5 Women’s Role in Securing Peasant Livelihood

Since the 1970s, ‘women’ has become a focal subject in development theory and practice. The discussion on the role of women in development is controversial not only in international development organizations, non-governmental and governmental organizations, but also within the women’s movement itself. The debate touches the basis of gender diversity and thus tends to be overloaded with ideologies.

Recently, scholars recommended to use a ‘livelihoods systems concept’ to analyze women in poverty. They defined ‘livelihoods systems’ as ‘the mix of individual and household survival strategies, developed over a given period of time, that seeks to mobilize available resources and opportunities...Resources can be physical assets... human assets ... social assets and collective assets. Opportunities include kin and friendship networks, institutional mechanisms organizational and group membership and partnership relations.’ (Grown and Sebstad, 1989, p. 941). To understand the gender aspects of ‘livelihood systems’, some relevant issues of the ongoing discussion on women and development are presented below.

CONCEPTS OF WOMEN’S ROLE IN THE UNDERDEVELOPED WORLD

Key terms dominating the discussion have been ‘reproductive work’, ‘gender’, ‘gender relations’, ‘male bias’, ‘patriarchy’ and ‘empowerment’.

‘Reproduction’ includes a generative, a socializing and a regenerative aspect. ‘Generative reproduction’ is defined as the biological ‘production’ of new producers, including begetting, pregnancy, birth and care of infants. ‘Socializing reproduction’ comprises the physical and psychological care, upbringing and schooling of children. ‘Regenerative reproduction’ covers the activities necessary to restore an exhausted labour force, like provision of food, drinks, shelter, clothes, physical and psychological health care and care of sick, aged and disabled people (Lenz, 1984, p. 95). The activities involved in these
three spheres are also covered by the term 'reproductive work'. Except for generative reproduction, which biologically determines different roles for each sex, the reproductive activities could be performed by each sex alike.

In most societies of the world, the social relations ascribe the bulk of the reproductive work to women. The differentiation between male and female according to different processes of socialization is termed 'gender difference' (Jaquette, 1988; Whitehead, 1981; Rosaldo, 1974). The patterns of behaviour and the social and economic roles men and women adopt according to their socialization vary between cultures. In contrast to the biological sexes, 'gender' is a social construct. It is also an ideology which creates, legitimates and constrains choices according to sex (West and Zimmermann, 1987, p. 147). Gender systems tend to create a hierarchy between male and female. Usually attributes and activities associated with men are given a higher value than those of women (Benería and Roldán, 1987, p. 12). Ascribing child-raising to women is an example of the implications of gender ideology. Because this responsibility is not shared within the society as a whole but regarded as the private charge of mothers, their access to income-generating activities and to markets is constrained. This is frequently extended to childless women who from the outset are regarded as future mothers and therefore do not receive full entitlement to economic activities. The oppressed gender holds a contradictory position within this system: women frequently do not protest against or challenge their oppressors but they become 'implicit accomplice(s)' (Sen, 1990, p. 126) of the unequal order.1

'Gender relations' are typically characterized by power on the basis of sex (Moore, 1988; Acker, 1988; Scott, 1986). The notion of 'male bias' is applied for asymmetric gender relations, which comprise social, political, economic or cultural inequality adversely affecting women, especially by withholding entitlements from them which men enjoy. A male-dominated society, to which equal rights for women and men are not natural, is termed 'patriarchy'. The capitalist society is shaped by patriarchal structures. Among other things, these are expressed in the fact that a monetary value is attached to productive work, but not to reproductive work, thus discriminating against particularly women's activities. A strength of the concept of gender relations is that it reveals power relations between the sexes (Wolf, 1990; Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Stichter and Parpart, 1988), but also differences among women (Cole, 1986; Gaitskell et al., 1983; Flax, 1987). The policy impact on women of different classes as well as
different forms of women’s political action can be specified within this concept (Berger, 1990; Benería and Roldán, 1987; March and Taququ, 1986; Moore, 1986; Constantinides, 1982; Urdang, 1979).

In Africa the colonial powers reinforced patriarchy. They strengthened the importance of men in the public and productive sectors, extending a share of the executive power to male African leaders and pushing particularly men into wage work. This laid the foundation for the technological superiority of men’s over women’s production. Development projects tend to enhance this, supplying men with means of production to increase their productivity in areas which have been productive domains of women before, such as agriculture and certain trades (Rogers, 1980).

In a number of African countries, the patriarchal leaders have adopted Islam as the state religion. Islamic rules tend to be applied in a way that makes women and non-Muslims citizens with less rights in family law and law of inheritance than men (Laudowicz, 1992). Islam can thus be used as a tool for male power-holders to justify the suppression of women.

In the majority of the industrialized countries, women have only recently won the right to vote and to be elected, access to education on all levels, access to income and in a few countries the right to decide over their own bodies. Still, in the First as well as in the Third World, women are highly underrepresented in political, academic and economic leading positions, own less assets and are paid less than men, are much more frequently victims of sexual violence than men and depend socially and economically much more on men than vice versa. The care of children is far more often the responsibility of women than of men, whereas the formal right to children is more frequently with the fathers than with the mothers. Many more patriarchal structures appear in social relations, culture, ideologies, science, physical and psychological conduct, sexuality and language, which give evidence of the fact that more power is attached to men than to women all over the world.

Many women’s organizations have been founded in every country to raise consciousness and struggle against patriarchal gender relations. Main issues of their analysis are reviewed in the following sections.

The ‘Women in Development’ (WID) Approach

Boserup was the first to point out that women in the Third World continued to do the bulk of subsistence work at a time when
transactions of goods and labour were being increasingly commoditized. Her basic assumption was a development pattern which would inevitably lead to urbanization and modernization similar to that of the industrialized countries. However, whereas modernization increased the income and productivity of men, the productivity of the type of work allocated to women remained low. Boserup observed that the changes in the gender-specific division of labour caused by technical innovations tended to burden women with more work, while their economic independence and social status decreased. From Boserup’s point of view, development needs continuous market expansion in order to restrict the economic importance of the subsistence sector in the Third World (Boserup, 1982, p. 165).

Boserup’s disclosure of the important role women have in production had far-reaching consequences for the academic debate as well as for development planning. Research on women flourished. Special fields were analyses of the gender-specific labour division and of the schedules of Third World women’s work. Field studies disclosed that in peasant societies, women tend to work longer hours than men, household work being almost wholly performed by women (McSweeney, 1979). Whereas the amount of women’s farm work is limited by their obligations in household work and child raising, men’s time to earn cash income is much less restricted by household duties. Thus, women’s and men’s labour are not interchangeable, because their tasks are determined along gender lines. Based on these findings, the concept of the new home economics which starts out from the assumption of the perfect substitutability of men’s and women’s labour according to comparative advantages at the market, has been criticized (Ellis, 1988, p. 174). It has been concluded that these patterns inevitably lead to women being economically dependent on men.

