements made production on a sustainable basis by widely geographically-dispersed, under-capitalized African peasants relatively unlikely. African peasant agricultural commodity production was increasingly losing its place in the world division of labor.

3. THE ENSUING SCRAMBLE FOR INCOME

(a) *Pressing cash requirements*

While returns from peasants' commercial agriculture were becoming less certain, daily cash requirements increased under the economic stringency of SAP. In addition to the removal of agricultural subsidies, bankrupt African governments removed subsidies on educational and health services. School fees and user fees at health centers became a high priority in peasant household budgets. Price inflation reached rural consumers through rising import costs of agricultural inputs, and enticing consumer goods that private traders brought to village markets. Market liberalization, from the perspective of the rural consumer, has tended to expand choice but at arm's length, for much of the tantalizing merchandize came with unaffordable prices. Meanwhile, peasants continued to shoulder the normal expenses of living in their agrarian communities. Such costs, depending on local circumstances, included agricultural inputs and equipment, community-centered gift-giving, and food purchases.

Farmers increasingly faced agricultural bottlenecks due to rising farm input costs. In those areas where ploughs or mechanized, as opposed to hoe, agriculture is practiced, there are heavy annual capital costs associated with the purchase and maintenance of equipment, or alternatively equipment rental and labor costs.

Expenses also arise from social gift-giving and ceremonial life. The ceremonial side of peasant life gives vital meaning to agrarian work and reaffirms the sense of community needed for sustaining relations of mutual help (Wolf, 1966). Bank and Qambata (1999) see older rural women's substantial expenditure on ceremonies as the means through which they shape a sense of the agrarian social community as its more material aspects slip away. Manona (1999) notes animal stocks are more for ceremonial use than sale. By contrast, the Nigerian case studies (Iliya, 1999; Meagher, 2000) record a tendency for decline in expenditure in gift-giving because people are being forced to forego such expenditure in favor of more immediate consumption needs. The moral economy of gift-giving is under pressure.

In many case studies, the largest expenditure was on staple food purchases. In rural areas of Nigeria, food prices rose astronomically in the late 1980s and 1990s causing hardship for food-deficit rural households (Yunusa, 1999). Sixty-five percent of the Ethiopian households sampled were net buyers of grain. The Zimbabwean and Ethiopian study areas experienced not only increasing food purchase but also food aid dependence (Berkvens, 1997; Mulat, 1997). Serious recurrent food shortages were associated with harvest failures in a semi-arid climate, declining yields, and growing distress of the poorer sections of the rural community. The Nigerian case studies refer to many households cutting back on the consumption of basic food items. In northern Nigeria and Ethiopia, poorer peasants disposed of productive assets, notably land, as a way of keeping up with their necessary expenditures.

The proliferation and frequent escalation of costs that peasants of all economic strata faced gave rise to far more continuous, year-round cash expenditure requirements, whereas agricultural income was generally characterized by lump-sum payments after harvests. Peasants

had to find ways to meet these year-round costs, exacerbated by the declining levels of income derived from flagging commercial agricultural production.

(b) *Rising incidence of nonagricultural income diversification*

Previous survey reviews found in the income-diversification literature converge on an estimate of roughly 40% of African rural household income on average being derived from nonfarm sources (Bagachwa, 1997; Ellis, 1998; Haggblade, Hazell, & Brown, 1989; Reardon, 1997). By contrast, DARE survey results are remarkable in finding much higher levels with nonagricultural activities accounting for 60–80% of household income.

Comparing widely different survey findings is by its very nature a rough-and-ready exercise. It would be necessary to delve into the minutiae of categorization and measurement to make definitive statements on why there is such a gap. On the other hand, a large gap is hardly likely to result merely from methodological differences. Most of the surveys upon which these 40% estimates are based were conducted during the 1980s or early 1990s. The recent DARE surveys and others suggest that the tendency for declining agricultural commodity production combined with expanding participation in nonagricultural activities gathered momentum during the 1990s (Francis, 2000; Kinsey, 2000; Ponte, 2002). Mustapha (1999) has the benefit of time-series data for his Nigerian cocoa-producing area study site showing a remarkable rise in household participation in nonfarm activities from an average of 33% in the mid-1980s to 57% at the time of the DARE survey in 1997. Sixty-seven percent of household dependants' involvement in nonfarm activity in Doma, Nigeria, was initiated during the last 15 years. Forty-three percent had no previous economic activity before setting up (Yunusa, 1999). In Madulu's (1998) Mwanza region study in Tanzania, over 50% of existing nonagricultural activity started in 1990 or thereafter and another third in the 1980s with only 16% of respondents involved in nonagricultural activity in the past. In Yunusa's (1999) study of Tanga Region, Tanzania, nonagricultural activities started in the 1980s.

