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LAW, TRADITION, CONTRACT AND IMPOVERISHMENT:

Some Cases In SSA

Reginald Herbold Green

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By Reginald Herbold Green

On a cloth untrue, with a twisted cue
And elliptical billiard balls.

- Gilbert and Sullivan

And from him who hath not
Even that which he hath
Shall be taken.

- Parable

Woe unto them
Who add field unto field
Until there is no place.

- Isaiah

Preface

The operation of rural impoverishment - and enrichment - in rural Sub-Saharan Africa is complex. Almost all simple explanations - and certainly all single instrument ones are simply wrong in respect to a majority of cases. That does not lessen the prevalence of marginalisation and pauperisation both as present realities and as powerful dynamics - it does mean that they need to be analysed more carefully and contextually. Nor does it make the struggle to find ways in which the processes leading to degradation of rural households can be slowed, halted or reversed, any less urgent - the need for complexity and contextuality in analysis should not be taken as an excuse for delay. An analytical process which produces accurate answers after the pauperisation of the victims and the dissolution of their communities has a distinct resemblance to the famous Dickensian case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in which the lawyers exhausted the estate not the legal issues to be resolved.

The following cases are in no sense presented as definitive, typical or an adequate basis for an analytical - much less an operational - solution. They are intended to illustrate complexity, the importance of contexts, the dangers of reductionism and, perhaps, two general themes.

The first of these is political economic. Power matters. Political and economic power usually interact, interpenetrate and reinforce each other. Those groups (or sub-classes or kinships or regions) outside the national or local governing coalition are likely to be the victims of any process of change - and the holders of power either the beneficiaries or (in the case of disasters such as massive drought) at least able to offload most of the losses on others.

This is an important point. To examine individual processes outside the overall political economic context is unlikely to explain why the impact of drought (or a commodity price boom) varies sharply or why the gains from agricultural service provision or expanded rural basic services are far from identical in different countries (or even regions within one country). Further, if analysis indicates that the basic cause of a dynamic of impoverishment for specified sub-classes or kinships or regions is the distribution and uses of power then no 'solution' (however nominally technically and financially possible) which does not address the question of power is likely to have much operational impact.

The second is the abiding and important nature of law - including tradition and contract. Abiding in importance, not necessarily in result. In many cases the legal and contractual forms have been rather inexpertly transplanted from another context or because the legal, traditional and contractual forms have remained relatively static in form while the content has changed. As a result the content and results of the forms are often very different either from what their authors intended or from what they were at an earlier period.

A Positive Example - Almost

In 1981-82 the second Rawlings government in Ghana sought to reduce diversion and delays of payments due to tree crop producers. It mandated payment by cashable cheque to producers' cooperatives on delivery. Initially this

related to cocoa, the dominant tree crop and export. However, it was also noted by the government that the poorest regions - Northern, Upper East and Upper West - had a tree crop in shea nuts which had almost disappeared from official trade flows. The Cocobod was therefore instructed to develop a shea nut campaign - included payment by cheque to coops analagous to that for cocoa.

By 1986 results were evident. How much shea nut sales were up was unclear since part of the rise in official purchases probably represented rechannelling of trade from traditional neighbouring country oil markets to the official channels selling to the newly appeared European skin cream and oil market. (Shea nut oil is apparently micro-environmentally sound for human skin.) Officially marketed totals rose from the order of \$3 million to \$30 million and payments to producers coops from perhaps \$1 million to \$15 million. Clearly a success story: higher official exports loosening Ghana's foreign exchange strangulation, prompt payment to coops, cash income for very poor regions, districts and households, lessening their need to sell part of their inadequate food production to meet cash requirements, income for a crop sold by women, and therefore especially likely to be used to strengthen household nutrition and child welfare. Yes, but....

Shea nuts are not in fact primarily grown albeit a few tree farms do exist. 90 to 95% are gathered from wild trees - virtually all by poor women. They are sold by the pan - to coop members. As is not the case in cocoa (most cocoa producers coops being made up of producers), the shea nut growers coops are in a majority of cases dominated by male intermediate buyers. There is not - for whatever reasons, probably including limited transport and access to cash - perfect competition among the buyers so the average price paid by male buyers to female collectors is apparently about half what the buyers collect from Cocobod in their guise of producer coop members. The apparent unawareness of Accra (understandable at Castle, i.e. State House level but less so at Ministry of Agriculture level) of the actual nature of shea nut production, marketing and gender division of labour has made the results of duplicating the legal pattern of buying for cocoa quite different in its distributional effect. The poor women collectors have, it needs to be emphasised, not been injured but they have been exploited (in both the vulgar and the technical sense) and the large gainers are not poor (and are now richer).