The new insights in the importance of women’s work culminated in the declaration of the UN Women’s Decade 1975–85. Since then women have become a special target group in many development organizations and ministries. Equal access for girls and boys, women and men to education, training and resources has grown into a major development aim. Institutions like the World Bank and governmental organizations have started to use the notion of ‘empowerment of women’, implying that the development deficit of women could be made up with the help of formal and technical measures. Thus women have been included in the mainstream development as potential resources which have yet to be used in a more efficient way (The World Bank, 1989, p. 79).
‘Empowerment of women’ in this sense signifies integrating women in the already existing development pattern. The supporters of this approach consider development in the direction already pursued as promising, if women and, moreover, the preservation of nature, are included. They do not question the underlying power relations and the direction of the present development strategies themselves. The causes of women’s suppression and the ‘feminization of poverty’ during the 1980s are not touched by this approach. Accordingly, women are not regarded as victims of the environmental crisis, as they were before, but as privileged environmental managers. Agencies ascribe an intimate knowledge of natural processes to women, due to their close relationship with nature and regard them as being predestined to solve the ecological crisis (Charkiewicz-Pluta and Hausler, 1991, p. 25). This approach burdens (Third World) women with the main responsibility for solving problems which have been created by the capitalist, patriarchal society. Furthermore, it neglects the specific knowledge of nature which men in rural economies have acquired as farmers or healers. In practice, women are compelled to use their precious time for reafforestation and other environmental tasks, but inequality remains: mostly they neither get legal access to land nor legal control over the resources they create in the frame of this kind of development projects, nor are they involved in decision-making, nor is the traditional gender-specific division of labour changed (Monimart, 1989; Wichterich, 1992, p. 72). In fact, women tend to be used as a cheap labour force for the aims of external decision-makers.

The success of the WID approach is due to the fact that it does not fundamentally criticize the mainstream development policies. The most important achievement of WID promoters is to have made governments as well as national and international organizations aware of women’s work, women’s importance for food security and women’s significance for the success of development.

The Relation between Peasant Women’s Subsistence Production and Capitalism

Meillassoux (1983, first published in 1975) particularly investigated how imperialism exploits the ‘domestic community’. He found that capitalism uses ‘domestic reproduction’, that is, mainly peasant women’s unpaid labour, as a means to reproduce the labour force which is utilized for capitalist production. On this basis the term ‘tributary function of the traditional sector’ has been developed
(Tetzlaff, 1979, p. 339), expressing that capitalism functionalizes the ‘traditional sector’ with the result that ‘structural heterogeneity’ (Cordova, 1973) is continuously produced and re-established.

Later in his analysis, Meillassoux got close to Boserup’s conclusion, with one important difference: Boserup regarded the dissolution of the subsistence sector and the market integration of Third World women as progress and a precondition for social welfare (Boserup, 1982, p. 163 and p. 212). Meillassoux also concluded that the unpaid ‘domestic reproduction’ tends to be broken up, but he expected from this process the destruction of affective relations which he considered to be the last bastion of the domestic sector against capitalism (Meillassoux, 1983, p. 164). He held the struggle of youth and women for their emancipation to be movements which, however unintentionally, foster the development of capitalism. In his view, capitalism recruits its free labourers continuously by destroying the privileges of the domestic community, of the patriarchy, of the father and, recently, of the mother (Meillassoux, 1983, p. 162).

By Meillassoux’s theoretical approach, part of the relationship between the subsistence sector and capitalism and women’s and peasants’ specific role have been settled. However, he and the scholars of the 1970s who followed a similar line of argument failed to recognize gender as the crucial factor by which economic relations are split up into production and reproduction.

Werlhof, Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1983) focussed their analysis on the special function of women for capitalism. Contrary to Meillassoux, they assumed an alliance of capitalism with the patriarchy. They saw a common aspect in the relationship of ‘the patriarchy’ with women, with the Third World and with nature, namely their colonization and exploitation through direct and structural violence. From this angle, they analyzed the subsistence sector. Contrary to Boserup, they concluded that self-determination of women is greater in the subsistence sector than in the commoditized sector. Mies (1988) derived from the alleged power of the subsistence-oriented women an eco-feminist utopia, which is characterized by saving the ecology, absence of violence, decentral structures, labour-intensive production (including a new meaning and value of work), rural orientation, dissociation from the world market, absence of hierarchies and ‘released consumption’.

In contrast to Meillassoux’s, this approach excludes the social dimension and ignores the internal contradictions and dynamics of capitalism. Furthermore, the authors neglect the involvement of
women in the market (Lenz, 1988, p. 173) and the 'feminization of the labour force' (Standing, 1989). Instead, they state a global tendency towards 'housewife-ization' (Werlhof, 1983). Furthermore, the approach is based on the very contentious anthropological key assumption that the relation of women towards nature is cooperative, whereas that of men is instrumental. Finally, it excludes the aspect of autonomy of women who live and work in the industrial and service sectors of the economy (Lenz, 1984; Donner-Reichle, 1987). Two progressive elements of this approach are: taking up women's resistance as the starting point for analyzing how patriarchy oppresses women and considering sexist violence against women in the industrialized and in the underdeveloped world as a characteristic inherent to the present patriarchal society. Gender relations are thus part and parcel of this approach.

The relations between women's subsistence production and capitalism have also become a focus of analysis for Third World scholars. The failure of the modernization strategies of development and the concomitant worldwide rising awareness of the ecological devastation they have brought about led to harsh criticism of the prevailing development pattern. Nandy (1987), Visvanathan (1987) and Shiva (1989) consequently fundamentally oppose western science and the western idea of the market economy. Shiva points out that western science has a reductionist character. Serving an economic structure based on exploitation, profit maximization and capital accumulation, it extinguishes the diversity of nature, livelihood and culture. Science has become a prominent tool of the dominant classes to deprive peasants of their livelihood and destroy nature (Shiva, 1988). Shiva and other critics postulate a 'people's science of life' to overcome poverty, degradation of the environment and subjugation of peasants. The methods would be observation, revived traditional knowledge, intuition, experience, feeling and other approaches derived from daily life perceptions. The basis of development would be traditional subsistence agriculture, ruled by the 'feminine principle' which originates in Hindu cosmology and refers to the life-giving force (Shiva, 1989, p. 223). Participatory democracy is regarded as crucial for socially and ecologically sustainable development. This critique has become the background for influential women's movements in the Third World.

Like Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and von Werlhof, the Indian scholars perceive the local movements, which are mostly carried out by women rural producers, as an important means of protecting the
peasants’ interests against national or international interests. Shiva regards women as being closer to nature than men, therefore she ascribes to them a specific knowledge of ecological health. The representatives of this approach attack consumerism in north and south and demand simple lifestyles, the primacy of ‘being’ over ‘having’ (Fromm, 1981) and human and nature’s integrity as opposed to the perception of people and nature as resources. As a consequence, they postulate polyphonic and polycentric developments, enhanced subsistence production and local use of local resources (Charkiewicz-Pluta and Hausler, 1991, p. 12).