It seems more than coincidental that the survey findings of all the DARE studies, barring those from South Africa, report a surge in nonagricultural income sources over the past 15 years of SAP implementation. This is a perverse outcome for a set of policies that was originally implemented in the name of correcting urban bias and "getting the prices right" for Africa's peasant farmers. To come to grips with this unpredicted twist, it is useful to contextualize it within traditional and more African farming systems.

The existence of a wide array of nonagricultural activities is readily apparent in the accounts of 19th century explorers. Their range and incidence was probably far greater in precolonial times, prior to the introduction of time-consuming export crops and the out-migration of labor from villages. Nonagricultural activities became concentrated in the post-harvest dry season when agricultural work was at a low ebb. In the process, craft skills were lost due to a lack of time to perform such activities combined with the replacement of various traditional consumption items by imported manufactured goods. The loss of traditional skills was less profound in those societies where rural African elites were prominent and demanded such articles or where there was some slack in the agricultural system affording time to carry on with nonagricultural pursuits.

In addition to the issue of labor time availability, there is the agrarian risk factor most acutely experienced in Sahelian farming systems. Higher probabilities of harvest failure have historically encouraged Sahelian farmers to seek compensating, nonfarm income sources. Drought-prone Sahelian and Sudanese rural economies have strong traditions of trade and labor migration (Grawert, 1998). The growing body of African income-diversification literature has a strong affinity to studies of survival strategies in drought-prone rural areas (e.g., de Bruijn & van Dijk, 1994). In the era of structural adjustment, the concept of household coping strategies was applied to economic as well as climatic shocks and income diversification became aligned with agricultural producers' more generalized experience of risk.

Ellis (1998) distinguishes rational risk-management from default coping strategies. "Risk management" is perceived to be voluntary decision-making that avoids production failure by varying income sources and spreading them over time to reduce co-variate risk and to ensure consumption smoothing, i.e., the continuous realization of the household's basic purchased needs year-round. "Coping strategies," on the other hand, are defined as an"involuntary response to disaster or unanticipated

failure in major sources of survival" (Ellis, 1998, p. 13). "Adaptation" is a more reasoned response to changing circumstances of vulnerability and income-earning (Ellis, 1998, p. 14). These distinctions are difficult to disentangle in the field given researchers' reliance on retrospective interviewing. Rather than being qualitatively different approaches to risk, they can form a sequential trial-and-error learning curve in which rural farmers are thrown into coping in the first year or two of a disaster, before managing the risk and in so doing, eventually adapting.

Peasant farmers' responses to sustained change in liberalized rural commodity markets would be likely to unfold in this manner, as opposed to more knee-jerk survival strategies in the wake of sudden natural disaster. Imprecision in understanding risk management seems to arise from the failure to distinguish climatic risk from market risk in the income-diversification literature of the 1990s. The surge in African rural households' income diversification over the last 15 years cannot be correlated with a flush of bad weather on the continent. While market imperfections are often cited as a cause of small-holders' risk-averse behavior, most of the IFI literature (e.g., World Bank, 2000) sidesteps the ubiquitous evidence of SAP and market liberalization's profound risk-enhancing effect on African peasants' agricultural commodity markets.