Food, Flowers and All What

Self evidently substituting flowers for food contributes to impoverishment and malnourishment. Therefore the establishment of carnation growing in Kenya on land which might otherwise grow grain is clear contribution to the "other half" dying. So runs the simple food first argument. But is it that simple?

Kenya has a substantial grain surplus - at least defined in terms of effective demand. Malnutrition is linked to poverty not to physical unavailability of food. Too many households with too little, too poor and too risky (in terms of rainfall patterns) and too few jobs underlie poverty. How do carnations (or tea or other non-food crops) relate to poverty and therefore to effective access to food?

Many non-food crops - including both tea and Nairobi elite or export market horticulture and (a fortiori!) carnations have a far higher gross output value per hectare than grain (6 to 8 times for tea, up to 100 times for carnations). Even allowing for higher input costs the labour required (employment or self employment provided) for many of these crops is several times as high per hectare as that for grain. Grain exports are - at best - marginally viable (especially in the face of USA and EEC dumping/subsidisation) and while Kenya cannot fairly be described as subject to import strangulation, constraints on import capacity do hold output - especially in manufacturing - below potentially attainable levels.

So.... non-food crops, including export crops such as carnations (a dramatic example albeit tea is perhaps a more typical and certainly larger example) can increase exports and therefore operating levels in manufacturing, raise agricultural sector gross output and provide more employment and self employment allowing the employees/growers to buy more (readily available) food. At that level it appears that the last way to reduce hunger would be to force reductions in the 10 to 12% of farmed area devoted to non-food crops. And up to a point that is true. But....

The nature of crop growing and marketing varies markedly - perhaps for technical reasons. New tea is largely allocated to smallholders (doubtless

not the poorest of the poor but rarely rich either) and marketed through a relatively cost effective, high payout procurement, processing and sale body. Even if serious question marks hover over Nairobi tea exchange prices it is hard to argue that small Kenyan farmers do not benefit from tea growing. Carnations are more complex. Because they are perishable and fashionable, quality control and instant (same day air freight) marketing are essential. Because the import ends of the market are specialised and fairly tightly controlled the margin between London wholesale, free on plane Nairobi and farm gate prices are very high. The actual growers may be small in number of hectares but not in scale either of financial investment or turnover. The hired workers are better off than urban semi or semi-self employed or marginal farmers but probably not very much. A grave suspicion must exist that the main beneficiaries are not employees, Kenyan growers nor even the Kenyan economy albeit it is hard to argue any of these lose absolutely if the alternative to carnations is grain (or, less clearly, another horticultural product).

The underlying problem is probably not legal. The labour, purchase and export contracts are all (or almost all) legally correct and not on the face of it oppressive. On the face of it.... this is a line of business in which specialised, near instant knowledge is power. Kenyan workers, growers, tax officers and exchange control (export proceeds remittance monitoring personnel) neither have that knowledge nor any very evident way of acquiring it.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey"

Oliver Goldsmith's best known line from the "Deserted Village" applies forcibly to the Western Sudan - including its causal conclusion "when wealth accumulates and men decay". Indeed it should as the dynamic is the same - enclosure of previously "common" land, expulsion of herders and peasants, advance of freehold tenure. The only differences are not in the Sudan's favour - the enclosing landlords of Britain by and large were improving ones who raised yields for the long run while to date the dominant characteristic in the Western Sudan has been land mining leading to horrendous and potentially irreversible environmental degradation.

The history of land law in the Sudan from the imposition of British (nominally Egypto-British condominium) rule is a necessary backdrop. The British created - as in many other colonies - a multiple system.

The underlying land ownership was vested in the colonial state (by right of conquest over the Mahdist state). However, a series of subordinate tenures (which more or less fully ousted normal "Condominium" ownership) were the dominant forms of land holding and use.

The first broad group related to public sector irrigation and (less prominently) rainfed schemes. Here land ownership was - and remains - vested in an Authority, e.g. the Gezira Board. In general it was compulsorily acquired from the third (traditional user right) form of landholding with payment of some compensation in cash or alternative grazing rights.

The land was (and is) leased on tenancy contracts to farmers subject to detailed husbandry (including crop, water use, etc) conditions and with definite credit, credit recovery and division of main crop (normally cotton but more recently sometimes wheat) proceeds. The tenants were rarely previous land users not so much by a will to exclude but because the shift from pastoralism to regimented irrigated farming suited neither their preferences nor their skills. Nominally sub-tenancies and share cropping (and less clearly absentee landlordism) are prohibited. In practice they have been rife - in the Gezira scheme - for at least forty years. The cynical joke that Gezira tenancies are owned by merchants and urban landlords operated by kulak middle peasants but worked for a pittance by Nigerians who have run out of money en route to or from Mecca overstates but has a major core of truth in it.