Implicitly this approach substantiates the present gender-specific division of labour theoretically, which in fact, especially in Third World countries, puts women closer to nature and the environment than men. It tends thus to burden women more than men with the responsibility of saving nature. Although it attacks international exploitative relations and violence of the state against society, it fails to consider and explain the patriarchal structure, caste and class relations and exploitation within Third World nations.

The Invisibility of Women’s Work

Part of the international feminist discussion questions the methodology of mainstream economics, accusing it of excluding women-specific economic activities due to a male-biased conception. Two related approaches which draw conclusions from the analysis of gender relations are introduced here, that of Waring (1988) and that of Whitehead (1990).

Waring targets the United Nations System of National Accounting (UNNSA) which sets standards for national account statistics and international reports of IMF, World Bank and UN agencies. To measure economic growth, UNNSA puts values on production and on interactions of people at the market.

According to Waring, this perception reduces dramatically the multitude of values existing in human societies. She points out that UNNSA cannot respond to values it has not recognized (Waring, 1988, p. 4). Applied to the reality of Third World countries, the UNNSA, developed in an industrialized environment and in a western cultural system, does not address traditional sustainable agriculture as an important factor of economic wellbeing. Political decisions therefore neglect this sector or perceive it as backward and, thus, as being in need of modernization in a western sense. Also women’s household
labour, peace, individual and social wellbeing and the health of the environment are values which are not counted. This results in the ‘paradox...that the eight hours’ walk of a Tanzanian woman to fetch water is seen as an unproductive activity while the clean up of the chemical spillage or the production and maintenance of nuclear weapons produce additional value and contribute to economic growth’ (Charkiewicz-Pluta and Hauser, 1991, p. 39). Waring warns that the global application of the UNSNA standard guarantees that the particular view of economy it promotes determines the adoption of future policy guidelines on a world scale. She shows that the UNSNA ‘serves as a tool to perpetuate reductionist economic values ... and therefore it is instrumental in the production of an economic reality which contributes to the destruction of the environment and subordination of women’ (Charkiewicz-Pluta and Hauser, 1991, p. 39). Waring proposes including women’s work, environmental accounting, the distinction between destructive and creative production and economic welfare measurements in the UNSNA. The recent UNDP reports take part of this criticism into account. But still, the data base on women is inadequate for fully including their work in the statistics.

Whitehead focusses her critique on the widespread hypothesis that self-interest is the mainspring of economic behaviour. Evidence shows that mothers are more likely to feel responsible for feeding their children and even renounce their own benefits in favour of children, whereas fathers tend to satisfy their own needs first. Whitehead found out that husbands and wives frequently compete for the rewards that an increase of effort or a change of labour allocation may bring. However, whereas once goods were circulating within the family, now money prevails and money is shared differently from food (Whitehead, 1990, p. 8). Distribution of income within the family tends to become an intense field of dispute.

Usually, economic theorists fail to consider these specific gender relations while analyzing economic actions of households. As a consequence, their analyses might lead to unsuccessful development efforts. It is evident from this anthropological research that the ‘household’ in Africa is too complex a notion as to be useful for a model to explain economic decision-making. Therefore, it has been proposed to analyze decision-making by an individual approach combined with ‘tracing networks of interdependence and distribution, both within and beyond domestic units’ (Guyer, 1986, pp. 93, 98).
With her analysis, Whitehead refutes part of Boserup’s assumptions on women’s confinement to subsistence production. From her results it follows that in many societies and cultures, a male head of household is not necessarily the most appropriate person to give information about other members of the domestic group. Taking into consideration that work is divided along gender lines and that even the perception of work differs between genders, it is reasonable to study women’s work by concentrating interviews and observations on women. As many case studies show, this is by no means a matter of course.

Steps Towards a Woman-centred Development Approach

At the United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, ‘Development with Women for a New Era’ (DAWN), an international network of Third World women, for the first time appeared in public (Wichterich, 1987, p. 139; Satzinger, 1987). It has become one of the most influential critics from the south against mainstream western-dominated development thinking. The criticism is also directed at the WID approach, which holds that women are included too little in development. Analyses of DAWN reveal that, on the contrary, women’s paid and unpaid contributions are the fundament on which development is constructed. Antrobus (1989) points to the costs women paid and still pay for this development pattern, the exploitation of their time, labour and sexuality. She criticizes the primacy of economic growth, which WID shares and points out that this economic model capitalizes on the role of women in the reproductive sector. With the example of structural adjustment she shows how women compensate cuts in government spending for social services by intensifying their effort. As a second example, she presents export production in free trade zones which uses women as a cheap labour force, thus subjugating them under the interests of multinational concerns.

DAWN rejects the patriarchal and capitalist structures, because they instrumentalize Third World women. It particularly turns against the prevailing population policy which aims at reducing the birthrate by wielding power over the women’s bodies (Rott, 1989). The group demands the right for women to decide over their own bodies, presuming that ultimately success in reducing birth rates will depend on the desire of individual women to have less children (Charkiewicz-Pluta and Hausler, 1991, p. 58).
DAWN's methodology is based on feminism, the roots of which can be traced back to the struggles for national liberation from colonialism and to peasant and workers' struggles. Three principles rule the methodology:

1. **Rejecting the separation of private and public domains** Personal and political reality, household and economy, feeling and rationality are not regarded as opposites, but as factors forming the whole. This principle embraces the values of the international women's movements, which are cooperation, resistance to hierarchies, sharing, accountability and commitment to peace. A practical realization of this principle would be one step to overcoming patriarchal gender relations in favour of equal relations.

2. **A deductive approach** The studies of DAWN members start from analyses of micro-level experiences of poor rural and urban Third World women in order to construct macro-economic models on this foundation.

3. **Respect for diversity** The regional variations in the economic situation affect women differently and are therefore carefully considered. Social, cultural and political dimensions are integrated into economic analysis. This holistic approach opposes reductionist or generalizing scientific methods.

This methodology creates a new practice of science, a people-centred 'science of empathy' which uses intuition and reason simultaneously (Charkiewicz-Pluta and Hausler, 1991, p. 56). The aims of DAWN are equitable development and building a 'society from women's perspective' (Sen and Grown, 1988), based on the experience, perceptions and analysis of southern women. Women peasants, being at the point of intersection of reproduction and production, sustainable development and ecological disaster, population and land, are regarded as central to achieving a balance in these areas. From DAWN's point of view, the combined oppression of race, class and gender affecting poor Third World women necessitates multiple actions of liberation which should be executed simultaneously. Hence they advocate empowerment of Third World women as part of the empowerment of Third World countries *vis-à-vis* the western industrialized countries. 'Empowerment' in this sense does not correspond to domination over others as in WID thinking, but means increased self-reliance of women, internal strength and control over material and non-material resources in order to make their own choices. Antrobus (1989, p. 203)
defines empowerment as 'creating the space and the conditions in which women...can do their own gender analysis and - on the basis of this analysis - organize to define for themselves the long-term requirements for change and...to challenge policies that are against their strategic gender interests...In short, it means support for autonomous women's organizations.' This implies radical changes within the organizational structures of government agencies and of the development establishment. Therefore, these institutions do not support DAWN's empowerment postulate.