Berkvens's (1997) study of a Zimbabwean communal area views drought-proneness as a significant contextual aspect, stressing that attempts to modernize agricultural production have led to some crop yield increase but also continuing exposure to harvest failure due to climatic risk. He attributes the 5% per annum growth of nonagricultural activities to the impact of SAP and market liberalization, specifically: the contraction of the urban formal job market and the presence of returned migrants in rural areas; and the economic unviability of using improved input packages in peasant commercial agriculture due to rising prices. Mounting population pressure and the low value that the population places on agricultural work predispose the population to seek nonagricultural incomes. Kinsey (2000) records a similar increase in nonagricultural activity in Zimbabwean resettlement areas during the 1990s. Madulu (1998) cites the collapse of Tanzanian public services at village level associated with SAP cutbacks as many people's motivation for entering nonfarm activities. Furthermore, the lifting of restrictions on informal sector activities under market liberalization policies had a catalyzing effect in Tanzania (Bryceson, 1993).

Rural contextual features militating for nonagricultural involvement emerge from several of the case studies. Parts of Nigeria (Chukwuezi, 1999; Iliya, 1999) and Ethiopia (Mulat, 1997; Yohannes Habtu, 1996) have reached acute levels of land shortage, propelling many into nonagricultural work. Certainly there are many forces influencing peasants' selection of income-diversifying activities, but it is nonetheless important to ask *why* such searches are *now* so generalized across the various agro-ecological zones of sub-Saharan Africa. Neoliberal hype about the benefits of market liberalization for peasants' agricultural production has clouded recognition and realistic assessment of peasants' income diversification, risk-averse and labor allocative behavior.

In view of rural households' increasing reliance on nonagricultural income, are such earnings alleviating risk and achieving consumption smoothing? What costs are borne by households in taking this route? In Mwanza Region in Tanzania and Sokoto State in Nigeria, respondents mentioned that involvement in such activities is considered as a somewhat shameful admission of a household's failure to adequately provision household needs within the gamut of agricultural production. The state's withdrawal from provisioning necessary infrastructural support for agriculture was also cited as a reason for initiating nonagricultural activities (Iliya, 1999; Madulu, 1998). Most case studies, however, document a rural process already well advanced that is now considered normal and certainly not shameful.

Several authors cite the welfare benefits experienced by those households most actively involved in nonagricultural production. In Malawi, households involved in nonagricultural activities averaged 225% more annual cash income as opposed to those without (Tellegen, 1997, p. 152). In Zimbabwe, households with incomes from more than one kind of employment, especially if they had formal employment, were less likely to apply for food aid Berkvens (1997, p. 12).

In other cases, nonagricultural income sources have become rural households' staff of life. In Ethiopia, asset-poor people without sufficient land or draught power rely heavily on nonagricultural income sources of a rural service nature in the absence of the means to

pursue agriculture. In Igboland, high population densities, small plot size and degraded land make trade central to livelihood strategies. In South Africa, transfer payments have long been the central support for rural households.

4. THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SCRAMBLE

(a) *Proliferation of income earners within the rural household*

Nonagricultural income diversification not only refers to the fact that households are diversifying into nonagricultural activities but that they are often pursuing more than one, sometimes several, different nonagricultural activities simultaneously or at different times throughout the year. Most of the activities are highly opportunistic in nature, involving quick responses to market demand and supply. But changing labor-force participation patterns are apparent. As more household members are entering nonagricultural production, the male household head's dominant role as family cash-earner—an ideologically ingrained feature of African peasant commodity production—is eroding.

Donor agencies throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Boserup, 1970; Rogers, 1980) generally assumed African rural women's lack of involvement in cash-earning. Income diversification's pervasive expansion has overturned this assumption. Rural women are earning cash, although their work is generally less remunerative work than men's because women remain largely restricted to income-earning activities based on their home-making skills. Sales of prepared snacks, beer, hair plaiting, petty retailing, prostitution, knitting, tailoring, and soap making, are a few of the many services they sell. In non-Muslim study sites, beer brewing and sales of prepared food were usually women's major income earners, especially for female heads of households who faced major labor constraints due to the relatively small size of their household and lack of male assistance for various tasks (Berkvens, 1997; Mulat, 1997; Mung'ong'o, 1998; Tellegen, 1997). In Malawi, the sale of food snacks and beer brewing accounted for 76% of female heads of households' nonagricultural activities.