Private irrigated (pump) holdings which are basically freehold tenure also date back to soon after the 1905 conquest. They are - when well run which is neither universal nor uncommon - rather like the public schemes except that the board and prime tenant are combined and sub-tenancies both legal and, apparently, less common albeit managers for absentee landlords are more so. While substantial salination and other standard irrigation problems exist, this form of tenure and cultivation has (like its public enterprise analogue) been reasonably consistent with environmental stability.

The third original form of tenure - then covering most useable land apart from the public and private irrigated sectors was traditional varying widely from area to area but basically communal ownership of land and allocation of use rights to male household heads. The use rights were in general secure so long as cultivation or herding use was maintained, usually de facto hereditary but not normally otherwise transferable.

Under the Nimeri government the political influence of the urban trading/landlord sub-class (and of some pump scheme owners) and the newly recognised potential of large scale dry land grain (sorghum) cultivation and ranching for export led to substantial changes in the old system.

State lands were made transferable to freehold tenure. So de facto were traditional lands. The initial results were the acquisition of very large tracts of land - especially in the West - by private landlords and - to a lesser extent public sector schemes. In many cases the land was not unoccupied but either traditional rights had never been formally recognised or they were brushed aside, the main initial losers being semi-nomadic pastoralists. Further, the de jure requirement of consent from traditional allocating bodies (and of use right holders) to transfer from one form of tenure to another was frequently acquired by fraud, force or fiat - especially, perhaps, in respect to military officers and their relatives.

The initial land uses were primarily rain fed, mechanised sorghum cultivation and large herd extensive pastoralism. The first has raised sorghum output (and exports) dramatically but only in good rainfall years and at the cost of reducing the fertility of the soil and the defence against wind erosion. Some estimates suggest millions of hectares of land have been permanently ruined - six years is reckoned to be the maximum economic period of cropping (or mining out).

The ranching, in itself, is probably much less environmentally damaging in respect to the land used. But it has driven previous pastoral users onto extra marginal pasturage leaving many no access to even semi-secure drought year pasturage. This almost certainly increased their 1981-84 drought period herd losses (by forced sale or death) and will probably prevent their herd rehabilitation during the current run of good years setting in train a degradation of marginal herding communities which has been more studied on the

other side of the Sahel in Mali, Niger, Senegal and Burkina.

The current phase of enclosure has moved to the wadi (seasonal river valley) country around Nyala and to parts of the Nuba Mountain zone not taken over in the first wave of land grabbing. The present (or at any rate recent past and in part remaining) users are small to medium scale peasant households practicing mixed farming with crops predominant and using hand (from streams) or pump (probably usually animal or hand powered) irrigation in a majority of cases. Many have been severely affected by the past drought - from which the West has not uniformly recovered - and the collapse of the sorghum price with the return of the rains, the paucity of transport and the fact that the inadequately financed government support price scheme for sorghum was largely snapped up by the big growers. A significant proportion are already heavily indebted to merchant money lenders and individual household disasters (e.g. deaths, illnesses, accidents, fires) and even happier events entailing financial burdens (e.g. marriages) are steadily raising that proportion.

The merchant money lenders are securing shifts of large hectarages from traditional to freehold tenure under the unrepealed Nimeri laws. The consent of many of the (heavily indebted) use right holders and community representatives/officials (perhaps equally indebted or desirous of an initial capital to enter merchanting or landlordism) is hardly among equals or arms length and indeed is precisely what traditional tenure's codification (or at least legal recognition) was intended to avert.

Whether the new enclosure phase will be environmentally disastrous is not clear. More intensive irrigated farming may well be possible in many wadis but the limits to water flows and the soil composition (both in respect to salination and to drainage) are not well studied so significantly greater risks than those associated with the Nile schemes do exist. More clearly the consolidation of large freeholders (non-resident merchant money lenders in most cases) and the dispossession of peasant use right holders (and their descendants) will increase landlessness, inequality and the size of the very poor rural proletariat precisely at the time its previous lifeline of unskilled migrant labour jobs in Libya and the Gulf is fraying. While the shift will perhaps raise food output it is even more clearly going to raise hunger related to inability of rising numbers of families to produce (landless) or to buy (poverty level incomes) adequate food.