The DAWN approach combines several aspects of the subsistence-oriented stream of the debate presented above. It transcends them by including social and political dimensions and by being aware of global contradictions which come to light in class, race and gender oppression. It is innovative in its methodology, which still has to prove its reliability. The success of the strategy to put the focus of change on poor Third World women will depend on the ability of DAWN to spread the network to the marginal areas in the south.

DAWN ascribes a crucial position to peasant women for generating a new and more human development. This implies again that these women are burdened with the responsibility for solving the problems which have been caused by others. On the other hand, it transcends this by demanding empowerment for women and Third World countries as well as new structures within development organizations. Peasant women are thus not regarded as being the only carriers of change.

The 'World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet' in Miami in November 1991 was convoked in order to agree on an agenda for women, which was forwarded to the UNCED Conference on sustainability and environment held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The 'Women’s Action Agenda 21' is the first international document which unites the broad spectrum of international women's groups under the umbrella of the responsibility of humankind for the environment. It goes beyond the mainstream development approach of WID by challenging the capitalist and patriarchal structures of the international economic, scientific and ethic system and by calling the industrialized countries to account for the crisis of the Third World countries. On the other hand, it does not, as the eco-feminist scholars do, encourage the preservation of women's subsistence production in the Third World as the sole solution to the crisis of development. Instead, it claims to strengthen (ecological) education, training and employment, political participation and decision-making for women
and men alike. Implicitly, the Conference demands reparations, reforms, equality and an ethic of nature and humankind within the capitalist structures. This is questionable, but cannot be discussed in the frame of this study.

The following elements of the feminist debate are useful to be employed in the livelihood approach:

- the reproductive work;
- the gender-specific division of labour, of entitlements to land and other resources;
- the gender-specific division of responsibility for others and of decision-making with special regard to its impact on livelihood security;
- the relationship of women to ecological destruction and preservation of the environment;
- peasant women’s integration in the capitalist economy;
- class differences affecting women’s access to livelihood options;
- the impact of gender-specific social and cultural values on the livelihood security of rural people.

IMPACT OF GENDER RELATIONS ON THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN SUDAN

The gender relations in Sudan are manifold and dynamic. They correspond to the huge diversity of cultures and social relations in the country. Although it is beyond the frame of this study to present a survey of the role of women in the diverse Sudanese subsocieties and ethnic groups, some general characteristics ought to be mentioned.

National indicators show female–male gaps in formal education, participation in political decision-making and occupation. The literacy rate of men in the age group above 15 years is 43 per cent, that of women 12 per cent. The mean years of schooling among the age group above 25 amount to 1.1 years for men and half a year for women (UNDP, 1992, p. 137). The proportion of girls to boys (boys=100) in school enrolment in primary schools is 71, in secondary schools 74 and in tertiary schools 66. In 1988, only 1 per cent of members in parliament was female (UNDP, 1992, p. 145).

The male–female gaps are even wider, if rural–urban and regional differences are taken into account. However, no gender-specified figures about this have been collected. But a comparison between rural and urban access to health services and clean water provides
an impression on the gap. Forty per cent of the rural population have access to health services and 10 per cent to clean water. On the other hand, 90 per cent of the urban population (22 per cent of the total population live in towns), have access to health services and 60 per cent to clean water (UNDP, 1992, p. 147).

The constraints girls and women face with regard to formal education are rooted in different levels. On the surface, the costs of schooling and in rural areas, especially in south Sudan, the scarcity of schools within reach are causes for illiteracy, short periods of schooling and low enrolment rates among girls. A second level of causes is the gender-specific division of labour which ascribes reproductive work, food processing and in rural areas frequently also subsistence production, certain types of cash crop production and services to women. The fertility rate of 6.4 in 1990 and the annual population growth rate of 2.8 between 1980 and 1988 (UNDP, 1992, p. 171) indicate that women are very much confined to reproductive obligations. The high fertility rate in turn is a response to the under-five mortality rate which amounts to 172 per 1000 live births (UNDP, 1992, p. 149). The labour of the girls is part of this productive and reproductive system. Girls have to break off school as soon as labour shortage requires them to assist their mothers. Hence, families mostly prefer to pay for boys’ education, expecting them to contribute to the family income later.

Engagement in politics is largely a domain of men, although elderly women’s advice is also accepted. Especially in the Islamic regions of Sudan, for women of child-bearing age it is culturally unacceptable to appear in front of public audiences. Therefore the proportion of women in political organizations is very low.

The proportion of women in the national labour force was 29.1 per cent in 1988–90 (UNDP, 1992, p. 159). Employment opportunities mainly exist in towns and agricultural schemes, whereas unpaid agricultural labour by women prevails in the countryside. In the northern and central regions, irrigated and mechanized cultivation has reduced the resident women’s participation in agricultural work. This is reflected in a movement toward a more orthodox Islamic belief which confirms female seclusion ideologically. Whereas middle-class women in these areas are confined to the house, women migrants from other areas, mostly from Kordofan, as well as resident girls and older women from poor families are seasonally hired for cotton picking. The wages are low compared with the rates for other agricultural work (Bernal, 1988, p. 131). In northern and central Sudan, women’s
labour contribution generally has been marginalized, not only in farming societies, but also in nomadic groups (Holter, 1993). The women have lost control over the food supply, which had previously guaranteed them an important position in the household. Their influence in household decision-making has declined. They have become dependent upon men for cash (Bernal, 1988, p. 150). This confirms the thesis of Whitehead that economic development might change bargaining positions between genders. The flow of money has strengthened the bargaining power of men and made women more dependent on men’s decisions.

In the ‘traditional’ sector, this has been different. To bridge the lack of thorough studies elsewhere, the case of Kutum appears to be suitable for a gender analysis, because many livelihood sectors employed in Kutum can be found in other peasant areas of rural Sudan too.

THE GENDER-SPECIFIC DIVISION OF LABOUR IN KUTUM

Women participate in all fields of rural production and trade and do the bulk of the reproductive work. However, according to the angle from which women’s economic roles are considered, different views occur. According to the qualitative methodological approach, three perspectives can be presented and compared. These are public opinion, a woman’s lifecycle and Kutum women’s perspective.

Public Opinion

The first step of a field researcher should be a meeting with officials in order to explain subject and aim of the study and to gain permission. During the research in Kutum, the officials tended to answer all questions concerning women’s work at length, but seemed to be slightly puzzled that I still wanted to speak to the women themselves. The points of view of the officials are supposed to indicate the way ‘society’ reflects gender issues. They are summarized in the following statements:

A woman has only little work to do, just cooking and cleaning. She can use her leisure time efficiently for gardening.

(Head of the Agricultural Department, Kutum)
The gardens are so small that one woman can work it easily on her own, while the men can earn more money elsewhere.

