

THE INVOLVEMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT IN TANZANIA*

Marie Antoinette Oomen-Myin

L'auteur a travaillé dans le district Morogoro en Tanzanie, de 1978 à 1980, comme chercheuse au département de développement rural de la faculté d'agriculture de l'Université de Dar Es-Salaam. Elle a étudié la participation de la femme du milieu rural au développement des villages en Tanzanie. Cette étude est devenue le sujet de sa thèse de maîtrise en anthropologie culturelle, qu'elle a soutenue à l'Université d'Utrecht (Pays-Bas). Le présent article est un résumé de ses conclusions.

Background of the Study

Women in Tanzania, as in most developing countries, are the backbone of rural development. Yet even in Tanzania, which chose a model of development for which the human element is central, little attention has been given so far to the position, role and contribution of women to development policies, programmes and projects. Especially significant is the lack of participation of women in selecting, designing and carrying out projects.

During 1979-80 I undertook research in the Morogoro District as part of a study on the impact of rural extension by the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Dar es Salaam. The main points were: To what extent are women involved in decision-making at the village level? What factors constrain women's participation? What could stimulate involvement? Although the research was primarily about women, men (husbands and leaders) took part to learn their views on women's work, position and role. Eight villages were selected for the study. In two of them, the village 'top-leader' was a woman. Six villages had started, or were to start, an agricultural project, and six had a branch of the Union

of Women of Tanzania, the only official political institution in the country aiming to represent the rights of women's development in all sectors.

A participatory research methodology was used, based mainly on the ideas of Paulo Freire. This means that a true dialogue between the researcher and the beneficiaries of the research is stimulated through participation and observation, and through discussions whereby people are kept informed regularly of the progress and the results of the research, formulate their views, identify their problems and express what they see as better alternatives. To stimulate dialogue, women field-workers first spent time in the villages. Meetings were held regularly throughout the research to present the results, gather criticisms, comments and further information.

At the conclusion of the research, a simplified version of the report was written in Kiswahili and distributed in the villages and to various institutions dealing with women and rural development. It included simple line drawings that the women and I developed as visual aids for discussions on their situation and lives.

The Ujamaa Policy in Tanzanian Rural Development

More than ninety-five percent of the approximately seventeen million people live in rural areas; ninety percent depend on farming for subsistence and livelihood. Most live on small holdings, are outside the wage employment sector, and use traditional agricultural tools. Since independence in 1961, Tanzania has aimed at achieving social and economic development based on self-reliance and betterment, particularly in the agricultural sector. The *Ujamaa* policy of the development

strategy formulated in the Arusha Declaration of 1967 can be considered as an ideology and as a programme of rural development, and is often taken as an example of modern African socialism.

Ujamaa literally means "family-hood" and reflects the principle of organization in the extended family social structure of many African societies, such as a common obligation to work, collective control of capital, goods and land, and mutual respect and obligation to one another. *Ujamaa* includes the building of self-determination and self-reliance, and is to be implemented through the type of leadership that persuades and teaches people, and is with the people.

The ways in which the implementation of *Ujamaa* policy has weakened the position of women in rural development will be discussed in the concluding section of my article.

The Position of Tanzanian Women

It is not possible to describe one uniform position of Tanzanian women and their traditional and new roles. Agricultural and pastoral societies differ and each tribe has its particular norms and customs. Nevertheless, there are traits common to most groups concerning the position of women.

Tanzanian societies have tended, generally, to be patrilineal. Ownership of the means of production and control over labour is held by the male relatives. Traditionally, women were assets since the girl's father received bride-price from the family of the future husband, and marriage gave the man the right to his wife's labour. Women did not own the means of production and the surplus they produced, nor did they have the right to their children. Women were allocated a house

"Key posts in the Union are held by women with a high social status, such as being wives of influential politicians".

and land to produce the subsistence crops necessary for their children, themselves and their husband, as well as his relatives and/or friends who lived at or visited the homestead. A rather rigid sexual division of labour existed.

In the area where the research took place, most people belonged to the Luguru, one of the very few matrilineal societies of Tanzania. Although women here were traditionally unlikely to be dispossessed of either land or their children, the sexual division of labour existed in much the same way as in patrilineal societies. During the colonial time, drastic land shortages partly were a result of land alienation by settlers and the state, and of the growing pressure to expand acreage for production of cash crops and subsistence crops. Women were forced to work on farms for cash crops as well as on their own subsistence plots. Efforts to increase labour productivity were aimed at men, partly because of the sexist ideologies of most colonial administrators and missionaries, and partly because of the sexual division of labour that is characteristic of traditional societies.

