

Background paper for the  
**Competitive Commercial Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa  
(CCAA) Study**

**ALL-AFRICA REVIEW OF  
EXPERIENCES WITH COMMERCIAL  
AGRICULTURE**

**Social Impacts**

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# COMPETITIVE COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA: SOCIAL IMPACTS

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the findings of a literature review relating to the social impacts of commercial agriculture in Africa. Environmental impacts will be considered in the following chapter. The findings presented here are not a comprehensive account of the observed impacts pertaining to each of the commodity case studies – that would be beyond the scope of this study. What this chapter does offer is a flavour of the sorts of social issues that have arisen in connection with agricultural commercialisation in the past and which may therefore provide lessons for the future. Whilst many of the findings do relate directly to the commodities examined in the case studies, others are of a more general nature or relate to other commodities from which valuable lessons can also be learned.

### 1.1 Social development goals

Before discussing the social impact of agricultural commercialisation in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is worth clarifying how the term ‘social’ is to be used in this review, since the term is a broad one and ‘social impact’ can be interpreted in a variety of different ways.

In the development literature the term ‘social’ is frequently used in connection with particular development goals, such as those associated with the following

- Poverty reduction
- Equitable income distribution
- Eliminating exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, caste, age
- Gender equality
- Universal access to basic services, such as health and education
- Greater accountability and transparency in decision-making
- Elimination of socially undesirable labour practices, such as slavery, bonded labour, child labour
- Elimination of social ills, such as violent conflict, crime, alcoholism, drug abuse, HIV AIDS and other diseases.

In the sociological and anthropological literature, use of the term ‘social’ is often not so much about development goals as about systems, structures and processes. It is used to describe the way societies are held together or the way societies change and evolve over time. Social systems and social change manifest themselves in terms of the relationships between and within different social groupings. These relationships are shaped or reinforced by customs, practices, values and norms, which are

often referred to collectively as the 'culture' associated with the particular group or society in question.

In this review our primary concern is the impact of agricultural commercialisation on social development goals. Its impact on culture, social structures and the processes of social change are only considered insofar as they have a bearing on social development goals. We do not give equal attention to each of the social development goals identified in the list above, as their coverage in the literature is quite varied, and because the breadth of these goals precludes detailed analysis. For, example, there is a relatively large amount of literature on gender issues in development and many studies have explicitly examined the impact of agricultural commercialisation on the intra-household distribution of power and resources. However, some of the other 'social impacts' of agricultural commercialisation receive less explicit treatment.

The impact of agricultural commercialisation on poverty and income distribution is obviously important, but is too large an area to be covered in a short review such as this. This chapter addresses this question in a qualitative way at the intra-household level, but does not cover the broader debates that are to be found in the economic literature about the role of agriculture in reducing poverty at the macro level.

## **1.2 Social change**

Social change is an inevitable outcome of economic growth and development. Indeed, social change is necessary for rapid economic development to take place. The social institutions that allow the economies of small, relatively autarkic, rural communities to function are different from the institutions which those same communities need in order to integrate with the wider economy where markets, private property rights, and specialisation are the norm (North 1990). Moreover, institutions that in relatively stable environments foster social harmony and integration and facilitate sustainable exploitation of natural resources may fail to do so when traditional socioeconomic systems are subjected to new pressures, such as those relating to population growth, environmental degradation, demographic change, and the changing aspirations and values arising from contact with urban areas and the wider world.

Social change involves both costs and benefits. Social benefits such improved health and nutrition, better education and a higher material standard of living usually come at the cost of social ills brought on by the processes of change itself. Some of these are hard to avoid – the breakdown of communities and traditional forms of organisation and the associated tensions and conflict; the stress, often falling disproportionately on women and even children, that is associated with the longer working hours that often come with agricultural intensification; the spread of diseases such as HIV AIDS that is facilitated by improved transport and communication. Social costs cannot be avoided altogether, but they can be minimised if there is the political will and the necessary awareness.

### **Identifying winners and losers**

Social change involves changes in the relationships between people and in their relative power and access to resources. It is a necessary feature of the development process and creates both winners and losers. Understanding who the winners and losers are is an important part of any social impact analysis. Social changes that empower the weak and vulnerable and provide them with new opportunities for economic advancement are clearly desirable from a development perspective. On the other hand, changes that threaten their traditional sources of income or erode the social safety nets they depend upon in times of crisis need to be examined more carefully. Whilst it may be neither possible nor desirable to avoid changes of the latter kind, a detailed understanding of them can help development agencies mitigate their most harmful effects through the creation of alternative forms of safety net combined with initiatives that help vulnerable groups participate more fully in the benefits of economic growth.