In Tanzania, village women often referred to their new income-earning role in terms of it having been thrust upon them by worsening economic circumstances (Bryceson, 1996). What is apparent is that rural men have generally accepted that their wives and daughters need to work outside the home to earn money. Changes in male attitudes appear to have taken place rapidly and under duress. In Lushoto District, Sender and Smith (1990) observed that male interests were directed at protecting women from having to work outside the home during the mid-1980s. Ten years later, women were emphatic that their menfolk were actively encouraging them to earn an income (Jambiya, 1998).

In the Middle Belt and northern parts of Nigeria, the combined influence of plough agriculture and Islam has historically limited women's involvement in agriculture, although in the drier parts of the area they do farm and have a more public presence. Yunusa (1999) found only 22% of male household heads derived income from nonagricultural activities compared to 89% of their wives and 48% of their dependants. Well before SAP, women in these areas were active in food vending and petty retail trade. They tend to rely on the labor of their children to retail their merchandize, so as to conform to *purdah* restrictions. The starting capital for petty trade is low, hence its popularity as a major avenue for women's income-earning. The attraction for women is that the earnings they generate from nonagricultural activities are theirs as opposed to earnings from farming which belong to the family (Meagher, 2000; Yunusa, 1999).

Iliya (1999), writing about semi-arid Sokoto State, offers other rationales for women's participation in nonagricultural activities, which relate to the experience of income decline in polygamous family structures. Polygamous wives felt that their husbands could no longer support all their dependants; there was economic rivalry between wives; and women strove to give reciprocal gifts to one another as a form of mutual support and future investment. Although women were allowed to farm in this area, the small size of their agricultural plots and the high capital costs of agricultural input purchases led them to prefer nonagricultural activities. This was borne out by the exceptionally large range of nonagricultural activities they pursued. Iliya counted 89 different female-operated nonagricultural activities compared with 79 for men. Their presence was overly weighted in the low and medium-earning activities. Twenty-three percent of all the sampled

women had received government loans to help finance their enterprises.

The strongest female presence in nonagriculture income diversification, in fact virtual monopolization, was recorded by Manona (1999) and Bank and Qambata (1999). This results from selective demographic processes in which older women are numerically dominant in their Eastern Cape rural study sites. A large percentage are widows in the enviable position of receiving pensions and/or remittances. In the face of traditional Xhosa patriarchal values and social structures, they have acted as a magnetic force, drawing their urban-based relations and the local rural community into ceremonial rituals that invert Xhosa gender roles. Even beer-drinking social occasions have been feminized in a quiet but no less powerful expression of female economic and demographic presence. Manona (1999) observes that patriarchal barriers to women's asset ownership have been largely removed. Women in his study site did not experience gender discrimination in the allocation of land and some were actively involved in local politics. They constituted two-thirds of those engaged in nonagricultural activities. This new-found activism was linked to the removal of the traditional chiefly Tribal Authority with the dissolution of the Ciskei bantustan. The residents' associations that replaced it were founded on democratic principles that benefited women.

By contrast, chiefly leadership prevailed in the more remote South African research site where female economic initiative and autonomy were less in evidence (McAllister, 1999). The unperturbed strength of agrarian-based male patriarchy in this area and in the Ethiopian study contrast strikingly with the other sites. Their stronger adherence to traditional hierarchical order within the community influences women's economic and social spheres. Women are primarily part of an agrarian family work effort.

Virtually all the DARE case studies indicated that women have not relinquished their more traditional role in household domestic labor and subsistence regardless of their level of involvement in nonagricultural income diversification. In Igboland, although the gender division of labor in farming is blurred and there is barely any difference between the percentage of total income women derived from nonagriculture (79%) and that of men (81%), women are more likely to farm than men (Chukwuezi, 1999). It is only in Muslim areas that women are not the key producers of subsistence food needs.

Like women, youth, teenagers and young unmarried adults, have actively sought nonagricultural activity involvement. Their presence is especially noted in trade. In Tanzania, the rush into trade has been remarkable. Madulu (1998) notes that Mwanza youth are specializing in medium and long-distance trade, taking advantage of the freedom of movement associated with being unencumbered by family responsibilities. In Mbeya Region, given the proximity of the Malawi and Zambia borders, the East African rift zone's wide variation in complementary agro-ecological zones and the influence of economic liberalization, trading has become a youthful passion (Mwamfupe, 1998). In Nigeria's Middle Belt, Yunusa (1999) states that youth dominate nonfarm activities, citing an 18% increase in family and child nonagricultural activity since 1992. Similarly, in Nigeria's southwestern cocoa-producing area youth of all income strata are far less attracted to farming than their parents and are diversifying into a number of trading and service activities (Mustapha, 1999).