The political economy of the present phase is somewhat puzzling. The West is the heartland of Prime Minister Sadiq al Mahdi's Umma Party. The merchant money lenders are dominantly non-Western and their sub-class on the whole supports two rival parties (one an uneasy junior partner in the coalition, the other the main opposition). Why therefore the victims cannot seek effective political redress is less than clear albeit the concentration of the government in far away Khartoum on a full scale civil war and an apparently insoluble macro economic crisis presumably have much to do with it. So too may the rather ironic missionary zeal for unrestricted freehold tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa which its proponents (Reaganauts, international experts and African intellectuals and technocrats) do not seem to notice is the reverse of the present trends in the Western European and North American zones which were freehold tenures original birthplaces and heartlands.

The Bend of the River and the Burdens on the Bent Backs

Irrigation is widely pronounced to be the solution to Africa's food problems. As the previous section suggests, even where irrigation does raise output on a basically sustainable basis at a plausible cost (conditions which are met in much of the Sudan), it may still be associated with increasing landlessness, poverty and hunger. But the Sudan is atypical. In the Sahel (or "Western Sudan") the French Office du Niger and its national and World Bank successors and copiers have a nearly unbroken half century record of failure even to secure adequate output increases to cover the capital cost of the schemes.

At least six basic problems arise from such schemes - as viewed from the point of view of peasant households.

First crop selection is biased in terms of saleability by the operating/marketing authority of the scheme and of the absence of alternative buyers. The reasons are simple. Unless a crop is sold through marketing structures to which the operator has access (many staple food crops are not) then the operator cannot act as buyer and marketer and is, at best, in a weak position to cover input, management and debt service costs. Second, if other marketing channels exist then tenants may seek to sell via them to avoid operator charges (whether to recover costs or to attain a surplus). Third, if

the capital cost of the scheme is largely financed by external loans the design and operation are likely to be further biased to crops which will yield foreign exchange for debt service, i.e. exports or - perhaps - direct import substitutes.

Second, the technology of large scale irrigation schemes - including, e.g. large dams, major irrigation channels, mechanised processing plants, agricultural machinery - by its nature and scale is beyond peasant household capacity to finance, maintain, manage or even, in part, to operate. Unless - as is quite uncommon - specific efforts are made to build up peasant competence to operate and maintain all aspects of the scheme as well as to participate substantively in management decisions there is a significant shift of production relations resulting from this loss of control over the technical and immediate institutional aspects of production.

Third, the output and productivity effects of most large scale irrigation schemes in SSA have been below both expectations and the levels needed to cover operator management and production costs plus debt service while still raising peasant household net incomes. The reasons vary but the record of technico economic unsuccess (or at the least marginal and below projection outturns) is general enough to raise serious questions about whether viable large scale irrigation scheme approaches viable in SSA exist except for a handful of special cases. The regular incantation of the words Gezira and Sudan do not answer these questions. Gezira, Er Roseires and Hashim el Ghirba are special cases, took a long time to come right economically and at least in the latter two cases have certain problematic aspects.

Fourth, the division of proceeds within most schemes is biased against the peasant producer. Receipts are used first to recover administration and production service costs, next to cover at least the interest portion of debt service and then to pay producers. As a result the producers are the most exposed to design or operation mistakes, bad weather (which can affect irrigation schemes if it causes floods, limits availability of irrigation water or reduces the rain component of total moisture availability in cases in which this is significant) or falling output (rising input) prices.

The greater pressure under even World Bank style structural adjustment for improving public sector returns (less losses and/or higher surpluses)

objectively increases both the overall offtake from gross receipts before peasant payments and their exposure as the first to be hit by adverse events external either to their own actions or to the project.

Fifth, the land use regulations of most schemes are hierarchical and inflexible (at least on paper). Households are required to grow set hectarages of particular crops in particular sequences using (and being charged for) specified inputs. The reasons are partly technical agronomic ones but this does not alter the nature of the resultant production relations. Further, some of the requirements seem intended to maximise dependence on scheme payments and labour supply for scheme marketed crops and - whether intentionally or not - to erode or destroy both basic household self provisioning and the rights of women to land and time to carry on that activity which are integral to a majority (not all) of Sub-Saharan African peasant agricultural systems.

Sixth, these schemes are among the few contexts to date in rural SSA in which debt bondage analagous to that in South Asia can arise. If output (or price) is low and/or costs high, many peasant households find it impossible both to pay for services used and to survive. In such cases a portion of service charges are usually rolled over and recharged (with interest) in the next season. (This pattern is reinforced in cases in which the tenant is nominally a proprietor and is charged for some improvements as a loan with regular interest and principal instalments.) In Sahelian schemes a substantial proportion of tenants appear to have sunk so far into debt that they cannot hope ever to escape from it.