Formal school education and vocational agricultural training were for boys and men. Extension workers were also men. Settlement schemes were based on the nuclear family structure whereby the man is the head and the wife (wives) a necessary and complementary appendage. Young men were recruited from remote areas for cash crop production. This male labour migration led to increasing hardship for wives and children, and to marital instability. After World War II more and more women began to follow their migrant husbands, and urban migration took on large proportions. Nowadays migration to urban areas offers an alternative to women's traditional subordination. However, women's job opportunities are very limited in the highly competitive urban job market.

Rural women have seen their workload become even heavier with the introduction of cash crop production in which they have to take part, in addition to all their other duties. The Western idea of women as only housewives and mothers – introduced by missionaries and colonial administrators – has been largely adopted by planners, experts and extension workers.

Women are not completely forgotten in national development programmes or local projects, but these concentrate mainly on home economics, handicrafts, and child care and ignore the vital role of women in agricultural production. So far the Union of Women of Tanzania has been more successful in towns than up-country, and in commercial income-generating activities. The Union lacks personnel skilled in management and administration, and its activities are too marginal and too concentrated in urban centres. Key posts in the Union are held by women with a high social status, such as wives of influential politicians. The disdain felt by village women is illustrated by this remark: "These well-dressed town women who come to the villages once every two years and carry a bucket of water or work with the hoe for half an hour . . ."

Involvement of Women in Village Life

•In Village Leadership

The research study showed the highest involvement of women in village leadership to be found in the two villages where the top leaders were women, and in the villages where the UWT branches have started projects, such as the production of sunflowers, brewing of local beer, setting up of shops. In one of these two villages, both women and men appreciate their female chairperson who, they say, is fair, competent and hardworking. The second village is an excellent case of nepotism: the woman who heads the village council was accustomed to putting forward plans made by her husband and brothers, all of whom held administrative posts at the sub-district level.

Overall, men have much more contact with village leaders than do women. The women put forward such statements as: "the leaders do not need our opinions . . . we have too much work to do . . . we never see the leaders . . . our husbands would not allow us to take part."

•In Social Activities

Only eleven percent of the men, as compared with forty-seven percent of the women, do not participate in any village association. Interestingly, in most cases,

women who act as heads of households participate more than do married women. Attendance of women in village meetings is low, and their reasons include: "too much work, no time . . . we do not get informed . . . it is men's business . . . it is the business of the leaders . . . my husband forbids it." When the women who claimed they attended the meetings were asked if they took part actively, eighty-three percent responded negatively. Their reasons are revealing: "I do not dare to speak in public . . . I have nothing to say . . . men would not listen to women . . . I only come to listen . . . I don't know how to discuss." Some women said it is easier to discuss among women because we have the same life and the same problems.

•In Agricultural Projects

Women participate in village agricultural projects slightly less than do men, and work the same number of hours as men do. However, men are more informed about the organization and management of the projects. A range of questions were put to both women and men on the preparation and implementation of projects. The research field-workers did not encounter any problem with the men in their understanding of the questions (both men and women were asked the same questions.) But most of the women needed to have the questions explained to them, claiming that they were too difficult. In their ideas about the projects, women gave them a practical aim (food, cash), while men spoke of village development, introduction of new crops, and organization of communal work.

The Life of Rural Women

•Access to Resources

In Morogoro District women do not acknowledge they have any right to land; they claim that land is cultivated jointly by both wife and husband and perceive it as a family resource. This shows that a drastic change has taken place in land rights in the district, a change that puts women in a weakened position. Traditionally, both women and men were allocated land from their respective clans. Adult members of a village, according to *Ujamaa* policy, have equal rights to land. However, our re-



Credit: CUSO

search data showed that land usually is allocated to families which are headed by a man, rather than to individual members. This means that although the land allocated to a family might be as large as the combined plots of husband and wife (wives), women have lost their traditional right to land and, thus, the right to dispose of the proceeds.

●Division of Labour

Women's labour may be divided into two types: domestic and farming. Women spend over five hours a day on farming. During the remaining seven or eight hours, they are busy grinding maize, fetching water, collecting firewood, washing clothes, cooking, and doing housework. All tasks are usually performed along with looking after the children. It is true that about thirteen hours of work each day is rather common for any working wife and mother of dependent children. What makes the day of a peasant

women even heavier is the time she spends in walking long distances (often heavily laden), poor health conditions (due mainly to the high rate of pregnancies), poor diet, and inadequate farming tools and household utensils.