Too many losers and too much inequality can be harmful not only to the interests of those on the losing side, but also to society at large. There is evidence to suggest the economies of highly polarised societies grow more slowly than those in which incomes and resources are distributed more equally (Galor and Zeira, 1993; Banerjee and Newman, 1993). The strength of this inverse relationship is likely to be magnified when the discontent bred by poverty and economic marginalisation lead to violent conflict, especially when the latter is fought out along ethnic lines, as has so often been the case in Sub-Saharan Africa. A social impact analysis of agricultural commercialisation must therefore take account of how commercialisation is like to affect the distribution of income and assets, both within groups (such as within the household, the clan, the village etc) and between groups (eg between different ethnic groups, religious factions, or geographical regions).

Economic development can occur under conditions of very unequal income distribution. Indeed, according to the Kuznets' inverted U-hypothesis, income disparity inevitably increases in the early stages of development, but begins to fall after reaching a peak (Kuznets 1963). However, the Kuznet's hypothesis is disputed and other studies suggest that it is the pattern of growth, and not the stage of growth, that determines levels of inequality (Fields 1980). Since future patterns of growth are likely to be path dependent (ie shaped by earlier patterns of growth), current patterns of agricultural commercialisation may effect not only current levels of income distribution, but future ones as well. This makes it particularly important to understand the impact of current patterns of agricultural commercialisation on income distribution. In Malawi, for example, Tobacco production has arguably had a beneficial effect on social and poverty indicators (Jaffee 2003), especially since the policy changes allowing smallholders to partake in the more lucrative Burley tobacco production. However, it is still the more advantaged smallholders that benefit from tobacco (see chapter on tobacco), whilst the majority remain locked in poverty and dependence upon low input /low output subsistence production. However, future patterns of growth are likely to depend upon how agricultural commercialisation affects this majority. The same can be said for all countries in which some, but by no means all, smallholders (or workers on estates) have benefited from the production of high value export commodities.

## **Land**

Land is obviously a critical resource in agriculture and income distribution is greatly influenced by control over it. In Latin America land ownership is highly polarised and this is reflected in the high levels of income inequality that are evident throughout much of that region. In those parts of the developing world where land is (relatively) more equally distributed (in many Asian countries, for example), income tends to be too.

In Sub-Saharan Africa private property rights over land – in the shape of legally recognised titles that can be exchanged in the market place – are less developed than elsewhere in the world. Although there are exceptions (eg in Kenya), traditional forms of land tenure still hold sway throughout much of the region. Understanding the social impact of agricultural commercialisation requires an understanding of these complex systems of property rights and how they affect access to land. Whilst land has historically been an abundant resource in Sub-Saharan Africa (allowing agricultural growth to take place through extensification rather than intensification), rapid population growth is now making land scarce. As a result, new forms of property rights and new technologies are needed if land is to be exploited efficiently and sustainably. However, technological change and land reform creates social tensions and has major social and political ramifications, the nature of which determine whether or not the transition from subsistence-orientated agriculture to commercialised production takes place smoothly and in a way that benefits the poor. Platteau (1996) provides a review of the evolution of land rights in Africa, the social and economic implications, and associated difficulties. He notes that customary land rights often provide protection for the poor including women and ethnic minorities which formal land titling can erode or eliminate.

We now turn our attention to some of the empirical evidence regarding agricultural commercialisation in Sub-Saharan Africa. We begin by examining social issues in smallholder cash cropping before moving on to examine the issues relating to large farms and plantations. The chapter concludes with a case study illustrating how agricultural commercialisation, migration and poorly defined property rights can combine to create ethnic tension and conflict.