(Officers at the Council)

Along the *wadi* there are living a lot of unmarried wealthy women, who gathered all the furniture required for marriage through their incomes from garden production. Now they are waiting for husbands to marry them.

(Head of the Office for Youth, Sports and Social Welfare)

These utterances give the impression that horticulture is a lucrative sideline for women, the income of which they spend on their personal needs. To complete ‘official’ information on women’s occupations I was kindly permitted to see the registration lists of two schools. These lists contain data on the pupils’ families. Concerning my interest in the occupations of the mothers, the lists were disappointing. They only contained information on the fathers, on their occupations, unemployment or death. The mothers’ occupations were not mentioned at all. This corresponds to the picture expressed in national statistics, according to which 29.1 per cent of the total labour force were women. The low figure is only explicable if the bulk of the activities requiring women’s labour are not counted at all (Ahmed *et al.*, 1987, p. 25). The male bias in valuing the contributions of household members to a family’s livelihood is evident.

The ‘official’ view on women’s work is contrasted with further analyses of women’s economic roles below.

**Survey of a Woman’s Lifecycle**

In a second approach, spheres where women’s labour is required and ways in which women subsist are pointed out by a typologized survey of economic aspects during a peasant woman’s lifecycle. The typology is derived from a sedentary Kutum woman who is active in agriculture, gardening, trading and the general household chore. In the case of nomadic and rural women belonging to different socio-cultural environments, certain but not profound deviations occur.

A northern Sudanese peasant woman’s lifecycle can be divided into the following stages: small girl, circumcized girl, unmarried woman, married woman, mother of small children, mother of unmarried young adults and grandmother.
The small girl up to the age of seven is primarily a consumer. Her consumption of food and clothes is restricted in poor and middle-class households. She usually eats the food left over by the male family members, which is mostly stomach-filling asida with sauce. Milk has become rare since the drought, because many people have lost their livestock. The small girl wears cheap, mostly worn-out dresses and either no shoes at all or slippers or sandals made from tyres. At the age of three or four, she starts to care for her younger brothers or sisters, to help her mother in the household, to carry water in little buckets on her head, to collect firewood and to fetch small things for her mother. If the family owns animals, she drives the goats or sheep to the pasture in the morning and back home in the evening, sometimes together with her brothers.

When she is between seven and sixteen years old, the girl takes over more and more of the household work, starts sowing and weeding in the field and garden, milks animals, fetches water from the well and after the rainy season from the wadi, collects fuel wood and sells crops or processed food. Most of the girls of this age go to school. But frequently they break off before completing primary school, because they have to help their mothers. This occurs more often in villages than in Kutum town, due to the differences in the social structure.

After circumcision,\(^\text{4}\) the girl gets new dresses and shoes and wears a small veil. The unmarried woman stays with her mother and takes over the bulk of the work in household, agriculture and horticulture, as well as petty trade with small amounts of crops. Her elder brother or her parents buy her veils, dresses, shoes and some cosmetics which she is recommended to use in order to attract a husband.

In the event of marriage, the bride and her family obtain a considerable amount of money and presents (food, clothes, jewelry, cosmetics) from the bridegroom. They provide the household utensils and part of the furniture in turn. The parents of the bride or bridegroom allocate the young couple a joint field. Frequently, particularly in the Fur and Tunjur areas, the bride is given her own field as well and often receives the right to cultivate a garden in addition. In most cases, the garden plot is legally bequeathed to the husband or to the couple later on. Only rarely is the wife alone entitled to full legal ownership.

In Kutum a woman usually gives birth at least every two years. Many women bear 8 to 12 children during their lives. The hardest time in a woman's life is the stage of being a mother to small children who cannot yet assist her in her work. Child care is added to the work in household, field, garden and possibly craft and trade. In Kutum
region, women carry their babies on their backs, wrapped in a piece of cloth tied round their bodies, until the children are capable of walking. Because food and cash crop production are complementary due to the different seasons of cultivation, the women work constantly throughout the year, with peaks during weeding and harvesting periods. Only those who do not produce or sell and resell cash crops are able to relax during the hot summer months. Also nomadic women are responsible for food provision throughout the year. They mostly stay in stationary camps or huts, keep some small livestock, grow millet and some of them even take up gardening (Holter, 1993).

If there are several small children, the woman cannot fulfil all her obligations. In case there is no sister or other relative to help her and if this cannot be compensated by a sufficient income from the husband, a shortage of food or neglect of the children or of the household work will inevitably be the consequence. Although a woman usually lives near her relatives or even in the same hosh with her husband’s family, she keeps her own household with her husband and children, has her own cooking place (burma), grows crops for her core family and uses the cash earned to buy food for them. Only in cases of need or shortage do the relatives help one another with the necessary items.

Reciprocal activities occasionally occur among women gardeners who sometimes have breakfast together and help each other during labour peaks. In many cases however, each woman works alone on her plot and exchanges only greetings with her colleagues. The same pattern appears at the market. Some women may sit together with their relatives and colleagues, share information about the prices and qualities of the day and send girls or women to buy certain crops or commodities for them. Others have little contact and sell and buy their goods in isolation.

The mother of unmarried young adults is released from a big share of the drudgery, because her children, especially her daughters, take over a lot of work. In poor households, the mother buys only the most necessary clothes for herself and gives her unmarried daughters the chance to dress nicely in order to find a suitable husband.

The grandmother participates in all the spheres of work described above, including care for her grandchildren, according to her strength and health. She usually stays with one of her children. The grandmother generally consumes very little for herself, leaving all available money for her children and grandchildren. She divides her field among them and decides who inherits her garden, if she owns one.
This brief overview shows that the woman is responsible for the bulk of the generative, socializing and regenerative reproduction, thus securing the livelihood of her family and contributing to maintaining society as a whole. These obligations limit her chances of obtaining professional qualifications and being mobile and flexible enough to earn a substantial share of the family income. Throughout her life she is productive in agriculture, food processing and perhaps horticulture, animal husbandry or handicraft. In contrast to formal education and employment, these activities do not require a fixed time table but can be combined with reproductive duties.

The survey also shows that during most of her lifetime, a woman does not consume more than is required for her subsistence. The only exception is the stage of the unmarried and newly married woman who needs a collection of clothes and cosmetics in order to be attractive for a husband. Women in the rural upper middle class and rich households consume considerably more commodities than the average peasant woman. The period of high consumption is not limited to the months after the wedding, but it is extended to the whole duration of marriage. This class, however, is very small in Kutum region as well as in all other peripheral regions of Sudan.

Although the tasks ascribed to each gender and age group cannot be generalized for the whole Sudan, basically the monotonous and daily repeated tasks are allotted to women, whereas the bulky and short-time tasks are men’s responsibility. Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil (1985, p. 341) consider this fact to be a right rather than an obligation, pointing out that ‘in fact the historic right of women to work in fields was never a subject of dispute or challenge by men’. Also during the 1988 field work in Kutum, nobody challenged women’s position in food production, but women blamed their husbands for being idle and scolded them for leaving the bulk of field and garden work for their wives.