In the past such tenants could 'escape' to the land frontier or to the domestic, regional or European migrant labour market frontier so that a debt hold was somewhat tenuous. However, increasing population has in many cases driven the land frontier into extra marginal and/or very risky zones, formal urban wage employment has in most cases been stagnant for at least half a decade and the regional European unemployment crises have virtually shut down that escape route for new entrants. Indeed, regionally, at least in West Africa, forced repatriation has almost certainly exceeded new entrants into employment in the main immigrant receiving labour markets (Ivory Coast, Nigeria) since the early 1980s.

The combination of these factors has meant that large scale irrigation schemes tend to cause very far reaching sub-mode of production and production relations changes. These are by no means limited to overt plantation cases. Tenants are usually in fact, even if not in name, labour only contractors far more analagous to wage labourers than to independent petty commodity producers. However, unlike wage labourers they fear the primary risks of poor output levels, high cost or low prices. As supposedly arms length independent agents their incomes are subordinated to the contractual obligations of operators to salary and wage workers, input suppliers and lenders (a logical result of the present formal legal pattern albeit different contractual arrangements putting at least minimum peasant incomes as the first obligation could be drafted and implemented). Further, the nature of the agronomic regulations imposed on ('contracted by') scheme tenants frequently both reduces the possibility of household self provisioning (objectively increasing the risk of food insecurity) and wipes out the contingent rights of women to a share of household land and labour time to produce food crops (empirically tending to increase child malnutrition).

These results are not unique to irrigated schemes although they are probably more marked in them. They also apply in varying degrees to regulated smallholder schemes which do have tight management, limitations on crops (including household food crops grown) and husbandry/purchase of services requirements as well as effective, compulsory single channel marketing. In extreme cases these are not true peasant or smallholder production at all but the substitution of sharecropping or de facto wage employment. The special features of many of the irrigation schemes - as noted - turn on the greater scale and complexity of the technology employed and the more dubious agro-economic viability base which often mean a loss of food security, autonomy, status of women and net income.

Population and Weather: Monsters or Myths?

A rather popular brand of neo-Malthusianism argues that Sub-Saharan Africa is becoming over-populated at an accelerating pace and that this is the basic cause of food scarcity and environmental degradation. Another - sometimes analytically related - argument is that since the mid-1960s SSA rainfall has entered a period of cyclical decline causing retreat of the safe pastoral and

tillage frontiers. Interacting with rising populations this has caused famine and environmental disaster in the former marginal but now, with reduced rainfall, extra marginal areas.

Counter arguments have been advanced equally forcefully. SSA's population per square kilometre is low compared to Europe or South Asia. Higher prices and/or higher yields not less people are needed. Rain (and drought) cycles have existed in SSA for centuries and did not formerly cause famine. Pre-colonial African tillage and rotation systems were environmentally sound; the environmental degradation problem relates to modernisation and production of export crops and could be cured by reversing these changes.

Held in these purist forms, the contentions create rather more heat than light; rather more sweeping generalisations than empirically tested specific analyses and rather more confusion than guidance on what needs to be and can be done.

An average population growth of 3% a year is historically very high (unprecedented for SSA). Since 1960 SSA's population has virtually doubled. Food production has risen - largely by increasing the area under cultivation and pastoral use and only secondarily (in some cases negatively) by raising output per hectare. But food production per capita has fallen in a majority of countries and districts - on average by perhaps 15%. Given the objective differences in natural potential (including soil quality and water availability) between SSA and South/Southeast Asia and in makeup of the labour force as well as capital available per agricultural labour force member simple comparisons with these areas are not very illuminating. Given present or known, tested and generaliseable techniques, several SSA countries have populations which are objectively as high as the agricultural base will carry and many more will reach that area by 2000.

Since 1965 average annual rainfall in SSA has declined. In addition in at least some cases - particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa - its temporal distribution within the crop year seems to have worsened and the number of successive bad (or good) years to have risen. Whether these are secular or cyclical trends - and if cyclical over how long a period - is simply not known. The results - combined with pressing outward on the land frontier and pressing down on fallow periods on intra-marginal land - have been

environmentally damaging well beyond their short term physical food supply and medium (at best) term directly affected household impoverishment effects.

Cyclical fluctuations in weather are indeed known to have affected SSA for centuries albeit detailed recording is not available and systematic reconstruction of probable past weather patterns is in its infancy. That they did not cause famine is by no means so clear. Arguably the fall of some medieval Sudanic and savannah political units did relate to droughts. Some famines are recorded as are population movements probably related to drought pressure on food supplies and much easier to achieve/enforce when populations were much lower and substantial tracts of intra-marginal land while not empty were very sparsely settled.