The youthful wave of nonagricultural practitioners has early recruits. Several researchers note the growing incidence of children as nonagricultural labor, often at the expense of school attendance (Iliya, 1999; Madulu, 1998). Mwamfupe (1998, p. 14) quotes a village elder in Mbeya region Tanzania: "school children used to assist in farm work after school hours, but today they dislike agriculture and are increasingly drawn into trading activities."

One of the defining characteristics of peasantries is the strength of family ties. Extended family structures dominate, as they are compatible with labor demands of agrarian production (Wolf, 1966). Colonial and post-colonial policies shaped agrarian systems that integrated family subsistence production *and* commodity production. The formation of patriarchal family structures in which senior males as heads of households were accorded the role of liaising with government and coopted into cash-crop production was encouraged. The male cash crop/female subsistence spheres date from this period.

Declining African agricultural commodity production over the last 20 years has differentially affected men and women. Men's labor time and economic returns from cashcropping have diminished and undermined their role as family provisioners. The decline has been so

rapid and forceful that virtually all able-bodied adults as well as many children have sought to earn incomes to prevent impoverishment. The individualization of economic activity and the increasing tendency to engage in nonagricultural income earning have had a dissolving effect on long-standing agrarian divisions of labor as well as economic rights and responsibilities within peasant households (Francis, 1998). Pooling of income within the domestic unit is weakening as categories of people who formerly were not expected to earn an income assert a moral right to determine how their income is spent. This assertion is given added emphasis because of a decline, if not a cessation, in income and material goods distribution from the domestic units' erstwhile primary earners, male heads of households.

(b) *Increasing economic differentiation*

The decline of peasant agricultural commodity production has been differentially experienced by peasant farmers. Broadly speaking, larger-scale farmers and those located in areas close to centers of food demand have managed to retain or even expand agricultural production. Economic liberalization has militated for the spatial contraction of production to those areas that afford higher yields due to favorable agro-climatic conditions or low transport costs (Poulton, Kydd, & Dorward, 1999). Within these areas, it is the better-off farmers producing with economies of scale who can purchase the input packages and maintain their yield levels.

In many areas, these forces have engendered a process of land consolidation. Peasant farmers with small acreages are increasingly selling or renting their land out to larger-scale farmers and turning to agricultural wage labor or nonfarm activities (e.g., Iliya, 1999; Mulat, 1997). The formation of landless agrarian classes is underway in some areas, especially those with high population densities where farmers are cultivating small, fragmented plots (Jambiya, 1998).

Before actual landlessness appears, poor families experience difficulties in mobilizing resources to farm their small unviable plots. This is especially apparent in areas utilizing plough agriculture, where poor families do not have ready access to the necessary equipment and draught power. The Ethiopian, Zimbabwean and South African case studies illustrate this dilemma. Poor farmers rent these resources from well-to-do farmers or sharecrop, but invariably they do so at suboptimal times, since the equipment-owning farmers use the equipment on their own fields at peak times. In South Africa, demoralization can set in when such farmers decide that the capital costs of farming are incommensurate with output, and fields lie fallow (Bank & Qambata, 1999; Manona, 1999).

For a number of years the nonfarm literature has been asking whether nonagricultural activities fuel or alleviate rural poverty. The sub-Saharan African and Asian literatures are often juxtaposed. The Asian case study material tends to suggest that rural nonagricultural activities lessen class differentiation by providing alternative economic livelihoods for the rural poor with limited or no access to land (Saith, 1992). Conversely, the African case study material presents a more ambiguous picture. Nonagricultural income diversification can reinforce class stratification as higher-income earners redirect portions of their agricultural capital to more lucrative nonagricultural activities. These activities have high levels of starting capital that preclude the entry of farmers with more modest means (Berkvens, 1997; Iliya, 1999; Meagher, 2001; Mustapha, 1999). Tellegen (1997) argues that nonagricultural activity provides the "road to rural wealth." The proportion of total household income derived from nonagricultural sources rose with income suggesting that there are agrarian elites capable of making a success of combined commercial farming and nonagricultural pursuits, relying on commercial agriculture more than any other group. In the cocoa-producing area of Nigeria, 100% of upper-income heads of households listed their main occupation as farming as opposed to only 89 and 62% in the middle and lower strata (Mustapha, 1999). But these high-income farming heads of households were earning 2.5 times more than middle-income heads and 10 times more than lower-income heads from nonfarm activities.

