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African Rural Labour, Income Diversification and Livelihood Approaches: A Long-term Development Perspective

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**African Rural Labour, Income Diversification and Livelihood Approaches:
A Long-term Development Perspective***

Deborah Fahy Bryceson

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The implementation of SAP and economic liberalisation throughout Sub-Saharan Africa during the last fifteen years has coincided with the rapid expansion of rural income diversification. Many analysts see income diversification as a vital coping strategy for the rural poor, while recognising that its growing incidence amongst all sections of the African rural population can serve as a mechanism for increasing wealth differentiation. The current income diversification and livelihoods literature primarily restricts itself to situational analysis underpinned by assumptions of economic optimization on the part of decision-making households, while ignoring the broader process of depeasantization. Early agrarian change took the form of urban migration, funnelling labour from rural areas and creating an array of stimuli that acted indirectly upon village life. Rural income diversification adds a new, more immediate dimension. Villagers are now actively part of in situ occupational change that has far-reaching implications for the social coherence of rural households and the political balance of local communities and nation-states. Such profound transformation calls into question the 'sustainability' of rural livelihood strategies now being advocated by donor agencies as well as the relevance of delineating formal, informal and peasant sectors of the national economy.

Over the past twenty years, the once intense academic and policy concern with the transformation of African rural labour has largely evaporated. It, as well as the category of peasant producer, has been replaced with the term 'smallholder' and 'smallholder development' in the context of the world market. The literature that documented the progressive dissolution of African agriculturalists' economic self-sufficiency, their entry into the cash economy, wage labour relations and the process of urbanisation has been largely short-circuited. In the place of analysis tracing structural changes in economic agents' modes of livelihood and production, studies focus on the commodity output, productivity and poverty

modes of livelihood and production, studies focus on the commodity output, productivity and poverty status of these agents. The time frame has been narrowed to 'before', 'after' and 'beyond' implementation of structural adjustment, with comparisons likely to be intercontinental rather than longitudinally situated within a given African rural society - contrasts between East Asian economic growth and African stagnation being most salient.

The World Bank's pre-eminent role in both interpreting economic performance and formulating policy has set the content and tone of debate. Advancing East Asia as a model for Africa to follow has, however, backfired in the light of recent stock market crashes and revelations concerning widespread insolvency and corruption in East Asia. Unperturbed western spindoctors are capable of recasting Africa's productive potential more favourably when the need arises. President Clinton's 1998 African tour was accompanied by headlines like: 'Africa Rising: After decades of famine and war, life is finally looking up for many Africans' (*Time* magazine, 30 March, 1998).

Western power nodes drive the discourse and the use of a wide angle lens for African economic assessment can give scope for either pessimism or optimism. This article attempts to circumvent both extremes by historically contextualising discussion of African rural labour and its productive potential. Current and past literature is examined to identify developmental trends. The paper's first section briefly examines the present upsurge in rural income diversification, noting the existing literature's coverage and blindspots. In the second section, colonial and post-colonial perspectives on the African rural labour question, specifically with respect to Tanzania, are schematically presented to lend historical depth and socio-political dimension to the current focus on income diversification. To ground the analysis, the third section presents recent case study observations from four Tanzanian villages. The fourth section highlights some of the discrepancies between emerging rural labour patterns and prevailing economic development models and policy prescriptions.

Significance of Rural Income Diversification and Livelihood Approaches

The World Bank's (1995a, 1995b) recent reviews of labour conditions emphasise the rural character of African labour force participation, stating that 55 per cent of the population are engaged in non-wage agriculture and another 6 per cent are found in wage agriculture. These figures, however, mask the

growing multi-occupational nature of rural dwellers' livelihoods. Rural income diversification is receiving increasing attention in African development literature (Reardon et al. 1992, Dercon and Krishnan 1996, Reardon 1997, Tellegen 1997). It is defined in this article as an expansion of rural dwellers' income sources away from own farm labour. Such movement has various dimensions, namely:

- a change in labour form from peasant household labour to wage labour, individual self-employment, or reliance on remittances, pensions, rent or other income transfers;
- added impetus to the already well-entrenched tendency for subsistence-based activities to be substituted by monetised activities; and
- increasing replacement of agricultural work with non-agricultural activities.

Whilst the incidence of non-farm activities varies from region to region and from household to household within regions, survey reviews converge on an estimate of roughly 40 per cent of African rural household income on average being derived from non-farm sources (Haggblade, Hazell and Brown 1989 and Reardon 1997). Numerous studies have documented accelerated growth in the non-farm portion of rural household incomes over the past ten to fifteen years (Bryceson and Jamal (eds) 1997, Livingstone 1991). Certainly this is in line with overall sectoral change in Africa which has involved a pronounced shrinkage of the proportion of the population in agriculture both in terms of labour force participation and rural residence. Meanwhile the service sector has expanded (World Bank and ILO statistics cited in Bryceson 1996a).

The income diversification literature and the significance it imparts to non-agricultural activities in rural areas builds on the legacy of the rural industry and small-scale industry literature that surfaced in the 1970s (Chuta and Leidholm 1975 and 1979, Chuta and Sethuraman 1985). Tracing the relationship between agriculture and industry, in terms of forward and backward linkages, was central to this approach. The use of firm-level data and economic assumptions regarding the superior productivity of industry over agriculture, and the multiplier effects of non-farm investment propelled the upbeat orientation of this literature. Rural industries were seen as catalysts for the attainment of higher productivity and increased purchasing power for the population (Kilby 1986, Liedholm and Mead 1986).