## **2 SMALLHOLDER CASH CROPPING**

A large proportion of the literature relating to social impact of expanding smallholder production of cash/export crops concerns gender and the impact of agricultural commercialisation on intra-household relations and the status and welfare of women within the household. The literature suggests that expanding the production of crops for export can have the following effects:

- undermining women's access to resources, especially land
- placing additional demands on women's time and labour
- reducing the traditional autonomy of women in the household, making them more dependent upon the goodwill of male heads of household
- undermining household food security
- increasing child labour

An outline of some of the processes involved is given below. They reflect the findings of various studies of smallholder farming in Kenya (eg Davison, 1988; Mackenzie, 1993; Francis, 1998), including studies relating to the production of tea (Sorensen and von Bulow, 1990; Ongile, unknown date), sugar (Oniango, 1999; Kennedy and Oniango, 1990; Rubin, 1990), horticulture (Dolan, 2001; Dolan, 2002), tobacco (Francis, 1998; Heald, 1991). Studies of the troubled attempts to expand irrigated rice production in Gambia (Carney, 1993a; Carney, 1993b; IFAD 2001) also bear out the above findings to some extent.

### **2.1 Gender, food security and basic needs**

At the intra-household level, gender relations and food security are often interlinked. The nature of gender relations within households can sometimes produce food insecurity for women and children, even in households where the aggregate level of available resources and income are theoretically sufficient for meeting everyone's basic needs.

#### **Traditional divisions of labour**

In Sub-Saharan Africa traditional divisions of labour between men and women often give women the primary responsibility for meeting household food needs, a responsibility that is typically met by growing subsistence crops on land allocated for the purpose. Revenue from selling their output in nearby markets may also help women to meet their basic needs and those of their children and other dependents. However, the switch to higher value cash crops, especially those destined for export, can make it harder for women to fulfil their traditional responsibilities, since cash crop production often reduces the amount or quality of land available to women for producing food crops, and since the additional labour demands of cash crop production may reduce the amount of time women have for producing food crops or earning revenues with which to buy food.

## **Land rights and outgrower schemes**

Contract farming and outgrower schemes are a common approach to the commercialisation of smallholder agriculture, especially in the export crop sector. Under these schemes licenses and contracts as well as the cash revenues generated by them usually go to male members of the household. This is largely due to cultural norms that treat men as the head of the household and give males control over land, either via customary land tenure arrangements or formal legal titles.

Legal land titles, where they exist, are mostly held by men, whereas women's access to land is usually restricted to traditional rights based upon usufruct and other customary land tenure arrangements, usually determined by women's status as the wives, mothers or daughters of men (Dolan 2001). The fact that land titles can facilitate collateral and dispute settlements in credit contracts gives traders and processors in contract farming additional reasons for preferring to deal with male members of the household.

## **Obstacles to food security and basic needs**

Whilst the revenues from higher value cash crops should be more than sufficient to meet the household's basic needs and nutritional requirements, this does not always happen. Reasons for this include the following:

- Men tend to control the revenues from cash crop production and have different spending priorities from those of women. This can lead to the neglect of women and children and their nutritional needs and to increased spending on alcohol, cigarettes, and other socially less desirable expenditures.
- Ensuring that the benefits of household production are shared equitably between members of the household requires new culturally endorsed gender roles and forms of intra-household cooperation. However, the necessary cultural changes may lag behind changes in the household economy.
- Food markets may not always function very well – cash revenue does not provide food security if food is not available at a reasonable price.
- Volatility in the output and prices of cash crops can threaten revenues in unfavourable years and hence the purchasing power needed to buy food.

The mechanisms above suggest ways in which the food security and the general welfare of women and dependents within individual households can deteriorate as a result of producing exportable cash crops. Indeed, studies in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere the shift from subsistence food crops to the production cash crops has sometimes been linked with an increase in pre-school malnutrition rates (von Braun and Kennedy, 1986).

However, it is unclear how far these findings can be generalised, nor is it easy to measure the food security outcome in the 'without cash crops' scenario. The relationship between the commercialisation of agriculture and household nutrition is a complex one and studies that include baseline data from before the introduction of cash crops are few and far between. One study that does include such baseline data is reported by Kennedy and Oniango (1990) in their examination of 'the health and nutrition effects of sugar cane production in south-western Kenya' and by Rubin (1990). The data suggests that the significantly higher incomes enjoyed by smallholders as a result of their participation in sugar outgrower schemes did increase households' aggregate calorie consumption, but did not translate into significantly better (or worse) results in terms of child nutritional status and rates of pre-school morbidity and growth.