On the other hand, DARE survey data show that middle and low-income groups, who are not able to pursue the highest nonagricultural income-earning activities, are nonetheless vitally dependent on nonagricultural sources for their livelihood. This is especially true for heavily populated areas experiencing land scarcity. The Ethiopian and northern Nigerian Sahelian (Sokoto State) study sites both exhibited these characteristics (Mulat, 1997). In

Sokoto State, those with low incomes were the most heavily reliant on nonagricultural incomes (Iliya, 1999). In the Nigerian Middle Belt, household earnings were inversely correlated with landholdings, with nonagricultural earnings forming 74% of the earnings of the landless as opposed to 20% for households holding the most abundant land resources (Yunusa, 1999). All of these case studies reflected areas of growing land constraint and even landlessness, similar to rural Asian conditions. These too are areas with pronounced wage labor markets. Iliya (1999) and Jambiya (1998) record extensive local casual wage labor markets. In Sokoto State, labor is replacing dependence on family labor (Iliya, 1999). These case studies suggest that as rural populations expand and land availability contracts in sub-Saharan Africa, nonagricultural activities are becoming increasingly important to rural poverty alleviation. Even in areas which have not experienced generalized land shortages such as in Njombe, Tanzania, young households with restricted land access have become more dependent on nonagricultural economic activities or are resorting to migrant labor (Mung'ong'o, 1998).

The DARE research findings hold one more clue to the question of nonagricultural activities' effects on rural class differentiation and rural welfare. The South African studies as well as the Nigerian Igbo case study reflect another type of rural dynamic, whereby the availability of land for agriculture is no longer decisive in class stratification. Both represent areas where shortages of agricultural land were acutely felt in the past, but now primary reliance is being placed on nonagricultural income sources. This has led to land no longer being a demarcator of wealth in Osumenyi, Nigeria and field agriculture largely falling into abeyance in the South African case studies. Land is still desired and contested but its commercial agricultural value has faded. Landlessness in these instances is not necessarily synonymous with poverty. Wealth and poverty are now measurable in access to nonagrarian resources and consumption goods.

5. POLICY DIRECTIONS: CONFRONTING UNCERTAINTY WITH CAPABILITY

The future of African rural dwellers lies increasingly in labor force participation outside rural agriculture. They need literacy, numeracy, knowledge of the national language, and various occupational and computer skills to give them the means to command sufficient income for themselves and their families, as well as to raise the overall level of labor productivity in their respective countries.

This paper concludes with policy proposals that acknowledge the on-going process of depeasantization. Directed at supporting rural dwellers' current coping strategies and improving their position in the world market, the proposals have two main aims: to facilitate provisioning of rural households and communities local-level, daily needs, and to strengthen public policy, training facilities and infrastructure for future occupational diversification and specialization.

(a) *Retaining agricultural foundations*

The DARE research findings suggest that while African rural dwellers' agricultural export production is declining, food self-provisioning is gaining in importance as an economic fallback against a backdrop of inflation and proliferating cash needs. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, rural family farmers continue to value the pursuit of farming activities for home consumption.

It is generally recognized that future prices and demand prospects for Africa's traditional exports are not encouraging (Morrissey & McGillivray, 1999). International staple food prices are rising and will continue to do so as the farmer subsidies of the world's major grain-producing countries are removed. Sub-Saharan African countries, as net importers of staple foods, stand to lose (Mukherjee & Harris, 1999). The expansion of domestic staple food production is in the interests of African national governments since they need food security policies capable of ensuring rural welfare and preventing reliance on expensive food imports or food aid. The Nigerian government's ban on grain imports to protect local production was a positive measure that other African governments might consider (Meagher, 2001).