More recent literature focusing on rural households' non-agricultural activities from the perspective of coping strategies presents a more sombre picture. The early studies are restricted to drought-prone areas, where the likelihood of harvest failure makes the rural population far more active in non-agricultural activities like trade and handicrafts. The economic analysis centres on household efforts to preclude shortfalls in basic needs provisioning by seeking a number of income-earning activities which avoid year-round reliance on agriculture and offset the risk of production failure in any one activity (Campbell 1987, Bruijn and van Dijk 1994).

In the era of structural adjustment (SAP), the concept of 'household coping strategies' has been employed more widely (Bangura 1994). SAP and economic liberalisation policies resulted in a plethora of changes in rural productive and marketing infrastructure that often increased rather than reduced uncertainty. Many remote peasant farming areas experienced a decline in marketing services and the removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs, especially fertilisers, made the production of several peasant crops unviable. Meanwhile cutbacks in public funding for hospitals, schools and other social services as well as consumer inflation led to increased needs for cash. This environment induced a large-scale search for new, more remunerative activities outside agriculture.

The new 'sustainable rural livelihoods' (SRL) approach is a response to the complexity of rural livelihoods and their growing non-agricultural character. While there are several definitions of 'sustainable livelihoods', Carswell (1997) is often cited:

...the capabilities, assets and activities required as a means to a living. A livelihood is sustainable if it can cope with, and recover from, stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets and provide net benefits to other livelihoods locally and more widely, both now and in the future, without undermining the natural resource base.

The SRL programme approach is defined by Carney (1999) as:

...work with people, supporting them to build upon their own strengths and realise their potential, while at the same time acknowledging the effects of policies and institutions,

external shocks and trends...Livelihoods approaches have learnt from participatory assessments that vulnerability is a core dimension of poverty. Reducing vulnerability – helping people to develop resilience to external shocks and increase the overall sustainability of their livelihoods – is therefore a priority.

Unlike preceding donor interventions, which equated rural people's welfare with agricultural growth, it endeavours to be non-sectoral and assumes that the household serves as a collective decision-making unit in which members engage in complementary forms of income earning to maintain their standard of living in the face of adverse circumstances. Emphasis is on rural agents' own perspective and decision-making in response to the wider institutional context. Offering a rather eclectic blend of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods, it combines participatory research and mobilisation techniques with a 'capital asset' perspective. Households' and individual household members' capital assets are defined very widely to embrace: 'physical', 'human', 'social', 'financial', 'natural' and 'social' capitals, which provides a basis for a synchronic situational analysis somewhat reminiscent of Sen's (1980) entitlements approach (Swift 1998). Obviously measurement or even comparison of such diverse 'forms' of capital is problematic, and poses analytical challenges to poverty assessment.

In essence, the SRL approach is both conceptually and operationally supportive to African rural dwellers' drive for income diversification. Rural households' diversified income-generating activities are considered to be an expression of economically rational risk management, in which the household economic activity portfolio seeks to achieve low covariate risk between activities. This aims at reducing the household's vulnerability to agricultural fluctuation and rural market imperfections in land, labour and credit availability and in so doing facilitates 'consumption smoothing', i.e. the continuous realisation of the household's basic purchased needs (Ellis 1998).

Involvement in non-agricultural activities, especially at a high level of skill and spatial mobility, may provide a means of accumulation for some peasants. In contrast to the Asian literature that tends to see diversified, non-farm activities as a way of reducing rural differentiation, the African literature has more mixed outcomes. It is broadly recognised that income diversification switches from being a

coping to an accumulation strategy when pursued by wealthy and many medium-income households (Iliya and Swindell 1997, Meagher and Mustapha 1997, Dercon and Krishnan 1996). Wealthier households' superior skills and asset endowments yield far greater returns than poorer households with fewer non-agrarian skills, means of transport, and essential contacts. Poor households, more vulnerable to the climatic fluctuations of the agrarian calendar, harvest less in bad weather years and have little choice but to pursue non-agrarian income-earning activities in easy-entry, already saturated markets, especially at times of the year when local purchasing power is depressed due to agricultural cycles. Thus, over time income diversification may serve to exacerbate rather than alleviate inter-household economic differentiation.

Furthermore, some analysts see income diversification as a trend that weakens rather than strengthens rural productivity. Berkvens (1997) records how diversification detracts from Zimbabwean households' achievement of higher agricultural productivity by the diversion of labour and capital from farming. At a more abstract level, Collier and Gunning (1997) argue that income diversification sacrifices the gains of specialisation in favour of spreading risks over multiple income-generating activities. In their view, income diversification represents the response of rural producers to shallow markets, notably the lack of rural credit. In other words, income diversification is not a decisive step forward, but rather a fumbling attempt to 'make do' in a severely deficient market environment.

The SRL approach is so far non-committal about income diversification's long-term effect on rural productivity and inequality, stressing instead its importance for reducing poor households' vulnerability. By concentrating on the impact of income diversification on immediate household welfare, the literature ignores the larger picture. Longer term sectoral transformation remains out of focus. The SRL's synchronic, activity-asset-institution perspective fails to confront the accelerating process of depeasantisation in the African countryside. 'Depeasantisation' here refers to the erosion of an agrarian way of life that combines subsistence and commodity agricultural production with an internal social organisation based on family labour and village community settlement (Bryceson forthcoming). The SRL's ahistorical, non-sectoral approach sidesteps the implications of fundamental changes in rural dwellers' agricultural commodity production and the social dynamics within rural

communities and households. These changes call into question the 'sustainability' of rural livelihoods for broad sections of today's African peasant population.

The next section considers earlier colonial and post-colonial policy literature about rural labour to discern major historical trends, citing Tanzania for illustration.