As with other smallholder outgrower schemes focusing on non-food crops, it is possible that an alternative policy and investment environment that favoured food crops instead of sugar production might have led to better food security outcomes for everyone in south-western Kenya. However, it is

hard to judge precisely what such an environment might look like, let alone measure how it might affect intra-household welfare distributions. Outgrowers on the scheme (run by the Mumias Sugar company) were supposed to set aside a proportion of land for food production (see chapter on Sugar). The same was supposed to happen under smallholder tea production for the KTDA in Kenya (see chapter on tea). However, the high price received for sugar and tea relative to food crops has deterred many smallholders from doing this, with potentially negative implications for local food supplies and prices, and hence for the food security of low income consumers in the respective production areas. In the cotton sector Briand et al (2006) claim that in Mali poverty and child health indicators are actually worse in the cotton growing regions than in other regions with less agro-ecological potential, whereas in Burkina Faso, Grimm and Gunther (2004) highlight the importance of cotton to poverty reduction in the areas in which it is produced, whilst conceding that it has had little effect on poverty in other rural areas (see chapter on cotton).

In summary, what existing studies indicate is that one should not assume that the generation of increased household incomes through the cultivation of cash crops will necessarily lead to improved food security within the households or poverty reduction more generally. Future initiatives to support cash crop production need to take account of this and where necessary intervention strategies should be fine-tuned to ensure that the welfare of women and children are not adversely affected.

## **2.2 Intra-household conflict**

A household's involvement with cash crops is often seen to benefit men much more than it does women and children. This clearly adds to tensions and conflict within the household, especially where women see their traditional autonomy within the household being eroded.

### **Reducing female autonomy**

As has already been noted, women's land rights can be threatened by a shift to cash crops, particularly where good quality agricultural land is scarce. Moreover, whilst women often enjoy independent sources of income and a certain amount of autonomy from men under traditional farming systems (an autonomy that they direct towards meeting the needs of themselves and their children), cash cropping puts pressure on the sources of that autonomy – namely on women's access to land and control over their own labour. This can make them more vulnerable than they were previously, especially in households where men do not treat the welfare of women as a priority.

Labour shortages are common in some areas, especially in those areas where a number of different cash crops are grown (including the traditional and non traditional export crops) or where production is very labour intensive, as in the horticultural sector. Labour shortages add to the demands placed on female members of the household. Yet, often women's labour contribution to cash crop production is not directly remunerated, since the revenues from cash crop production are typically paid to men. This can cause resentment, especially where women feel that their own independent sources of food and income are being curtailed by cash cropping and where the spending of cash crop incomes is biased towards the consumption preferences of the male household head. Resentment of this sort is exemplified by a study of smallholder production of French beans for export in the Meru District of Kenya – women were found to perform 72 percent of the labour used in French bean production whilst obtaining only 38 percent of the income (Dolan, 1991). And in the cotton sector in southern Africa women do much of the work and are the worst affected by pesticides because of their responsibilities for spraying, but, again, they have relatively little control over the revenues from the crop (see chapter on cotton).

### **Intra-household cooperation and efficiency**

Most economic models typically assume that the household as a homogeneous production unit with a common set of goals and priorities. For practical reasons the assumptions of these models are often used in the design of agricultural development interventions. However, the reality is more complex. The divergent interests of male and female members of the household and gender-based divisions of resources, responsibilities and incomes within the household can make the transition to commercialised production less smooth than it might otherwise be. For example:

- The study of French bean production noted above shows how gender conflict over land and labour, longer working hours for women, and a lack of financial incentives for female labour led to a deterioration in the quality of the beans being produced and ultimately to smallholders losing their contracts to supply beans (Dolan 2001).
- A study of gender relations in a Kenyan tea growing region estimated that 30 percent of tea plots were neglected because of disputes over female labour (Sorensen and von Bulow 1990)
- In Gambia similar conflicts over land and labour led women to withdraw their labour from irrigated rice production schemes which the government and donors were trying to develop in the country's wetlands (Carney 1993). The schemes performed very poorly as a result. The developed land was concentrated in the hands of men and was land that had previously been allocated to women in exchange for providing labour on men's plots elsewhere. The expanding cultivation of irrigated rice put pressure on women to meet the growing demand for labour on the developed land, whilst at the same time depriving them of the compensation for providing that labour – ie the privilege of growing and selling their own crops (rice and vegetables) on the very land that was now being devoted to irrigated rice under male control. Subsequent donor interventions have sought to improve position of women by promoting women's horticulture production and being more sensitive to implications of customary land rights and labour allocations (IFAD 2001)

Intra-household cooperation is clearly important if the smallholder household is to act as an efficient agricultural production unit. In many cases the most fundamental changes necessary for this to take place are cultural and ideological, especially in those societies in which the corporate identity of the household is weak. As Dolan (2001) points out in relation French Bean production, “ideological constructions of gender norms are intricately woven into struggles over export horticulture, struggles that both shape and subvert the potential for gender equity and capital accumulation in the sector.”