Men were asked if they helped their wives in household activities. That sixty-six percent of the men say (and often as a single answer) that they help in farming is a fact to be underlined, particularly when one realizes that the husband is commonly seen as (a) the household head and (b) the farmer. Men obviously consider farming as women's duty, and feel they are assisting their wife (wives) when they work on the plot for food production.

Very interesting are the answers of women to questions related to men's labour: farming, travelling, attending meetings, visiting friends, going to market places, drinking, arguing with women, and resting. At this point in the discussion, women were enjoying themselves. The jokes they told ("they always

seem to be busy but they are never tired . . . they spend their time giving us work . . .") seem to reflect the unequal relation between wife (wives) and husbands about work. Just as workers would joke and gossip among themselves about 'the boss' when he is not around, the women had a good time criticizing and ridiculing their husbands.

Women see married life as equivalent to more work and more hardship. No one mentioned sharing of labour, combined efforts, or mutual assistance and understanding. As a whole, women perceive domestic tasks as the heaviest duties. Whereas women spend most of their time farming, they do not complain about the claim it puts on their time and energy: "it has to be done, it is heavy, but if we would only have that job, life would be good . . ."

●Access to Income Sources

To questions about income sources, the unanimous first answer women gave was

"none." Here again, the fact the land now is being allocated to the family deprives women of income sources. Husbands deal with the sale of agricultural surplus, if any, and wives depend upon the "generosity" of men. Asked about the allocation of money – whenever they have some – women replied that they spend it on the household and the children.

●Access to Information

The access of women to information is limited. Women are less educated than men and they marry younger; this means their time is less flexible because of early and repetitive pregnancies. Their daily workload does not allow much time for attendance at agricultural demonstrations and meetings. The attitude towards them of men (husbands, leaders, and agricultural extension workers), and the acceptance by women of their own second-rank position are all factors that play a role in their poor access to information.

The World-View of Women

What I mean by 'world-view' is the perception we have of ourselves and our physical, cultural and social environment. A large number of women prefer to work with other women because women work harder than men and women can discuss freely and cooperate with each other. A list of activities which are usually performed in villages by individuals was submitted to both women and men. Each was invited to say who were more able to perform the tasks. The answers show little difference between the opinion of women about themselves and the opinion that men have of women. The only task that a large majority attributed to women is "educating children" – not bearing or feeding them, but educating them. Tasks that involve contacts outside of the village are seen as men's duties, as are tasks involving decision-making, management, supervision.

Women gave their opinion on the three most important problems faced by rural women, and on what would help them in their lives. The main problem is repetitive pregnancies which weaken them physically and thus do not allow them to be as

productive as they would like to be in their agricultural work and in other activities. Worth remembering here is that women do know about family planning in general and about contraception methods in particular. This contradicts a number of newspaper articles and scientific papers on the subject which state that "women need to be informed first," that "women would oppose," that "this subject must be approached very carefully." When invited to comment on these statements, the women said: "people from towns think we are fools . . . let them come here, we shall see if they dare say these things to us . . . did they speak to women or to men . . . they must all be men." Women felt that men would be the ones to oppose family planning since it would affect the male concept of manhood.

The two other most important problems faced by rural women were identified as poor water supply, and poor relationship with husbands. Though farming is seen as hard work and as time-consuming, women do not see it as a problem because it is their reason for being as peasants, wives and mothers responsible for feeding the household.

What women think would help to improve their lives shows how aware they are of their inferior position, even though they tend to accept it. Besides family planning, grinding mills, water supply, and medical facilities, they speak of such improvements as cooperation among themselves and with their husbands, of the free choice of husband, of leadership training for women, and of more education. Men were invited to give their opinion about women by formulating character traits they appreciate in a woman, and things that women should not do or be. Their answers need no comment: "she should be hardworking . . . bear a lot of children . . . have good health. She should not build houses, fell trees and collect firewood . . . be sick, tired, weak . . . tell lies, gossip, abuse men . . . drink alcohol . . . be dirty . . . wear short dresses."

Conclusions: What Can Be Done?