Where From? Colonial and Post-Colonial Labour Transformations

Major G. St. J. Orde-Browne's (1933) monograph entitled *The African Labourer* provides a useful starting point. Although permeated with attitudes of colonial paternalism, it nonetheless offers an in-depth look at the nature of non-farm employment during the inter-war period. Orde-Browne (1926, 1946) was a liberal-minded labour officer in the Tanganyika Territory during the 1920s who eventually became the British Colonial Office's labour adviser.

Labour productivity was one of his major considerations, viewed from the pragmatic perspective of how the labourer's work environment could be moulded to encourage increased output. In contrast to today's World Bank perspective, Orde-Browne problematized rather than assumed the nature of African labourers' work motivation, placing it in the historical context of the largely agrarian self-sufficiency of local communities. He distinguished motivation at two levels: that of leaving one's home area for work and that of willingness to produce within the workplace. Price responsiveness could not be simply assumed in either case.

The unit of welfare calculation for colonial policy was the 'tribal community' rather than the rural household. Colonial paternalism was rooted in the notion that retention of the moral order and agricultural self-provisioning capacity of the tribal community was vital. Marxist scholars (e.g. Wolpe 1972, Meillassoux 1981) would later point out that this reduced the costs of capitalist reproduction of labour. In fact it was a multi-purpose strategy which reduced the economic costs of the labour force as well as being calculated to deter social and political instability. The authority of the tribal chief was enshrined in various forms of indirect rule. The system of circular migration and bachelor wages dovetailed with indirect rule, ensuring that young male migrants periodically returned to their home areas to renew their social bonds with the community.

What is pertinent here is not whether or not this system was exploitative, which it surely was, but rather that it was underpinned by an integrated set of political and economic policies which contrasts markedly with the World Bank structural adjustment programme's concentration on market-driven economic policies. The circular migration and bachelor wage system was essentially an attempt on the part of the colonial government to control the pace of change and to preclude occupational transformation of the rural masses. Orde-Browne was well aware of the balancing act that this required. The young male migrants who had in a sense 'seen the world' were considered to be a volatile element in the system.

[The migration] experience must greatly change the worker, and he will return to his village home with a very different outlook; he has acquired an attitude of scepticism towards ritual observances, and has perforce braved the spiritual terrors held over the heads of infringers of tribal custom. . .The elders will be alarmed and shocked at the result produced by foreign adventure on their young men, and will accordingly become steady and determined opponents of the wage-seeking habit.....the detribalized worker must face destitution if he loses the employment from which he draws his wages, and will become a homeless wanderer picking up a precarious living for himself and his family as best he can. The danger of creating such a class is very real, for they must form a miserable and discontented body almost inevitably inclined to crime, while their misfortunes will render them peculiarly responsive to any agitator or mischief-maker (Orde-Browne 1933, 101-13).

By the end of the 1930s there was a growing awareness on the part of the colonial administration that male circular migration had taken its toll on home areas. Migration was disruptive to relations between husbands and wives. The danger of a migrant finding a wife in the vicinity of his place of work and not returning to his home area was felt by the Native Authority and district administration alike.

After World War II, a number of forces converged to finally undermine the bachelor wage system and 'stabilise' the labour force in East Africa, and Tanganyika in particular. Labour rights and conditions were intimately entwined with the movement for decolonisation. Chiefs and Native Authorities endeavouring to retain their tribal communities were losing the battle. Colonial governments were switching their support to a new embryonic educated class which would assume the reins of power at independence. At the same time, the world economy was witnessing large-scale mechanisation of agriculture triggered by technological invention and rising costs of labour. East African employers were scaling down their unskilled rural labour forces. The move for guaranteed minimum wages, i.e. a 'family wage', capable of covering the basic living costs of a worker's nuclear family began to take shape. The Tanganyikan colonial administration instituted a statutory minimum wage in 1957 that was restricted to the country's capital (Bryceson 1980). Following independence five years later, statutory minimum wages were applied throughout the country. By that time, the urban migration tide had gained momentum.

The colonial government was not alone in fearing the political and social effects of rapid urbanisation. Much of post-independence policy in Tanzania can be understood in terms of government attempts to deter urban migration and provide real livelihood possibilities based on peasant commodity production. The growth of a state-provisioned productive and service infrastructure directed at raising levels of peasant agricultural productivity and standards of living was spearheaded by a nationalist government with popular support from peasant producers. Agricultural subsidies in the form of low-cost fertilizers and pan-territorial producer pricing of basic staple food crops provided a boost to peasants analogous to what the family wage did for urban dwellers. It raised production costs, but it also substantially raised peasant output in post-colonial Tanzania relative to what had prevailed during the colonial period (Bryceson 1990). The 'modernisation' of peasant agriculture, involving the far-flung distribution of capital inputs to peasants throughout the nation-state, was a logistically complex undertaking spearheaded by parastatals and state-directed cooperatives.

As argued by many (e.g. Raikes 1988, Bryceson 1993) and most vociferously by the World Bank, parastatal and marketing cooperative performance was far from efficient and waste and corruption took seed in their operations. When documenting this there is need to clarify two points. First, there were

notable production successes especially in commercial food crops such as maize. For example, a maize revolution took place in the former marginalised labour reserve areas of southern and south-western Tanzania. Second, the clue to understanding the nature of deteriorating parastatal distribution and pricing policies lies in its timing. Parastatal performance began to falter in the mid-1970s at the time of the international oil crisis, slumping irreparably after 1979 when the second oil crisis struck. This was not a coincidence. Parastatal input and service delivery systems were founded on the prevailing low oil prices of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Once oil prices started to climb, the economics of their operations and indeed the competitiveness of African peasant commodity production on the world market floundered, exacerbated by declining international prices for Tanzania's main agricultural export crops.