However, Sub-Saharan Africa is culturally very diverse, and as Heald (1991) points out in a comparative analysis of tobacco production in two different societies in Kenya, the degree of cooperation/conflict between male and female members of the household varies between households and depends partly upon ethnic ideological differences concerning household corporate identity and gender-divisions/sharing of labour.

Whilst the cultures that shape patterns of intra-household cooperation are often slow to change and hard for outsiders to influence, they are not set in stone and need not preclude greater cooperation and better outcomes for women in the longer term.

### **Improving intra-household cooperation?**

In relation to tobacco production in Kenya, Heald notes that higher prices encourage greater cooperation between men and women. In relation to Kenyan tea production, Sorensen and von Bulow (1990) found that because women's labour is crucial to production and because of the difficulties of hiring labour, women do have a certain amount of bargaining power when it comes to negotiating their labour input and influencing the way tea revenues are spent. Summarising the findings of various studies of Kenyan cash crop production, including Heald (1991) on tobacco, Mackenzie (1993) and Davison (1988) on coffee, and Sorensen and von Bulow (1990) on tea, and Odaga (1991), Francis (1998) notes the following:

“The issue of how income from the production of the pure cash crop is used seems crucial in determining women's willingness to make a large input into the crop. Where the wife is persuaded that the surplus will benefit the household as a whole, she will make the contribution.... Men's position as landowners puts women in a weak position to make claims to receive, control or allocate income from contract crops, but this is partly mitigated by their ability to negotiate their labour input. Where women perceive that they are not benefiting from the surplus, they may withdraw their labour and retreat into food production.”

The influence of cash cropping on intra-household relations is clearly very complex and it is hard to make broad generalisations about its impact upon the welfare of women and children. Whilst it is easy to argue that women ought to get a better deal than they often do from the cash crop economy, it is harder to argue that there are no benefits to them at all. For example, comparing cane households with non-cane households in the sugar-growing region of western Kenya, Rubin (1990) notes that “[w]omen in cane households spent more time in domestic tasks, and in craft work (primarily basket making), which was carried out in the home while supervising children. They also had more leisure time.” This contrasts with other reports which emphasise the increased pressure which cash crops place on women and their ability to look after children undertake domestic chores. Discussing Sorensen and von Bulow’s study of tea production in Kenya, Francis (1990) notes that “the majority of wives in tea growing households consider that they do benefit from tea production under male control and withdraw their labour only because of pressure of work or where their husbands' neglect is severe.”

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The commercialisation of smallholder agriculture via the production of export crops clearly does help to raise incomes of many households, including smallholders. For example, “results of a household survey in Kenya undertaken explicitly to compare the incomes of households involved in export horticulture with those which are not.... [provides] evidence that households involved in export horticulture are better off than those which are not, particularly in rural areas” (McCulloch and Ota, 2002).

What the literature on the commercialisation of smallholder agriculture also seems to suggest is that the gender divisions of labour and responsibility in traditional farming systems often stand at odds with the degree of intra-household cooperation – including the pooling of resources and incomes – that is required to assure food security for women and children under more commercialised farming. This is not to say that such cooperation does not exist at all, or that where it is weak, it will not evolve over time. Nor does it preclude women from benefiting directly from commercialised agriculture in cases where they (rather than men) are the head of the household – a phenomenon that is increasingly common due to male migration to urban areas and the growing AIDS epidemic.

However, since customary systems for compensating women’s labour on male controlled land often don’t provide sufficient incentives for female labour in the cash crop economy, donors and the public sector may wish to provide further support for such incentives. Indeed, since the productivity of commercial farming in Sub-Saharan Africa often depends upon women's labour, there may be an efficiency-based argument for targeted interventions aimed at improving women's access to land and to the markets for cash crops and associated incomes.