A "food first" agricultural policy is advisable with respect to prevailing world market prices and international terms of trade. As Lewis (1978) argued, the combination of surplus rural labor and low agricultural productivity, particularly the productivity of staple food production,

determines the factoral terms of trade for poor countries. Low food production puts a brake on a country's general standard of living.

A Green Revolution has yet to take hold in sub-Saharan Africa. The use of improved input packages is in fact on the decline. Effective input packages have not been developed for drier African environments and the packages that do exist for the higher rainfall areas need to be supplemented with an expansion of intermediate technology to increase the returns to labor (Berkvens, 1997). There should be a renewed seriousness about addressing sub-Saharan Africa's growing food deficit. This begs the question of what role peasants can play in increasing food output. Without some reinstatement of input subsidies, larger-scale farmers will, by default, be the major commercial staple food producers. Rather than blanket input distribution as happened in the past under parastatal marketing, agricultural inputs should be available at affordable prices and tailored to local climate and soil conditions.

(b) *Unscrambling and improving current livelihoods*

The DARE program has documented peasants' increasing reliance on nonagricultural activities and income sources to generate a continuous cash flow to meet immediate purchase needs. There has been a great deal of learning-while-doing, but the process of trial-and-error can be costly in time and money. Detailed data need to be collected on household and individual work portfolios and how they have evolved over time. Participatory techniques of data collection could facilitate a process of self-discovery on the part of rural participants, helping them to become more analytical about what they do and how their activities can be improved.

Donor interventions directed at nonagricultural activities raise questions and dilemmas. Work portfolios of villagers are intricately suited to their individual cash needs and time demands. When a specific activity is targeted for improvement, other activities in the portfolio are affected. Short-term labor time management as well as longer-term capital investment and career planning should be a part of any training or assistance offered to villagers. Time management should extend beyond the problems of scheduling daily or seasonal activities. Rural dwellers' declining long-term agrarian prospects should also figure in their plans.

To assist people's nonagricultural activities, programs could be devised to assist in critical input supply. Often rural people have to forsake an economically viable activity because the supply of a critical input dries up. This may be an imported good, or in the case of traditional crafts it may be a natural product that has been overharvested. In the latter case, extension services might suggest ways of cultivating such natural inputs, thereby expanding income-earning possibilities. In both cases programs could help to establish reliable lines of supply of the critical input.

Some of the DARE studies confirm the utility of rotating credit schemes (e.g., Bank & Qambata, 1999). Efforts could be made to expand these schemes and to introduce technical skills and administrative or accountancy training into the rotating credit groups. One of the major sticking points of village-based nonagricultural activities is the lack of *in situ* purchasing power. Local programs could be set up to enhance local purchasing power through public works or community work exchange and voucher schemes.

Rural poverty-alleviation projects need to be aware of new signs of poverty based on nonagrarian rather than agrarian assets. Development agencies tend to target the rural poor on the basis of the size of their landholdings and agrarian capital-stock, which may now be deceptive (Chukwuezi, 1999). Unless external intervention agencies have intimate knowledge of the local community they are likely to misread the ostensive wealth indicators. For this reason, and given the increasing economically heterogeneous nature of rural communities, it is often better for project interventions to avoid rigid income-group targeting and target age-groups or activities which are self-selecting in terms of villagers' interest and time availability.

(c) *Heading for the future*

The first and most pressing need for the future is to establish a strong foundation to improve rural skills. This entails resuscitating primary education that has slumped in sub-Saharan Africa due to the budgetary cutbacks and economic stringency of the SAP era (Watkins, 1999). Besides formal educational opportunities, rural children need extracurricular

clubs and learning programs to expand their informal education, giving them a firmer grasp of practical skills, mathematics, basic science and reading, to take into their adult lives. Secondary school places also need to be expanded. For those who do not receive a secondary education as well as those seeking post-secondary technical training, innovative on-the-job training schemes are required.