Reversing 'modernisation' in techniques might in some cases arrest environmental damage on some land. But that does not in fact solve the underlying problems. If the population increase continues - as it clearly will for decades, the real question is whether the present 3% a year average falls or rises by 0.5% a year - then more food and non-food crops are needed. If less intensive techniques are reinstated more hectareage will be needed. As the land frontier in most cases is already into environmentally fragile zones not capable of holding up under existing techniques the result is likely to be at least as much and probably more overall environmental degradation.

The total elimination of non-food (more precisely non-domestic food) crops might free 15% of existing land in the average SSA economy. It would in most cases also reduce the value of agricultural output and the incomes of substantial numbers of households (net as well as gross). By reducing the availability of domestic inputs into manufacturing (e.g. cotton, rubber, tobacco, sisal) it would increase import requirements and by cutting exports (up to 90% in some SSA economies) it would reduce import capacity. In the absence of changes in productivity this might buy 5 years of time before the food production problem returned to its present levels. As with reversals of 'modernisation' there are doubtless cases in which switches from non-food crops (or herds) to domestic food production are desirable but neither offers any general solution.

The argument was, that many - not all - peasant long rotation cropping and some pastoral systems were environmentally sustainable. Similarly a substantial number of techniques including intercropping and minimum tillage (hoe as opposed to plough) were - and are - more in consonance with many African soil/environmental contexts than pure stands and deep ploughing.

But.... the long rotation systems depended on up to 20 years so-called bush fallow (bush and tree regeneration) following 3 to 5 years cultivation, a pattern which is in a majority of districts not sustainable at present population levels. For a majority of African soil/climate combinations no sustainable, environmentally benign system of cultivation - or at least none which is economically viable - is known. A shortened or eliminated fallow period with the old clearing, burning, low input cultivation methods is certainly very rarely viable or sustainable in the long run.

Similarly, the sustainable pastoral systems usually involved are not merely seasonal movement of herds but also fallback pastures used only or almost only in years of abnormally low rainfall. As these were normally on land suitable for crops the requirements for sustaining these patterns of pastoralism involve both human and animal population ceilings and a surplus of tillable land over demand (or firm political domination by the pastoral population groups). These conditions are no longer generally met and are steadily becoming even less common.

The land frontier problem interacts with these factors in a humanly and environmentally damaging way. Higher population density forces out the margin of tillage. Much of the land is either unsuitable for cropping or suitable only in years of above average rainfall or with higher than average capital investment. As the households pushed onto these sub or extra marginal lands tend to have below average assets and incomes (and in some cases a disproportionately high proportion of female headed households) the above average capital requirement can rarely be met in cash or labour power and the units are often very small preventing either mixed farming to lessen risk or amassing food (or cash) reserves for bad years.

The impact on pastoral societies is often even worse. Pushing out the cultivation frontier necessarily pushes out the pastoral frontier even if the pastoral societies' numbers are not rising (which they usually are). The average quality and security of their grazing is diminished. Further their fallback drought year pasturage is 'eliminated', i.e. under permanent tillage.

The effects are much farther reaching than cattle (and other stock) losses and severe food problems in bad years. In Niger the cultivation margin has been pushed scores of kilometres north since 1960. At least one pastoral people were pushed onto pasturage capable of sustaining adequate herds only in good years and probably by no means optimal even in them. As a result 1970s and 1980s drought cycle losses appear to have been proportionately more severe than in previous drought cycles. Further, natural herd regeneration for these people (albeit not for Niger as a whole) after the 1970s drought was inadequate to bring their herds back to pre-1973 levels before the 1981 onset of a new drought phase.

As a result a series of social disintegration and production relations changes which are unequivocally negative for this pastoral society have been set in motion. Migration of an increasing proportion of household members to urban (normally low income informal sector) employment/self employment has become essential to survival and to the hope (usually not realised) of saving cash to buy animals to replenish herds. In addition, merchants and large crop farmers who acquired animals during or at the end of the drought have been in a position to set up a growing, highly exploitative (in both the vulgar and technical senses) tending system of hiring pastoralists to tend their flocks for little more than their dairy by-products. They are not pure wage earners in that the risk of animal deaths falls largely on them. As they do not benefit from animal weight, quality or increase in numbers they - the pastoralists/herdsmen - have no incentive to use the best practices they know so that neither in production nor environmental terms does the new system have much to be said for it.