## **3 LARGE FARMS AND ESTATES**

Compared with the literature on the impact of smallholder agricultural commercialisation, the literature on the social impacts of plantation/large farm agriculture is rather limited. Much of what

there is focus on employment conditions, ethical trading initiatives, and associated gender issues, especially in the horticulture sector.

Large farms and estates are often compared unfavourably with smallholder production in terms of social development goals, being viewed as exploitative when it comes to employment conditions and inequitable with respect to land distribution, especially in places where land is scarce, such as Malawi where some investments in large scale production have been criticised as being at the expense of smallholders (see chapter on food staples).

Hurst (2005) notes that waged agricultural workers, many of whom work on large farms and plantations, are one of the poorest occupational groups in sub-Saharan Africa and “remain unrecognised in terms of goals, policies, programmes and activities to eliminate poverty.” There is also a debate about whether large farms and estates offer the same opportunities for economic growth and poverty reduction that smallholder production does (see discussion in earlier chapters).

Nevertheless, the case against plantations and estates is not always that clear-cut, especially if the growth in employment and income generated by large farms outweighs the growth that could be achieved in the smallholder sector for certain crops or localities (eg sugar in areas requiring irrigation). Estates often provide jobs and investment in economic and social infrastructure in underdeveloped regions where there are few other investment or employment opportunities. Some of the tea and sugar estates discussed in the chapters on tea and sugar are examples of this.

Also, in a simulation exercise relating to the Kenyan horticulture sector where production has been shifting rapidly from smallholder farms to large farms and exporters’ own plantations, Humphrey et al (2004) find that “the positive impact on employment of continued export growth and increased post-harvest processing is much greater than any likely reduction in employment resulting from the shift away from smallholder production.”

Whether desirable from a social development perspective or not, there are many reasons for why a shift towards large farm production may be hard to reverse. For example, in the horticultural sector the shift towards large farms is being driven in part by the need of exporters to exert greater control over the production process in order to meet the requirements of increasingly demanding European importers. These requirements include the ability of exporters to conform to European health and safety regulations, especially with regard to pesticide use, whilst also meeting the product quality requirements of supermarkets and complying with ethical trading requirements, especially in relation to child labour and worker safety (Dolan and Humphrey 2000). Dolan and Humphrey estimate that by the late 1990s only 18% of horticultural exports in Kenya and only 6% in Zimbabwe were sourced from smallholders, whereas in early 1990s nearly 75% of exports from Kenya were produced by smallholders.

### **3.1 Employment conditions and ethical trading**

Large farms and estates are often criticised for the way they treat their workers and in importing countries public concerns over this have helped drive the growth of ethical trading practices and associated codes of conduct. Ethical trading practices are an increasingly important feature of the value chain that links European buyers of horticultural products with their African suppliers. They are discussed in a paper by Tallontire et al (2005) which examines the impact of ethical codes in the African horticulture sector, drawing on case studies of Kenyan flowers, South African fruit, and Zambian flowers and vegetables. The aim of most ethical codes is to improve employment conditions relating to, for example, security of employment, working hours, health and safety (eg exposure to toxic chemicals and pesticides), fair wages, and adequate formal representation.

In Tallontire et al’s study only half of the companies examined were unionised and in those less than 50 percent of permanent workers were union members in all but three cases. More importantly, informal workers which make up the bulk of labour in the African horticulture sector rarely enjoy

the benefits of trade union representation or other employment benefits such as social security, housing benefits, maternity leave, and severance pay.

Women who make up the bulk of the horticulture labour force are especially disadvantaged. They are usually confined to insecure forms of employment in the informal labour market, are under-represented in unions, and are not adequately protected by the law against discrimination in the workplace. Tallontire et al make the following observations in relation to the three countries in their study

“Women’s concentration in insecure forms of employment is ...linked to social norms that legitimate the gendered allocation of tasks. Women are often recruited for jobs that are viewed as low skilled and easily accomplished, involving repetition and stamina (for instance, the need to stand for long hours), such as sorting and bunching roses. Men are more likely to be hired in positions viewed as higher skilled, for example as sprayers, irrigators, and tractor drivers. Jobs undertaken by men in the industry are more likely to be permanent and are paid higher wages.....Overall, women were under-represented in unions, with more male than female shop stewards in all but two cases, despite the fact that women typically constituted most of the workforce. Workers’ committees, which were common in Kenya and South Africa, similarly failed to give adequate representation to women workers..... national legislation also fails to prevent discrimination against women in the workplace, and often acts to reinforce local assumptions regarding the roles of men and women.” (p.567-568)

Barrientos and Kritzinger (2004), examining labour conditions in the South African fruit sector, highlight the risks and vulnerabilities faced by informal contract workers who enjoy little in the way of work security or employment benefits. They also note that whilst the informal contracts do provide some male workers with regular, relatively well paid work, the informal contract work available to women is likely to be poorly paid and of a short duration.