An extensive literature on structural adjustment has documented the dismantling of the parastatal sector. The World Bank's contribution to the literature is typified by its publication of continental league tables which record African economic performance and adherence to structural adjustment policies on a 'failure' to 'success' gradient (World Bank 1994). What is readily apparent when World Bank publications are compared over time is that most of the national success stories, e.g. Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, are unable to sustain their lauded positions. Levels of debt have deepened amidst fluctuations in national output, particularly agricultural output, which suggests that peasant agriculture is responding primarily to rainfall and climatic oscillations rather than to the projected higher producer prices of structural adjustment policies.

What tends to be swept to one side in this literature is the fact that structural adjustment and market liberalisation policies, implemented in attempts to rectify parastatal misdeeds and improve prices and commodity supply to peasant producers, have largely abandoned small-scale peasant producers. The removal of agricultural subsidies and pan-territorial pricing combined with larger producer price fluctuations over time and space relative to inflationary prices for consumer goods have created a high risk, low return environment in which many small-scale peasant farmers cannot compete. They are easing out of commercial agriculture while large-scale farmers with more manoeuvrability have accumulated non-agricultural capital and can produce agricultural crops with economies of scale (Iliya and Swindell 1997, Meagher and Mustapha 1997, Berkvens 1997). Small

peasant farmers have had to scramble to diversify their incomes. The next section provides brief sketches of emerging rural labour patterns in four Tanzanian villages arising from the recent 'Beyond the Shamba' study undertaken by the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden and the Institute of Resource Assessment at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Four Village Snapshots

Tanzanian market liberalisation policies have deeply affected local village economies by influencing the allocation of labour between agriculture, on the one hand, and non-agricultural activities, notably trade and migrant labour on the other. All four of the villages described in this section were part of the Tanganyika Territory's extensive southern colonial labour reserve, which later blossomed into important peasant commodity-producing areas under the agricultural modernisation policies of the post-independence government.

Two of the villages are situated in Mbeya region in the far south-west, bordering Malawi and Zambia. Until independence this was an area of male labour out-migration to the Rhodesian and South African mines. A region of relatively high rainfall, its agricultural potential was not realised during the colonial period for lack of transport infrastructure. In the 1970s a railroad and major highway crossing into Zambia were built which provided Mbeya region with the potential for economic success. The region became a major centre of peasant production of a broad range of food and export crops. The implementation of structural adjustment hindered peasant farmers in terms of the removal of agricultural subsidies and greater fluctuation of agricultural producer prices, but their strategic position in a border region with a good transport infrastructure gave displaced rural producers an alternative range of economic outlets.

The two villages in Iringa region have a similar historical background. During the colonial period, young men migrated to the sisal plantations of central and coastal Tanganyika. The pan-territorial pricing and fertiliser subsidies launched in the 1970s triggered the region's remarkable maize boom which restored a sense of agrarian pride and local identity. When the subsidies were removed in the 1990s, Iringa's peasant farmers, highly specialised in commercial maize production, faced bleak prospects.

The following four village snapshots derive from group discussions in 1995 with villagers focussed on the viability of non-agricultural activities and work career patterns and resource flows between generations (see also Mwamfupe 1998, Mung'ong'o 1998).

Mbeya Region: Opportunities and Obstacles in the Post-SAP Era

Densely populated, rice/cocoa-producing village off the main road

Ngonga village, situated in Tanzania's far southwestern corner on the shores of Lake Nyasa, has experienced increasing land shortages over the years. All vegetation within the village and its surroundings are cultivated plants. With multi-levels of tree crops and plants, the village has a lush appearance. Small agricultural plots of food crops for domestic consumption and cocoa for sale surround the houses. The large rice fields abutting the lake are divided into small strips belonging to individual families, but are so small that people no longer consider rice as a viable economic crop. Older farmers now rely on cocoa to provide a reliable supply of cash from year-round sales to private traders. Meanwhile, cassava plantings around the perimeter of the rice fields are growing in size, a sign of creeping food stress.

Twenty-five years ago Ngonga village was described as 'traditional' in outlook (Konter 1974). To this day, parents' reluctance to educate their daughters to an advanced level and a general keenness of inhabitants to avoid conspicuous consumption or to be known as economic trend-setters confirms this observation. Yet, the village has played on its 'international connections' in a calculated way. In 1993, the village leadership instituted a weekly market which caters primarily to Malawians who cross the lake to purchase goods, mostly Chinese consumer items like hair care products, cosmetics, jewellery, small plastic trinkets, as well as imported second-hand clothing. Malawians pay in cash or sugar. Essentially Ngonga is developing a 'service sector' niche for itself vis-à-vis the Malawian economy. Not only are such items made available for Malawian consumers but also the main form of male youth employment is the transport/trading of 100 kg bags of sugar purchased in Malawi and transported by bicycle to nearby Kyela town.

Male and female youth engage in a modicum of subsistence farming, but this is a seasonal activity which does not detract from trading. It is considered impossible for girls to carry heavy trade

consignments on bicycles, nonetheless, some young women reported making boat trips to Malawi to trade. Because land is at a premium, few youth will inherit sufficient land to be farmers to the same degree as their parents. Some male elders think that only the oldest son should inherit land while others consider it is negotiable. Generally, however, there is a feeling of generational discontinuity. Elders have little to offer their youth in terms of a material transfer of land and other wealth, and in turn impose few expectations or compulsions on their offspring, leaving them to find their way without censure or support.