**Women’s Perspective**

If not indicated otherwise, the following statements stem from Kutum women gardeners:

1. Garden work is hard work, especially during the hot months of April, May and June. It is even harder, if a woman is on her own.
2. Better work at the market than undergo the drudgery of pulling the *dalu*.

(Hay intermediary)
3. The women in north Darfur rely on their own work. They work more than men.
4. The children should grow up healthily. Therefore, the woman has to find enough food for them. Later the children should become farmers or get a good education, so that some of them can migrate and send money. Then the mother can finally relax.
5. Most of the women do not know anything, they can just pull the dahu. The government, the white people or Reagan should send grain to help them.

(An elder onion vendor at the market)

6. The Tunjur men depend on their wives who prepare the land and harvest the crops. The men divide the harvest into one share which is to be sold and another share for storing. The women work like machines and then the men sell their crops.

(Secretary of the Housewives’ Organization)\(^5\)

The statements 1, 2 and 4 reflect a sentiment of toil connected with food production, in particular with manual irrigation. Statements 1, 3, 4 and 6 take up the relations with men. They range from a factual comparison (‘women work more than men’), which perhaps implies complaining of the laziness of men, to accusing men of exploiting women (‘women work like machines, men sell their crops’). It has to be noted that the latter statement was made by a woman who has a physical and thus, also, a mental distance from garden work. It includes an analytical element, whereas the other statements rather express the feeling of being responsible for producing food. The facets of this responsibility vary between the feeling of independence (‘women rely on their own work’) and the perception of a burden (‘hard work, in particular, if the woman is on her own’; ‘then the mother can finally relax’).

Statement 5 reflects resignation. This implies a different quality compared with the other statements, because it expresses a personal conclusion derived from the hardship of work and the experience of starvation due to subsequent crop failures. Aid from outside seems to be the only hope, if the local economy breaks down. The accusal in this statement is directed neither against government policy nor natural disasters nor the division of labour in society, but against the ignorance of the women. Thus the responsibility for the deteriorating situation is indirectly loaded onto women and shouldered by them. At the same time, it is lifted from them, because they are already doing their utmost. It is striking that the woman’s conclusion is not the
demand for education, but for aid. This implies a deep doubt about the capabilities of society and also a basic lack of self-confidence. This attitude might be a consequence of the existential crises during the years of drought combined with the experience of foreign aid in 1984/5.

The analysis shows a high degree of responsibility towards securing the immediate livelihood necessities of the family. The value system prevailing in Kutum society fosters this, exposing a woman to disdain if she spends money on her appearance or other personal needs instead of using it for her family’s needs (Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil, 1985, p. 344). Public opinion vastly underrates women’s labour for livelihood security and ignores the effort, responsibility and renunciation associated with women’s economic role.

GENDER-SPECIFIC ENTITLEMENTS

Women have certain choices and face particular constraints with regard to control over the resources necessary for securing their families’ livelihood.

Access to land is basic for securing food. Although male-dominated privatization of land occurs in the area of Kutum, women do not face any problem in getting land for millet cultivation, even if they live on their own due to divorce or widowhood. A means of access to land which holds especially for men is marriage to more than one woman. This practice applied for nearly one-third of Kutum households in 1988. In polygynous households women often cultivate plots obtained from their own families. If a man has two or more wives, he eats from the harvest of each wife. Because rainfall is frequently limited to small locations, a man who has access to the output of more than one field is more likely to get grain from at least one of his wives than a man who depends on the crops of only one field (Martin, 1985, p. 28). In this case the marriage custom privileges men with regard to their individual livelihood security.

The gardens on the alluvial soil of wadi Kutum are more or less equally divided between men and women. However, men own larger plots than women because, according to Islamic law, a man inherits the double amount of a woman’s heritage. During marriage the gardens are regarded as being in the joint ownership of the couple. In case of divorce the land is usually left with the woman. Thus, as long as privatization of land is carried out informally, women do not
seem to be generally disadvantaged. A different picture emerges in case of land registration. In Kutum, the official act resulted in a distribution of gardens of 90 per cent male and only 10 per cent registered female owners. Apparently, the legal situation has no impact on the use of land though. In 1988 about 90 per cent of the people working in the gardens were women. But the bargaining power over the distribution of the harvest is closely connected with the land tenure rights, giving the casting vote to the legal owner. This indicates that if private land ownership is formalized, it results in an adverse impact on women's rights to land as well as to decisions on the use of the crops produced.

The practice of leaseholding entitles women to land use, but not to land rights. The increase of diesel-pump-driven garden cultivation indicates the dangers for women who have no land rights. Privatization and concomitant technological innovation threaten women's access to land and thus undermine women's part in securing the livelihood of their families.

A further gender difference occurs in the technology used for cultivation. Whereas men tend to use advanced technology for cash crop production, women are largely confined to using the hoe. Thus, a low level of productivity of women's work is maintained (Boserup, 1982).

Possessing animals as an insurance against crop failures is an urgent necessity in an area threatened by droughts. The owner of livestock has bargaining power and can decide on purchase and sale of animals as well as on the use and distribution of cash earned. The household survey in Kutum in 1988 revealed that with rare exceptions men were the owners of livestock.

Ownership of vehicles and assets raises the power of the owner compared to that of other household members or increases his or her independence from them. Usually, internal systems of rights and obligations are connected with this kind of property. Under Islamic law, Muslim women are allocated assets through marriage and inheritance which to a certain degree contribute to their livelihood security in case of divorce or widowhood. Men, on the other hand, own vehicles, mills, workshops, pumps and other equipment.

Income, a crucial factor for the survival of peasants, is mostly generated through informal productive activities and sale of crops and services in addition to subsistence production. Men usually control the income of the farm household. Men's income seldom flows directly into the satisfaction of basic household needs, but rather into social requisites like clothing, fees including school fees, feasts, perso-
nal status symbols like watches and radios and investments like animals, pumps or vehicles. Women tend to spend their money on food and other basic needs, if they have control over finance at all (Grown and Sebstad, 1989, p. 937). In Sudan income of women and children is usually little. However, there are regions where women are economically independent to a certain degree, for example among Fur women. But also there the amount of money women earn is generally much less than that earned by men. On the whole, men are reluctant to spend their income on investments which would reduce women’s work load or improve the diet of the family.

Control over resources increases the power to push through individual interests. Most of the time, a male head of household concentrates control over property, resources and decision-making on economic household affairs in his own hands. The penetration of capitalist norms further restrains women’s entitlements, allotting private ownership, advanced technologies and commercial power to men. Frequently the male head of household also controls the labour time of women, their freedom of movement and their levels of consumption.

SOME NOTES ON HOUSEHOLD MEMBERSHIP

Keeping in mind the methodological demand to integrate Third World women’s perspective while working on Third World societies, it is appropriate here to take up the notion of household Kutum women use. From their point of view, a household comprises all those family members who permanently live in one compound as well as those who are temporarily absent. The limits of ‘temporarily’ depend on the family’s expectation that the absent family member will return. The women also regard resources provided by absent household members and even expected resources as determinant factors for household membership. What seems to be a tautology within a narrow definition of the ‘household’, namely to include migrants in the household notion, is clearly laid down in the women’s notion.