In this period of extremely rapid change, targeting youth and children, rather than adults, may have more overall benefits. Participatory discussions that center on realistic assessments of villagers' agrarian/nonagrarian prospects *vis-à-vis* local and national markets are vital. Such discussions could be more usefully focused if they involved groups delimited by gender and age. Village nonagricultural specializations could be identified and gender stereotyping avoided. The already formed discussion groups could provide a platform for mobilizing skills training, marketing, and providing infrastructure for villagers' economic activities.

Governments at national, regional and local levels need to engage people in assessments of their geographical comparative advantage in the search for local specializations. By examining regional resource bases and the complementarity of different forms of production within the regional unit, economic opportunities become apparent. Consortia of government, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), private businesses and local people could become involved in a common vision of regional potential that would facilitate infrastructure building. On-road/off-road accessibility should also be addressed. Can access be improved for off-road locations or can viable employment activities be found that balance their locational disadvantage?

Rural land tenure policy is a vital issue linked to the question of geographical comparative advantage. Many rural areas languish in uncertainty about land tenure. Communal tenure arrangements often reach the limits of their utility as traditional rural leadership disappears, rural populations become far more ethnically and economically diverse, and women gain some degree of economic power but remain constrained by male-biased traditional land inheritance and allocation practices. Rural land tenure policy is fraught with historically-ingrained equity issues that have to be carefully weighed against productivity concerns. Support for nonagricultural activities should be seen as a way of deflecting land tenure quagmires. As rural labor is absorbed into nonagricultural pursuits, political demands for land access may ease.

Bringing the town to the countryside is a practical rather than impossible aim. Provisioning village water-supply systems, good road access and electrification need not be expensive if carried out with labor-intensive techniques. One of the main obstacles blocking such efforts is the entrenched bias toward capital-intensive construction methods of Western-trained engineers (Howe & Bantje, 1995). Local infrastructural building through public works programs can increase local purchasing power and provide vital building and maintenance skills to local people, in addition to providing them with better physical amenities. Much can be done to improve local-level means of transport and the introduction of appropriate transport technology can expand local employment as well as improve rural people's mobility.

6. CONCLUSION

Roughly a century after the scramble for Africa that set in train the formation of peasantries over vast areas of rural Africa, structural adjustment and market liberalization policies have triggered a widespread erosion of local peasant economies and social communities. African depeasantization raises many pressing challenges and threats to people's economic welfare and political stability, but it can be harnessed to good effect with sensitive national and local level policies. Parastatal marketing and blanket subsidized agricultural inputs are past history that cannot and should not be resurrected (World Bank, 2000). Mkandiriwe and Soludo (1999) stress the importance of future development policy spearheaded by African countries. Ellis' (2000) emphasis on income diversification indicates the direction in which much African experimentation has so far taken place. Now, rural policies are needed offering positive future-oriented, coordinated strategies that lay the foundation for occupational diversification *and* specialization. In the absence of labor specialization, individuals' and households' nonagricultural diversification faces the rapid onset of diminishing returns and social demoralization.

NOTES

1. "Centuries of poor policies and institutional failures are the primary cause of Africa's undercapitalized and uncompetitive agriculture" (World Bank, 2000, p. 170).

2. For more detailed findings and information on the methodologies employed in the studies see the Afrika-Studiecentrum DARE Working Papers: ETHIOPIA: Mulat (1997); NIGERIA: Chukwuezi (1999), Iliya (1999), Meagher (2001), Mustapha (1999), Yunusa (1999), TANZANIA: Jambiya (1998), Madulu (1998), Mung'ong'o (1998); Mwamfupe (1998), van Vuuren (2000), ZIMBABWE: Berkvens (1997), SOUTH AFRICA: Bank and Qambata (1999), Manona (1999), McAllister (1999) as well as Tellegen's (1997) book on MALAWI. The DARE program was made up of a network of researchers engaged in local-level studies of livelihood practices funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I served as the coordinator based at the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden collaborating with the following agencies: the Organization of Social Science Research for Eastern Africa (OSSREA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; the Center for Research and Documentation (CRD), Kano, Nigeria; the Institute of Resource Assessment (IRA), University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the Institute of Social and Economic Research (IZER), Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. In addition, other Netherlands-based researchers, not funded by the program, have contributed to the publications of the DARE program.

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