Densely populated, tea/coffee/dairy-producing village on the main road

Twenty five years ago Kyimo village had and today it still has the reputation of being progressive in terms of agricultural development (Konter 1974). It is on the verge of becoming a small town with a sizable number of people employed in the prison services and a technical training institute. The village centre has a tea shop, some small-scale industries and numerous kiosks and houses built very close together in an urban cluster pattern, with the village radiating in different directions from this hub.

Founded in the 1940s by returnee labour migrants from South Africa, this area has historically been outward-directed with an openness towards new ideas introduced by its labour migrants as well as by outside change agents. Now tea and coffee production are in the doldrums for economic and agronomic reasons. The latest innovations derive from a dairy project, which encourages more intensive mixed farming techniques through farmer demonstrations and information exchange. However, complaints are frequent about the lack of government agricultural extension advice, especially in view of a build-up of crop diseases. Here, as in Ngonga village, land is at a premium and traditional inheritance patterns are under pressure. The commonly held view by elders is that their offspring who show an interest in farming should be favoured over others - even female heirs are entertained by some.

On the other hand, trading is a youthful passion. Low attendance at a farm demonstration lecture was explained ruefully by middle-aged farmers as young people's unwillingness to be involved in anything that would take time away from trading and instant cash-earning pursuits. The village has electricity and a local video club in which films, mostly action-packed cops and robbers' capers or

kung-fu are shown. Elders bemoan the influence of this as well as youths' interest in drinking and nightlife. Concern is expressed for the lack of any formality to sexual relations, childbearing and rearing these days. Pregnancy out of wedlock is the norm and AIDS is a growing problem.

What is striking about both villages in Mbeya region is the psychological and moral dimension of the depeasantisation process. There appears to be a gulf between the generations in occupational terms. Few youth see their current livelihood or long-term investment strategy in agriculture, while adults look on disapprovingly but with a feeling of powerlessness.

Iringa Region: The Monocropping Cul-de-Sac

Moderately populated, maize-cashcropping village off the main road

With a ribbon-like settlement pattern along the feeder road, heavily influenced by the 1970s villagisation campaign, there is nonetheless no mistaking Igosi village's centre. The CCM ruling party headquarters, a large, well-built imposing building, marks the spot. Under multi-party democracy, the village government tactfully moved out of the premises and now occupies a much more humble building next door. This is perhaps symbolic of Igosi's predicament. It was a model for Nyerere's policy initiatives, an *ujamaa* village of the 1970s, and an active participant in Tanzania's 1980s maize boom, with highly successful harvests. The maize was sold to the NJOLUMA cooperative and ultimately the National Milling Corporation under guaranteed pan-territorial pricing policies. But now the market has been liberalised, the maize price has dropped in real terms, and private traders do not bother to come to the village even though it is only 20 kms from the regional town centre and main road.

The 'maize crash' was the omnipresent topic of conversation in the village during the time of the study. With the subsidy on fertiliser removed, peasant farmers have little means to buy fertiliser now and their maize yields have declined. Although the harvest had just been completed, the village's large storage godown was empty. The village chairman explained that people had been taking acreage out of production. They no longer saw maize as a viable cash crop. Over the previous two years many had switched to wheat as a cashearer, but plant disease was undermining yields. The village government was requesting people not to plant wheat the following year as a way of eradicating the disease.

Having successfully practised monocrop maize agriculture for over a decade, the adverse economic circumstances faced by the villagers over the past five years has left them in a state of bewilderment. All age groups are disillusioned with agriculture's poor returns, but they have few local cash-earning alternatives. There is virtually no purchasing power in the area to support local small-scale industries; youth are again migrating out to earn cash. Young men journey to tea estates for wage labour or produce rice on a sharecropping basis at Usangu more than 100 kms away. Young women board buses to Dar es Salaam in search of jobs as house servants. Iringa region is regaining its old reputation as a 'labour reserve', this time supplying female domestic workers to urban centres in Tanzania, as well as male agricultural wage labour.

It is as if the clock has been turned back and people are bitter about it. Here also there is a psychological and moral element to the depeasantisation process. *Pombe* brewing is the village's only booming business. At 11 a.m. on a weekday morning, men and women drink with gusto. Maize surpluses can not be sold, so why not drink them? The relatively young village chairman, who had spent a good portion of the morning sorting out the problems of an aggrieved party in a *pombe* brawl, saw it as a losing battle. His vision was to try to get some form of viable trading and artisanal activity (possibly carpentry given the significant forestry endowment of the area) for youth going in the village, admitting that mobilization of external support would be an uphill struggle.

Maize cash-cropping village on the main Songea-Makambako road

Mtwango is in the same agro-ecological zone as Igosi, so the same economic forces have been at play over the last five years. The main difference is that Mtwango's location on the road affords it some trading and small-scale industry potential.

Discussions with gatherings of youth and elders revealed their discomfort with over-reliance on maize. Here too land is being taken out of maize production and sometimes sold to parties either within or outside the village. Mtwango, had not followed an '*ujamaa* approach' and had from an early stage a recognisable group of 'big commercial farmers' using tractors. The economic downturn affords them the opportunity to purchase more land cheaply.

Still there is not a shortage of land to the extent experienced in the Mbeya villages. Youth farm for subsistence and expect to inherit acreages, though not as big as those of their fathers. However, they are keen to find non-agricultural forms of income. The village has had a technical training college for several years offering courses in metal working, carpentry and homemaking. There is a nucleus of carpenters in the village, but they feel that their prospects are limited. All retain a subsistence foothold in farming. During the study, one family of carpenters was identified with two brothers who had learned their skills from their father. The elder brother, despite having a substantial workshop with a wide range of furniture in various stages of production, stated he wanted his son to be educated for a white-collar job.