A second, but not exclusive, connotation of ‘household’ derived from Kutum women’s statements is the group definitely living together in one hosh. This is opposed to a notion defined according to the number of hearths. Thus, no notions of sharing, eating together or similar characteristics are involved in this. The relations within the
household have to be analyzed from case to case or from community to community and cannot be generalized.

According to this definition, households are not production and consumption units. The social units referred to are, on the one hand, larger, but at the same time smaller than the ‘household’ notion commonly used. Social power is decisive for the distribution and allocation of time, resources and tasks within any community overlapping with the household. Islamic marriage rules have an impact on intra-household relations in so far as they reflect social and economic relations which are determined by patriarchal power (Roberts, 1983; Mernissi, 1991).

**WOMEN’S ROLE IN SOCIETY**

Socio-economic change always has a particular impact on women’s position in society. The former social power of women was gradually pushed back. The British colonialists included only leading men in their system of rule. This accelerated the decline of women’s political power. Although the former influential position of women in public life is no longer visible today, rudiments have survived in the high social status of grandmothers in Sudan. In contrast to the younger generations, elder women are allowed to speak in public and men listen to their political statements. Although from 1969 onwards, the Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) built up modern educated women cadres, they failed to reach the majority of rural women and to reverse the subordination of women.

In Kutum the social differences between men and women are clearly visible: schools and organizations for boys and men are much more frequent than girls’ schools and women’s organizations. Within organizations, membership of men is far stronger than that of women. In 1988, in the villages of Kutum District no women were members of the party committees, allegedly because of ignorance. In Kutum town some educated women were said to be members of the Umma, but they did not appear in public. The Head of the Umma Party frequently repeated that women were not able to make decisions, that they were not allowed to speak in meetings where men were present and that they ought to and in fact did obey the resolutions of the men. This sheds light on the negligible role women were allowed to play in party politics.

The rise and fall of women’s political participation during the recent history of Sudan can clearly be seen from the case of Samia,
who was the head of a primary school in 1988. The implications of her career can be understood from the way her story was reported to me:

During the rule of Nimeiri, Samia had been one of the first women teachers in Kutum and an active member of the Sudanese Women’s Union. Against the socio-cultural norms, she spoke up in public assemblies. One of her main successes was the establishment of a house in the centre of Kutum where women could meet. However, the society openly showed disrespect. Samia did not find a husband until she was 33 years old, a disgrace for a rural Sudanese woman of this age. The reasons were her profession and her political activity. The man who married her was a Zaghawa teacher. Samia could be lucky that at least a Zaghawa wanted her [implying that a man of her own tribe would have been better accepted]. The Zaghawa men in Kutum are strictly patriarchal and mostly polygynous.

When I met Samia she was 45 and just breastfeeding her fifth child. She told me that she was happy to have borne so many children, because otherwise her husband would have married a second wife. She added that she would have more children if it were Allah’s will.

This case of a well-educated professional woman is of course not typical. However, it shows that even in the rural elite, women are forced to have their domain in the private sphere. Their social competence is measured by their motherhood and by their capability to be an obedient wife, whereas they are regarded as disreputable if they lay emphasis on their professions or political careers.

Another case, this time of a poor woman, also shows the importance of marriage for the social status of women.

Mohassin was in her mid-twenties when I met her in 1988. She had left her home village and came to Kutum during the drought of 1983–85. Her husband had died and left her with three children. The eldest son stayed with his father’s family in the village and went to school there. Her nine-year-old son and her disabled five-year-old daughter were with her in Kutum. Mohassin was working as a domestic servant and took her little daughter with her to the houses where she was employed. Occasionally she produced tabaks and sold them at the market. The boy was working as a shoe cleaner. The family lived in a poor hut on rocky ground close to the centre of Kutum. They usually had only one meal, mostly lentils, per day.
Then an officer, married and father of five children, offered marriage to her. She agreed and soon had another child with her husband. Whilst he continued to live with his first family, she stayed with the three children in her hut. Besides her and her son’s income, she occasionally received a little money from her husband. Furthermore, she was invited to several feasts at the houses of wealthy families.

This example shows that not only for economic but also for social reasons, the life of a widow puts a lot of pressure on a family. The main advantage of Mohassin’s marriage was the improvement of her status in the society. In economic terms her gain was little.

The degree of influence women have in society can be distinguished according to the levels of social organization prevailing in Kutum.

**Household**

Decisions concerning basic food provision for the household members are made by the wife or head of household and wife together. Cash crop production and sale at the market and purchase of basic food and household utensils are the responsibility of the women. Under conditions of economic pressure, women decide whether they lease plots, engage in petty trade or wage labour. Social affairs, from enrolling the children at school up to the convocation of assemblies, as well as economic decisions connected with animal husbandry, trade, travelling, investment, large-scale cash crop production and migration, are controlled by men.

**Extended Family**

In the extended family, women exchange visits and informal help, share child-minding and cooking, prepare food and drinks for invitations, festivities and feasts, discuss social and political events and participate in the formation of families’ views on public issues.

**Tribal Group**

The tribe plays a greater role in villages than in Kutum town where a tribal melting pot has emerged. Nevertheless, for minor disputes and complaints, women consult (male) tribal leaders who are in close contact with their followers and make their judgements according to their background knowledge of a family’s situation.
Circles of Neighbours, Friends, Colleagues, Working Group and Market Group

Exchange of views, complaints and ideas often takes place in the above circles and groups. Women share informal self-help, work and information on prices and food qualities in these circles, which overlap with the extended family and members of the same tribal group. In Kutum the participation in circles seems to be the most common way for women to form opinions and to build up demands. Social or political demands can reach higher levels through informally influencing male family members, tribal leaders or quarter sheikhs. Recently immigrated and very poor women are often isolated and do not participate in any informal circles.

Religious and Quasi-religious Circles

There are ‘holy men’ with whom people arrange a meeting if they are in trouble. Besides this, there are male and female ‘magicians’ who sometimes are consulted.

Professions

Teacher, midwife, secretary and nurse are the main professions of educated women in Kutum. They represent a modern middle-class life style and are respected by other women. The parents of an educated woman can demand a large dowry from her bridegroom. The professionals have some influence in enlightening other women and among their colleagues at work. Some of them try to speak out for women’s interests or to participate in meetings or administrative bodies, but they are heavily suppressed if they speak in public.

Formal Organizations

In the political parties, unions, cooperatives of professional groups and other organizations which existed in Kutum in 1988, women participated, but their influence was restricted. The housewives’ union offered courses in hygiene, child care, nutrition and religion and had its own consumers’ cooperative. Girls participated in youth clubs. Their activities were regulated and mostly confined to their houses, where they for example were busy sewing. From time to time, they did small social studies or social work like care for old or sick women organized by the Office for Sport, Youth and Social Affairs. In all these organizations, the influence of women was negligible.
Jurisdiction

Women call on the judge on their own if there are disputes. In particular the shari'a judge, who is responsible for jurisdiction over family conflicts, was often approached by women, for example if they wanted to be divorced from a husband who had been absent for more than three years in a row.