### **Weaknesses of ethical codes**

Whilst well intentioned, the growth in ethical trading and social codes to address some of the concerns outlined above does have weaknesses. In some cases this includes driving production away from the smallholder sector, which many see as being on balance a more socially and economically beneficial source of supply, but in which compliance with ethical codes such as those relating to child labour, and environmental codes such as those regarding pesticide use, is hard to monitor.

It is also argued by Tallontire et al that social codes do not necessarily achieve better outcomes for many of the workers that they are intended to protect, notably women and informal workers. Most employment in the African horticultural sector is informal and less easily regulated by codes of conduct. Therefore, those working in the informal sector, including women who are the main suppliers of casual and seasonal labour, don’t benefit much from social codes.

The cost of complying with social and environmental codes and competitive pressures to reduce costs may discourage employers from employing workers on permanent contracts. Barrientos and Kritzinger (2004) find evidence of this in the South African fruit sector, where they claim the pressures of “rising standards imposed within supermarket global value chains, falling market prices internationally, and increasing government legislation..... are leading to falling permanent employment and increasing use of contract labour on fruit farms, tempered by the need to employ skilled workers to meet quality and labour standards.”(p.81)

Where employers do succumb to the pressure from Northern buyers to provide more secure and permanent forms of employment, women who often depend upon the flexibility of casual labour, may find themselves with fewer employment opportunities than before. Women often find the

flexibility of casual labour more suited to their needs because of their domestic and childrearing commitments. Cultural norms also tend to favour men in the award of permanent employment contracts. As a result women could actually lose out if the opportunities for casual labour are withdrawn in favour of permanent contracts.

### **3.2 Social benefits of estate production**

Whilst the role of large farms and estates in social development is frequently criticised, these production models can also bring other social benefits as well as employment. Estates often provide facilities to workers and the local community, including housing, schools, clinics, roads, water and sanitation, in rural areas where they might not otherwise exist, as in the case of the Mpongwe and Munkumpu arable farming schemes in Zambia (see chapter on Food staples) and the Tanwat wattle estate in Tanzania (see chapter on UK colonial experience). Where the estates are run or owned by high profile foreign corporations the pressure from governments, investors, consumers and civil society to promote the development of local communities meet high standards of ethical conduct can be especially high. For example:

“Brooke Bond East Africa, owns Kenya's largest tea plantations, producing just over 10 per cent of the country's tea exports. .... It employs 18,000 people in Kenya and another 6,000 in Tanzania, and these workers have about 100,000 dependants. In Kericho, the company provides 22 primary schools, supports a clutch of secondary schools, and owns 17,000 homes, two hospitals, four health centres and three hydroelectric power stations. It also buys tea from over 300 small- scale farmers in the area and processes it at its factory. By virtue of being the largest and longest-standing employer - Brooke Bond has been in Kenya since 1925 - it is, to all intents and purposes, Kericho.....Tea is one of five raw ingredients - along with palm oil, peas, tomatoes and spinach - where Unilever will force its growers to adopt best practices for things like the use of pesticides and impact on the community. And Brooke Bond has been given the challenge of becoming a beacon for sustainable agriculture, so Unilever can show its suppliers how it can be done.” (The Independent on Sunday, 2003)

It has been suggested that workers on estates are sometimes better off than labourers on outgrower schemes because of the various benefits that go with formal employment. For example, on three outgrower schemes pioneered by CDC in Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia, many of the settlers who originally received land on the scheme cut down their own labour input once they could afford to and started hiring casual labourers to much of the work. The latter enjoyed none of the benefits enjoyed by estate workers, such as housing, pensions, clinics etc (see chapter on Sugar). Similar observations are made in relation to casual labourers hired by Kenyan smallholders producing tea for the KTDA. These workers do not have the same benefit as labourers hired by Kenyan tea estates (see chapter on tea).