Mtwango has by far the best non-agricultural prospects of the four villages. Land is still available. There is a training centre for non-agricultural skills. Large-scale farmers in the village still have purchasing power. With its close proximity to Makambako town on the main road and the railway between Dar es Salaam and Zambia, it is well placed. Nonetheless, there is no social status or political clout inherent in artisanal skills and no national guilds to promote the occupational image and skill-base of such people. As far as Mtwango villagers are concerned Tanzania continues to be a nation of bureaucrats and peasants (Bryceson 1988). The crisis of the past fifteen years has blurred the demarcation line between these two categories, but in the minds of villagers, it is still an either/or situation. The model career path is that of the successful bureaucrat who has passed his school exams in contrast to the peasant who has failed. There seems to be no recognised sense of achievement for anyone else. Craftsmen, traders and transporters, and other rural service sector workers merely do what they do to get by.

Defying the Development Models: Rural Labour's Deviant Path

African peasants' rush towards income diversification is ironic, even perverse, in the face of international financial institutions (IFIs) stated policy intentions over the past two decades. SAP and economic liberalization policies were originally rationalised as a stimulus for smallholder peasant production, but African rural producers have continually fallen far short of neo-liberal targets; their export crop performance has remained lack-lustre. No longer able to be portrayed as a victim of rent-

seeking governments, blame is being shifted to the inadequacies of the wider institutional environment of African economies. The theme of agrarian transformation, central to development economics from its founding in the post-World War II period until the early 1980s, has been shoved aside. The mono-economics of neo-liberalism ignores the complexity of peasant decision-making. Economic agents, whatever their circumstances, are profit maximisers and risk minimisers. African rural producers merely tilt more in the direction of risk minimisation.

The following sub-sections highlight some of the social and political trends entwined with income diversification that go beyond economic optimizing behaviour and are largely unacknowledged in current development literature. Tanzania again serves as the primary illustrative case.

Exodus from Peasant Agricultural Commodity Production

Rural income diversification is biased towards non-agrarian activities and caters to local and national, rather than international markets. Whilst the World Bank has tried to find 'success stories' with regard to peasant export crops in one or another African countries, rarely have these isolated cases stood the test of time. The lack of competitiveness of African smallholder export crop production on the world market relates to: African peasants' inability to compete with Asian output as their agriculture becomes more undercapitalised with the removal of state-provisioned input subsidies, the restricted array of traditional export crops, declining international terms of trade, and the incursion of biotechnology advances in Northern agriculture. Genetically modified crops and highly industrialised just-in-time production has the potential to seriously undermine many tropical peasant agricultural product markets in the future (Goodman and Watts 1997, Bryceson forthcoming).

In their search for cash-earning alternatives, African rural dwellers have embarked on profound economic and social experimentation. Subject to restricted skills, capital availability and local purchasing power, villagers' experimentation has served to broaden rural products and services. Social boundaries have been redrawn to maximise entry of market participants. The scramble for cash has caused an upheaval in age-old gender and generational divisions of labour. Types of work ascribed strictly to men, or alternatively women, have broken down. Since women hitherto were the most circumscribed, the nature and range of cash-earning activities that they currently pursue are striking.

But the breakdown in labour ascription works both ways. In places men have taken on traditionally female tasks, such as beer brewing (Mung'ong'o 1998).

New product and service markets have been introduced by transgressing traditional non-monetised reciprocal exchanges or even sacred duty-bound tasks that had hitherto been performed in the service of the community. This is especially evident in the sphere of medical services; many healers and midwives no longer perform their services on request but rather for money. Conversely, new products and services have appeared in villages that are in effect village versions of urban-based services. These provide villagers with a wider variety of entertainment and information services, e.g. travelling video shows using small portable generators, or delivery, albeit several days late, of urban newspapers.

Interestingly, the nature of the new non-agrarian activities does not lend support to the 1970-80s literature on forward and backward linkages between agriculture and non-agricultural activities. This literature stressed the stimulating effect of using local agricultural output in non-agricultural products, e.g. food processing, semi-processed export crops, etc., whilst non-agricultural goods and services maintained and improved local agriculture, e.g. blacksmithing, animal cart-making, etc. By contrast, the upsurge of rural income diversification has been dominated by petty trading, often of cheap imported consumer goods from South and East Asia, second-hand clothes, or imported foodstuffs. The widely reported rising numbers of alcohol producers, especially women brewers using local grains or fruit to make drinks that are primarily sold locally, does evidence backward linkages, but forward are lacking. Local observers point to the detrimental effect of increasing levels of alcohol consumption on agricultural and non-agricultural production, which diverts considerable amounts of a rural community's time and money away from productive investment (Tellegen 1997).

Through the expansion of the service economy, women and youth, have been afforded cash-earning opportunities. On the other hand, labour flocking to easy-entry activities has resulted in overly competitive conditions and low remuneration. As age and gender barriers to market entry have melted away, a growing divide has appeared between those with and those without sufficient financial capital to enter non-agricultural product and service lines with high returns to labour.

The RSL approach, in the main, has not taken account of the magnitude of the exodus from peasant commodity production nor the significance of non-farm activities' extensive spatial and often

migratory character. Migration be it seasonal, circulatory or permanent is primarily analysed with respect to its positive or negative impact on the sustainability of rural household livelihoods rather than exploring why and how individual migrant's seek work outside the village. Such questions could lead to a better understanding of the nature of occupational change in the economy as well as provide a local assessment of the actual sustainability of rural livelihoods. Furthermore, migration generates 'multi-spatial' households and a rural-urban continuum of diversified non-farm activities (Tacoli 1998) which are not easily accommodated in the SRL approach (Zoomers 1999).

Household or Individualised Livelihood Strategies?