Administration

In 1988, six seats out of 24 in the district council and a corresponding share in the area and village councils were reserved for women, as had been the rule already under Nimeiri. But women rarely attended meetings. The Administrative Director of the Area Council explained:

If women speak in the presence of men, they are said to be pig-headed... This is part of the Islamic tradition. In Darfur women learn from the beginning of their lives that they are inferior to men in every respect.

The levels of influence of women in decision-making and the qualities of social organization are summarized in Table 5.1.

To conclude, women's social influence decreases, the more a broader public is involved and the higher the level of modern organizations. To some influential groups (tribal leaders, religious circles, judges) women only have access as clients, not as members. Women's social influence is strongest at the household, extended family and informal group levels. The levels of high influence offer chances for women to be socially and economically supported. These are also the realms where reciprocal redistribution takes place and within which women can secure livelihood best. Women who are separated from their extended families or informal circles due to conflict, divorce, poverty, starvation, migration, childlessness, sometimes old age, death of the husband or of family members, diseases and similar events, frequently face poverty and abandonment.

At the end of their article on Kutum, Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil (1985, p. 349) pose the question whether women's 'active role in production has affected positively or relaxed the social constraints on women in the area and the decision-making process in their households'. This must be answered in the negative. As the authors indicate,
the new factors which enhanced women’s economic participation ‘make this less of a conscious choice’ (Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil, 1985, p. 349). This statement is confirmed by my own field research. Growing economic participation is a livelihood securing option within reach of women, because female economic activity has a long history. It is a conscious choice insofar as it makes women to some degree independent of unreliable male income. It is not a conscious choice insofar as under the prevailing conditions of economic and ecological pressure there is no real alternative for women than to actively participating in securing the livelihood of their families. This point alone would be sufficient to explain the lack of improvement in women’s social position.

Table 5.1 Influence of women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of influence</th>
<th>Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>High influence in basic food provision, free decision on market participation and land leasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>Middle to high influence and high degree of social integration. If separated from the extended family, low social acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal group</td>
<td>Little influence, but free decision to consult tribal leaders for conflict settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circles and informal groups</td>
<td>High influence, embryonal interest groups, but little and indirect influence outside the circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious circles</td>
<td>Little influence, but free decision to consult persons of these circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td>Influence towards women, suppressed (no influence) in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal organization</td>
<td>No social influence, but a share in membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdiction</td>
<td>No influence, but free to bring an action against any adversary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Formal employment, mostly on low levels, no influence on higher levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IMPLICATION OF WOMEN’S SUBORDINATION ON PEASANT LIVELIHOOD

The review of the academic debate on women’s role in development has provided some relevant aspects for a women-specific livelihood sectors analysis. In general the spheres of productive and reproductive work should be put together and the persons whose livelihood the women secure should be identified. In Kutum these are mostly the members of the core families, some close relatives and, loosely, members of informal groups. The relations are typically partly reciprocal, partly dependent. The type of relations determines the scope of action, decision-making and bargaining power of women with regard to livelihood-securing activities.

Women’s livelihood-securing work is not measured in terms of money. Their economic activities largely concentrate on food supply through subsistence production, husbandry of small animals and food processing, which are unremunerated. Their paid activities, in Kutum usually cash crop production, manufactured production, petty trade, services and wage labour, also tend to flow into the supply with basic needs, mainly food. Men’s productive role is complementary by providing subsistence crops as well as the major share of the income needed to sustain their families’ livelihood. The areas of women’s control are usually confined to decision-making and resource-use in their particular spheres of production, whereas men are responsible for providing and financing the items over and above immediate food needs.

Careful inspection of changes in women’s control of resources is part and parcel of a livelihood analysis. In Kutum, formalization of land ownership restricts women’s control over their basic means of production. Their access to land has become less secure than that of men. However, the women work the land and have control over the cash they earn from selling their produce. This right is derived from women’s legal relation with men, which obliges them to channel their income into family consumption. Agricultural modernization tends to marginalize women’s economic role in terms of esteem, but not necessarily in terms of utilizing their unpaid labour. The case of the leaseholders in Kutum has demonstrated that men tend to take over technologically superior methods of production which bring women in danger of losing access to cash crop production. The effect of modernization and the technological shortcomings women face in their spheres of production is a reduction in women’s share in
livelihood-securing capabilities. Under these conditions, women’s
dependence on men’s incomes increases while the amount of unpaid
productive and reproductive work remains stable or even grows. In
cases where the men fail to provide sufficient income, the subordina-
tion of women could become an important cause for deteriorating
livelihood conditions.

The social status of women in Sudan is generally a function of
men’s. Marriage is therefore obligatory for women in order to be
integrated as a full member in society. Influence of women varies
greatly between the private and public levels. Men determine the
family’s social events and represent the family in public. Women
might have some indirect influence, persuading male family members
to pursue some of the women’s interests. In Kutum area the rigid
limitation of women’s representation in the public sphere prevents
them from forming interest groups, from membership in existing
organizations and from founding autonomous women’s organiza-
tions. Direct political participation of rural women has therefore
been limited to voting. These facts disclose a wide gap between the
demands of women’s international organizations such as those pre-
icted above and the reality of rural women in patriarchal societies.
Self-empowerment of southern women seems to be an objective far
away from Kutum women’s reality. Improving women’s livelihood-
securing capacities thus can only take place on the family and infor-
mal group levels. Under the present conditions, women cannot be
expected to act as a pressure group to push through livelihood inter-
ests.

This has an impact on development projects. The analysis suggests
that projects aiming at easing poverty could only be successful if
they take into account not only all the levels of livelihood the mem-
bers of a given society make use of, but also all the limitations
preventing certain parts of the society, especially women, from parti-
cular livelihood options. Even if a project is planned specifically for
the development of only one section of peasant livelihood, the whole
in which this section is embedded in needs to be well-known in order
to be prepared to handle all possible effects of the change implanted in
the peasant society. Special attention ought to be paid to changes in
women’s position, because if women’s options are closed or reduced,
the livelihood security of peasant families will be affected immedi-
ately.
Notes


2. The Indian Chipko movement, the movements of the Indians in the Amazonian Basin, the Malaysian Punan movement in the Asian tropical rain forest and the Kenyan Greenbelt movement where (women) peasants have protected trees from the state are examples of the vehement competition over scarce natural resources between peasants and urban consumers as well as of peasants’ efforts to protect their environment.


4. In Sudan, Muslim girls are circumcized before puberty. Three forms of this purity rite exist: in the pharaonic method, the inner and outer labia are removed, with the sunna the whole and with the haditha part of the clitoris is circumcized.

5. Translation from Arabic by the author.