With the exception of a few pastorally led governing coalitions - notably Botswana's - pastoralists have tended to be the end of the line in access to land, to services and to effective drought relief/rehabilitation assistance. This has been true even in countries - e.g. Niger, Mali - in which the pastoral sub-sector has historically been at least as important economically

and in terms of households dependent on it as the arable. The reasons are partly technical - where practicable cropping can normally support more people in a given area than cropping; partly knowledge (African pastoralism probably has even less of a bank of relevant, tested, economically viable, user friendly techniques available for use today than does cropping); partly location - the end of the capital city, smaller town, main crop area, outlying arable, pastoral axis. But largely they are political - pastoralists (with rare exceptions) have not been leading members of governing coalitions. This is partly a colonial legacy as most pastoral societies received exceptionally little education during that period and, in practice, an educated elite has been crucial to securing and sustaining power but the causal factors would appear to be more complex and perhaps more context specific than education alone or even education plus role in the colonial territorial economic system.

Work: More? Less? Different?

One standard critique of African peasants - usually by observers who concentrated on men - has been that they did not work long enough. For example, in Tanzania, 1960s estimates of eight hour days worked by peasant farmers outside tree crop areas tended to be in the 90 to 150 range. On the other hand more recent analysis - concentrating on rural women - suggests that too much work (up to 15 hours a day average) is a crushing burden.

Both of these generalisations are too sweeping. So is the newest conventional wisdom that in all SSA peasant (or at any rate cropping) societies women do 80% of the work on food crop production. That overlooks the fact that work patterns in which women do not do field agricultural labour at all are by no means unknown in SSA nor limited to (or universal among) Moslem societies. And neither offers any automatic guide to policy.

It is a fact that in most rain fed arable systems (and to a lesser extent some pastoral ones) 'enforced, undesired leisure' is prevalent at some seasons because non-agricultural income generating activities are scarce (or the income generated almost invisible) and low input, rainfed agriculture has very uneven labour requirements over the year. Given the actual gender divisions of labour, 'enforced leisure' is commoner for men than for women.

It is also a fact that studies in some crop centred societies suggest that women do work up to 15 hours a day. In such cases a stylized makeup of male and female labour inputs in hours per day averaged over the year might be:

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Provisioning Crops	$\frac{1}{2}$	2
Cash Crops))
Other Income Generating)	3) 3
Activity))
Wooding	0 - $\frac{1}{2}$	2 - 3
Watering	0 - $\frac{1}{2}$	3 - 4
Household Other	1	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	$4\frac{1}{2} - 5\frac{1}{2}$	13 - 15
	=====	=====

In general the actual tasks within each category are likely to diverge for men and women. Construction (e.g. of houses) and land clearing are usually dominantly male; walking to fetch water (and only slightly less so, wood) and weeding are almost always female. Male income generation centres on cash crops (i.e. crops grown to be sold whether as domestic food, for industrial use or for export) and on wage or informal self employed labour; female often (perhaps more so in West Africa) on food processing and small to medium scale commerce.

Examination of these patterns do suggest several policy points only some of which are intuitively obvious to policy makers and technicians:

- a. off season opportunities for work which raises quality of life and especially future productive potential is needed - especially for men. This can include decentralised, low cash input community works and/or seasonal public works employment, e.g. small scale irrigation, education, extension and health facility (including staff housing) construction, improved farm family housing and storage construction, small scale civil engineering (e.g. wells, semi all-weather tracks, erosion control works), reafforestation for environmental protection linked with fuel, food and

fodder provision and cash income generation;

- b. labour reducing technologies (subject to their capital cost) are needed for peak labour requirement periods usually including soil preparation, planting and harvest. One example - perhaps a non obvious one - is introducing new crops whose labour input requirement time profile diverges significantly from present main crops thus reducing peak period bottlenecks;
- c. however, for women the prime need is for labour saving innovations perhaps particularly in respect to wooding (fuelling), watering and - sometimes - food preparation. As their seasonal time profiles typically do not include a long 'slack' season the need to concentrate on labour saving at particular times is less than for male labour time. Reafforestation (e.g. household or community woodlots) and small scale 'waterworks' (wells, spring protection, trenched pipes, check dams) are perhaps especially relevant in this context as these activities frequently bulk large in demands on women's time and because the construction labour input requirements frequently fall dominantly on the male side of the traditional division of labour;
- d. because there are few - if any - peasant households without what they perceive as basic needs which can be met only by cash, cash income generating opportunities need to be increased. To the extent that one specific goal is increased child welfare there is need for particular attention to women's opportunities as in practice most expenditures on children are made by women. In many cases increased cash earnings - whether from crops or otherwise - can directly augment food security because at present the only access to needed cash is to sell a portion of already inadequate food production which could and would be reserved for household use if other cash generating activities were available;
- e. specific case by case attention to gender division of labour and of land and labour use rights is needed to avoid unpleasant surprises. For example, if well construction and tree planting are male but well maintenance and tree tending are female, women must be involved in project design and skills training or there will be 'inexplicably' high proportions of broken down wells and dead seedlings. More generally it