Rural income diversification and the sustainable livelihoods literature generally assumes that income diversification is a household-based livelihood strategy premised on members' complementary activities. But are rural households' activity portfolios a result of calculation and planning and do they reflect household cooperation and authority?

The preceding village snapshots and findings from recent studies in various parts of rural Africa suggest that coordinated decision-making and income pooling is on the decrease rather than increase (Meagher forthcoming, Mbilinyi 1997). Amongst the rural poor, activity involvement often results by individual default rather than choice; other options being either unremunerative or not available. Furthermore, the locational separation of migrant household members places physical obstacles in the way of household decision-making. When choice is exercised, there are fracture lines by gender and generation that serve to delimit coordination or cooperation of decision-making amongst household members.

In Tanzania, village women often refer to their new income-earning role in terms of it having been thrust upon them by worsening economic circumstances. What is apparent is that rural men have generally accepted that their wives and daughters can and in fact should work outside the home to earn money. This change in male attitudes appears to have taken place quite rapidly and under duress. In Kweminyasa, a mountain village in eastern Tanzania, Sender and Smith (1990) observed that male interests were directed at 'protecting' women from having to work outside the home during the mid 1980s. Little more than ten years later, women interviewed were emphatic that their menfolk were

actively encouraging them to earn income (Jambiya 1998). However, here as elsewhere, men were less eager to accept a restructuring of intra-household relations and the division of labour to accommodate women's cash-earning activities. The women complained of their intensified working day. They are now expected to go out and earn money which is spent largely on provisioning basic needs that were formerly a male head of household's responsibility, whereas arduous daily subsistence activities remain entirely their responsibility.

In Kilimanjaro, famous for its peasant-produced coffee exports, decision-making over coffee production and marketing has historically been firmly held by men. During the late 1970s and 1980s as coffee producer prices stagnated, rural households diversified into non-agricultural activities and women gained relative to men in a situation in which most rural households' income was under strain. This gave rise to social tension and discord within the household. Women faced complaints about demoralised husbands who resented and taunted their wives' efforts to earn cash incomes, usually from trade and beer brewing (Bryceson 1996b, Pietelä forthcoming). In turn, women were coy with their husbands about what they earned in order to retain control and be able to budget for their households' essential basic needs. Women's freedom to spend their earnings, is still a source of resentment on the part of their husbands. Wife-beating is cited as an increasing problem. Whilst the example of the gender struggle in Kilimanjaro is especially acute given the area's strong patriarchal traditions, it is reflective of widespread social tension within Tanzanian and African rural households more generally.

Like women, youth responded to the decline in their dependence on male heads of household by assuming greater responsibility for their own economic well-being. Naturally, this entailed having decision-making power over their earnings and facilitated the emergence of elements of a youth sub-culture, geared to the consumption of western style clothing, music and videos, far more in tune with the capital city or western society generally than local village culture. While many elders regretted this development their opinions remained muted.

In the light of these tendencies, assumptions regarding the existence of collective or agreed household-decisionmaking aimed at optimizing the allocation of household members' labour between activities must be treated with caution. The disappearance of agricultural subsidies amidst increasing commoditisation of rural life has engendered a cash crisis in domestic household units, forcing virtually

all able-bodied adults as well as many children to seek different forms of income. The individualisation of economic activity, and the increasing tendency to engage in non-agricultural income earning, have had a dissolving force on long-standing agrarian divisions of labour as well as economic rights and responsibilities within rural households. Pooling of income within the domestic unit is weakening, as categories of people who formerly were not expected to earn income assert a moral right to determine how their income is spent. This assertion is given added emphasis because they experience a decline, if not cessation, in income and material goods distribution from the domestic units erstwhile 'primary earners'

Circumscribed Poverty Alleviation Policies

The widespread incidence of rural income diversification is related to profound changes in intra-village and intra-household relations connected with the growing shift from agriculture to non-farm income earning. The assertion of economic autonomy by formerly dependent social categories, namely youth and women, is at the expense of male elders' authority, but also at the expense of social cohesion, at least in the short term. Furthermore, this atomisation process harbours the possibility of individual but also collective fall-out as rural incomes are squeezed, and rural dwellers scramble, with greater and lesser degrees of success, to make up the shortfall. Recent studies of rural Tanzania record the growing incidence and awareness of poverty differentials between rural and urban areas, and between and within villages (World Bank 1993, Cooksey 1994, Mung'ong'o 1995, and Narayan 1997) and reflect trends in African rural areas more broadly.

Donors' new SRL approach is directed at poverty alleviation and is supportive to changing African rural livelihood patterns. On the other hand, that support largely takes for granted the integrity of African rural households and villages. The on-going collapse of peasant commodity production has accelerated depeasantisation. Rural income differentiation represents massive labour displacement and economic duress. The SRL approach is essentially defensive, rather than proactive. The approach does not provide an alternative development vision or even a sense of direction, rather it has adopted a participatory, facilitating role to help dwellers cope, largely on the basis of their existing asset holdings. Non-farm activity data readily reveals how restricted non-agricultural earnings are for the rural poor

given that they derive from a limited and hence highly competitive range of activities that lack capital investment and skills.

The 'social costs' of structural adjustment, although acknowledged by the World Bank and international financial institutions (IFIs) to exist, are generally considered to be the concern of NGOs or specific donor poverty alleviating programmes such as those focussed on rural livelihoods. In its 1990 *World Development Report*, the World Bank commits itself to poverty reduction, and has undertaken poverty assessments in various African countries (Hanmer, Pyatt and White 1997). 'Safety net' policies have been devised as supplementary measures for strictly delimited groups of people, such as natural disaster victims, and the 'structural poor' and 'transitory poor', e.g. female heads of households with insufficient family support or retrenched civil servants, who constitute SAP's fall-out.