Though the role of women in rural development in Tanzania slowly is being recognized, their position has weakened as a

result of the implementation of *Ujamaa* policy. They have lost their traditional rights to land and the proceeds of land. Their farming workload has increased because they participate as much as men do in village agricultural projects. *Ujamaa* is based on equality of all members of the society. Paradoxically, *Ujamaa* has worked against rural women by not acknowledging the basic existing inequality in roles and status between women and men and by claiming that all individuals, no matter which sex, have the same rights.

Women work as much as men in newly-introduced village agricultural projects and work much more than men in the production of food crops, but they participate little in decision-making processes which are involved in all aspects of community life. Their contact with the leaders and extension workers has remained limited. The presence of women leaders and the position of women as heads of households are factors that stimulate women to participate.

The main constraints on women's involvement in decision-making and village life – as identified by women in the research study – are: (1) too much work; (2) bad health and numerous pregnancies; (3) negative attitude of men towards women; (4) acceptance by women of their second-rank position. One can see that these constraints are inter-related and that the negative attitude of men towards women is at the heart of the whole issue. Men do not value the work that women perform, they do not value domestic activities as much as public and social activities, and thus do not take on responsibilities within the household and family.

Women remain the "forgotten factor" in development plans, projects and agricultural extension programmes. Women are kept in their role of producers and reproducers. They do not have the physical possibility and incentives to raise their status by taking part equally with men in activities outside of the home, and are forced to accept their second-class membership in the society.

What could be done to help women achieve a better position in rural communities? The availability of labour-saving technology, such as grinding mills and permanent water supply, and of con-

"The only task that a large majority attributed to women is 'educating children' – not bearing or feeding them, but educating them."

traceptives, are factors that would improve women's lives – all factors that are well-known to women. Yet would these improvements really help women to obtain the same status as men and to feel themselves socially as "strong" as men? I agree that women should have possibilities to act effectively by having at their disposal land, produce, marketing of crafts, etc. I agree, too, that female participation and female solidarity groups would help women to raise their own status. Yet it seems that these prerequisites of participation are far from existing in rural Tanzania and that something much more basic should be taken into consideration.

The basic issue has to do with attitudes – of women as well as of men. Although I agree that women's actions should start with the things they are used to doing and can do well, I believe strongly that men should be encouraged to take part in what they call "women's things," so that they realize how vital women's roles are for the

whole society. As long as men do not have a better understanding of women's roles, situations and expectations, it is difficult to see how extension programmes and agricultural projects can help women improve their positions, since the planners, agriculturalists, extension workers and leaders are mainly men.

Thus, I suggest that "women's things" be integrated in programmes, actions and projects involving both women and men. This may be stimulated by the following:

- 1) Organizing agricultural extension seminars on food production and household management.

- 2) Introducing into literacy programmes topics such as family life, women's position in leadership, the education of children, relations between men and women within the context of the family and of the community.

- 3) Organizing meetings and seminars prepared jointly by the Union of Women

of Tanzania and rural development authorities.

- 4) Involving women in village councils through the compulsory representation of UWT.

- 5) Organizing information campaigns on the implications of *Ujamaa* policy for all members of the community.

*Reprinted from *Convergence*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1983). We are grateful to the author and to Margaret Gayfer, who edits *Convergence* for the International Council for Adult Education, for their permission to reprint this material, an abridgement of the original.

Marie Antoinette Oomen-Myin now lives in Indonesia where she is involved with small-scale, grassroots and self-managed projects sponsored by international aid work of the Netherlands Government. Her address is P.O. Box 410, Medan, Indonesia.

FOR YOU GRANDMOTHER

Thinking of you on this Montreal balcony
 I remember a story
 of when I was almost a full note
 in mother's womb
 and from out of nowhere
 you came knocking on our door
 your face lean and determined
 a loaf of bread and a bottle of whiskey in your hands
 and over the weeks bits of both
 coming my way
 to relax me into a sooner downward swim
 on Valentine's Day I came breaching forth
 your message shot straight as an arrow
 from mother to daughter and granddaughter again
 but in growing up we never saw you
 your dislike a family's sad fruit
 now we're older and you're still a stranger
 yesterday we sent you a get well card
 we only really remember your face
 always smoothed with cream
 hardly a wrinkle at 83 hardly a grey hair
 cabbage rolls that once hot dry apartment in Strathcona
 your stubbornness hung in its air
 our regret now hangs 3 thousand miles away
 through daughters to mother
 stopping at you once again
 a clothesline of female lineage
 we are a small family
 and our door has opened and closed through the years
 you may have stood there once
 but only an old woman passes by now.

Mona Fertig
 Vancouver, British Columbia