matters whether - within a household - women do not till land, till jointly with men on the same land, till separate plots themselves or are primarily responsible for separate plots but have certain obligations to make labour inputs to the male head of household's plots and also certain claims on male household members' labour time for specific tasks in relation to their plots. (The last is probably the commonest pattern.)

Conclusion, Confusion, Confrontation

The foregoing examples and reflections clearly do not lead by themselves to any general, let alone specific contextual packages of measures to be taken. In one sense they are - and are intended to be - destructive. They stress complexity and contextuality because the record of approaches which reduced the number of relevant problems and constraints to one or two and assumed that a general Sub-Saharan context uniform and simple enough to make directly applicable policies on an off the shelf, continental basis existed is very poor indeed. Occam's razor is one thing - crude reductionism quite another and while the horizontal distance between the two may sometimes be narrow, the chasm between tends to be quite deep. Similarly, it is useful to identify common (in the sense of frequent, not of universal) factors and to construct tentative systemic analytical schema from them but very dangerous to assume that tentative conclusions can be assumed to be applicable to all cases and contexts - some will be exceptions - or applicable without adaptation to more than a handful.

Whether the examples suggest the need for inter or multi disciplinary work as normally described is unclear. They do suggest that a number of elements ranging from population patterns and levels through land tenure systems (including intra household ones) are frequently relevant. Clearly no one person or discipline can be an expert on all of these. However, most of the particular points made here are at the least not universally emphasised (or even accepted) by analysts and practitioners of the disciplines with which they are most closely linked whether demography or law, pastoral sociology or gender relations. The requirement therefore seems in one sense to be one for a particular type of generalism linked to a readiness to look for new interactions (sometimes called lateral thinking) both by groups of people (who may individually all be specialists) and by individuals.

Unfortunately it is not at all clear that the current thrusts either in research or in policy making and implementation - especially by Africans in Africa - are moving in that direction. There appear to be conflicting tendencies. The lessons of experience - to the extent they do not force total day to day crisis management to the exclusion of even medium term analysis and reformulation on the applied personnel - probably do thrust in the direction suggested. But the quest for quality defined as rigorousness and especially complex, quantified analysis frequently leads to increased specialisation and to models which reduce the numbers of variables and inter-relationships (and the forms in which they may be specified) to a degree which raises very real dangers of tunnel vision and reductionism. On the whole, both the reward structures (in prestige as well as pecuniary) and the premium placed on apolitical, easily generalizable, specific expertise by international and first world development agencies and by the global (dominantly northern) professional and academic communities tend to reinforce the second tendency. Certainly the approach advocated needs a foundation of more and more rigorous specialised knowledge than is now available. But it also requires an orientation - at least among a substantial critical mass of academics, managers, policy makers and applied professionals - to seek to explore interactions among specialised bodies of knowledge and their relation to specific contexts in order to arrive at time and place specific operational (as well as analytical) syntheses.

Source Note

This paper is basically reflective. Its examples flow largely from first hand observation, discussions with persons directly involved (some of whom would certainly not agree with the inferences drawn) and quite general reading on a fairly broad front of applied as well as contextually specific analytical literature. The following list of sources and related materials is, therefore, not in any normal sense a reference list nor does it have much claim to completeness.

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Author Note

Reginald Herbold Green has been a student of the political economy of Africa for slightly over a quarter century. He has been a consultant to SADCC, a member of its London Liaison Committee (and predecessors) since 1978 as well as an advisor to several African governments and organisations as well as to SWAPO of Namibia and to international organisations. He has recently been involved in a UNICEF Study on "Southern Africa's Children: The Price of War", an economic situation report for the government of Mozambique, an evaluation of the cost of South African aggression and a political economic strategic programme for combatting it for SADCC and a study on "Strengthening the Front Line" for ICFTU. An article summarising some of this work appears in Third World Affairs: 1987, Third World Foundation, London 1986, while an earlier presentation of parts of it appears in Destructive Engagement: Southern Africa At War, chapter "Regional Political Economies in Conflict: South African Hegemony vs SADCC Liberation" with Carol Thompson, edited by D. Martin and P. Johnson, Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1986.