If economic and social tensions break out into armed political conflict, there is yet another branch of international agency response, that of the United Nations humanitarian aid agencies as well as NGOs directed to disaster relief. This piecemeal, reactive approach stands in stark contrast to colonial paternalist policies that integrated political and social concerns with economic policy. The comparison between the two is not invalid since IFI's occupy a very similar role to the colonial state at present, formulating the policies which determine the ultimate welfare of Sub-Saharan Africa's rural population.

Incessant reference to Sub-Saharan Africa's lagging economic performance and the widening gap between it and other parts of the developing world is not accompanied with acknowledgement of the fundamental problem, namely African peasant agriculture's inability to compete in the today's global market and the need for a long-term development focus beamed on occupational change in African rural areas. Poverty alleviation programmes also sidestep the issue. Taking a narrow, short-term household welfare approach, they sacrifice longer-term productivity improvements and development objectives. This is especially clear in relation to the lack of attention to rural skills training. Donors' rural programmes tend to focus on the need for credit, while the issue of raising non-farm productivity through skills training is largely bypassed. This may be in the belief that such action would resurrect the role of the state in provisioning or at least regulating skills training and be out-of-step with current market ideology - a belief that could be challenged from several angles. Skills training is an obvious

policy issue that has yet to be linked to income diversification's upsurge in any meaningful way (Bryceson and Howe 1995 and 1997). From the perspective of villagers, it is an essential need at this early stage of occupational reorientation. The need for human capital investment is especially acute in the wake of SAP budgetary cutbacks which caused a decline of rural educational opportunities. Most rural income diversifiers have no formal training for what they do. In the Tanzanian Beyond the Shamba study, the vast majority only had informal on-the-job experience, often acquired during sojourns in urban areas. The economic potential of rural Africa and the future welfare of its residents is crucially dependent on the infusion of marketable skills through innovative informal and formal training for all age groups and education levels, but especially children and youth.

Where To? Sectoral Implosion and Beyond

The upsurge in non-agricultural income diversification on the African continent represents large-scale agrarian labour displacement within an accelerated process of depeasantisation (Bryceson forthcoming). This article has identified some socio-political tendencies associated with income diversification. It would be a mistake not to try to tease out trajectories of possible change despite Sub-Saharan Africa's geographical immensity and diversity. Without attempts at discerning patterns, we are left with leap-in-the-dark assumptions, tautological models and myopic analyses of projected change thwarted by an amalgam of unexplained factors, the so-called 'African dummy variable'. This is a grey area comprised of conceptually illusive aspects that persistently undermine the IFI's economic trajectory for the continent.

The literature's current preoccupation with market response and prescriptive behaviour based on western norms and formal economic models clouds perception of what is actually taking place. The confusion begins with limiting the focus to the household as the unit of analysis while tacitly assuming that such households operate within a clearly delineated formal/informal/peasant three-sector economy. The World Bank sees the so-called 'informal sector' growing at the expense of the formal sector, but does not acknowledge that the peasant sector is also shrinking. Posing the question of whether the informal sector can serve as an 'engine of growth' deflects the issue:

'[t]he informal sector does have a vital role to play in Sub-Saharan Africa's economic future. But so do Africa's formal sector and its vast agricultural sector' (World Bank 1995a, p.24).

Current academic and policy debates may be likened to the situation that prevailed in the first years after the wave of African national independence in the 1960s when the two-sector traditional/modern model of African economies outgrew its relevance. Its successor, the three-sector model, now faces a similar decline in its explanatory power and a need for an overhaul for hiding as much as it illuminates. One by one, the components of the three-sector model are changing in form and content almost beyond recognition by reason of: a decade-long collapse of real wages in the formal sector which undermined adherence to formal regulation by labour within that sector, the meaninglessness of an informal sector without a formal sector contrast, and the shrinkage of the peasant sector. The result has been national economies representing an amalgam of these three sectors into one large 'formless' sector with economic agents who have discarded sectoral boundaries and opportunistically engage in ad hoc activities based on their capital and labour time availability at any given moment. The once distinct economic logics of the formal, informal and peasant sectors have meshed to produce highly fluid, circumstantial networks of economic relations characterised by the absence of western-style professional ethics and business norms, the material conditions to support such norms, as well as effective nation-states to enforce them.

The rapid pace of change and the lack of clarity about its form demand an emphasis on understanding dynamic processes rather than merely slotting such change into theoretical categories and development models that have prevailed for more than 30 years. There is a critical need for serious attempts to construct more multi-disciplinary perspectives for macro as well as micro levels of analysis to grapple with the blending of hitherto distinct economic sectoral activity. Any one individual social science approach is bound to provide only a partial picture. The SRL multi-disciplinary approach represents a start, but its piece-meal, defensive attempt at 'sustaining' a 'diversified' peasant sector against the odds may succeed in alleviating poverty here and there but it does not confront the basic question of Africa's increasingly redundant peasant labour force. Fundamental rethinking and bold

programmes are needed to create and support new occupational careers for a massive number of the African rural population in the 21st century. Data collection concentrated on individual career profiles, family work histories, and community occupational change are required for formulating training needs and realistic development programmes.

Current social and political tendencies need to be understood in relation to actual rather than propagandized African peasant prospects. In so doing, the present yawning gap between economic and social policy could begin to be addressed. But, in the meantime, the gap may well be contributing to the growing social disorder evident in rising crime, corruption, ethnic and religious tension, political unrest and war. This cannot be ruled out by the mere assertion that IFI's policies are 'good' for rural Sub-Saharan Africa and that prophesised economic growth will eventually iron out social imbalances.

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