However, estates agriculture has also been criticised for acting as an enclave in deprived regions with benefits to those directly involved but little filtering out to the wider community. Speaking of the Mumias sugar outgrower scheme in Western Kenya Oniango (1999) notes that “there is little the community has to show for it in terms of economic gains... [and that there]..is not much evidence of improved housing or schools, or even health centres/hospitals, or roads, except those aspects which are handled directly by the Mumias Sugar Company”.

As is noted in the Chapter on Tea the conditions under which some services are provided have also been controversial. For example, when the East Usambara Tea Company built a secondary school students were expected to pay for their tuition by working on the estate. This highlights an important point, which is that social development initiatives such as education come at a financial cost which cash crops such as tea can help to meet. How the cost should be shared between the various stakeholders in the tea industry is however a difficult question.

#### 4 MIGRATION AND CONFLICT OVER LAND

New economic opportunities, such as those created by the commercialisation of agriculture, usually draw in migrants from areas where there are fewer opportunities. A sudden influx of migrants can create various problems especially where local services and the resources to support them are inadequate. The chapter on food staples notes, for example, how the establishment of a large arable farming estate in a previously unsettled part of Zambia drew in large numbers of migrants in search of work. This led to the development of unplanned squatter settlements with various problems such as poor sanitation and a lack of clean water, the theft of crops, encroachment on the estate's land, and a high incidence of malaria and AIDS.

Migration brings together people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds who typically find themselves in competition for jobs, land and other resources – both with each other and with the indigenous people. The livelihoods of the latter may come under threat as migrants and agricultural development projects compete for land and scarce resources such as water. Often it is pastoralists and sometimes it is hunter-gatherers, such as the bushmen of the Kalahari, that are most threatened by agricultural development. In Botswana, for example, the development of cattle ranching has squeezed the Kalahari bushmen off their ancestral lands, and in the irrigated regions of southern Somalia much of the chronic violence there can be traced to conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists over access to land and water (Merryman, 2000).

In Africa, where allegiances based on ethnicity, tribe and clan are very strong, economic competition can accentuate and deepen the divisions created by these allegiances. Cultural and ethnic diversity increases the likelihood of misunderstandings and the opportunities for individuals to mobilise support in their conflicts with others. This makes it all the more likely that the often unavoidable social tensions associated with economic competition will escalate into inter-ethnic fighting.

In a buoyant rural economy or thriving sector where the demand for migrant workers is high, ethnic and tribal divisions may cause few problems, providing there is sufficient land, housing, water and other basic necessities. However, when the demand for labour falls – due to falling commodity prices or other economic circumstances – or when land and the basic infrastructure needed to accommodate migrants and meet their basic needs is lacking, the ensuing competition can lead to social unrest and inter-ethnic violence.

Sometimes the social and ethnic tensions created by migration are relatively low key, as in the case of the three outgrower schemes pioneered by CDC in Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia which attracted migrants to come and settle on the newly developed land (discussed in the chapter on Sugar). However, in other cases the conflict has been much more serious. The experience of the Ivory Coast and the civil war there is a case in point – see Chirot 2006 & 2004; Kurti 2005; and Crook 2004.

Civil War in Ivory Coast has roots in conflict over land fuelled by migration to the cocoa growing south from other parts of the country and from neighbouring countries. During the cocoa boom years between 1960 and 1980 the government of the time encouraged this migration by sanctioning migrant control over land that they developed for cocoa production. Migration caused disaffection amongst local populations in the cocoa growing south. This intensified in the 1990s as economic hardship caused by the end of the cocoa boom and growing urban unemployment deepened. The latter encouraged southerners to return to their villages where they now had to compete with migrants for land. The host communities “began attempting to 'renegotiate' earlier land arrangements with migrants, leading to increasingly violent clashes in the countryside” (Crook 2004, p.1)

Politicians in the south, including leaders of the current government, have exploited hostility towards migrants and foreigners in order to gain support. And in 2000 the government restored customary rights over land, reversing the previously favourable position enjoyed by migrants. Political manoeuvring has deepened divisions between indigenous southerners and migrants from other parts of the country, making it easier for rebel leaders to take control of the north of the country in a civil

war that followed an abortive coup in 2002. It has also helped fan the flames of inter-ethnic violence that has persisted throughout the country.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided reviewed some of some the potential social impacts of shifting from subsistence agriculture to more commercially orientated production systems. Social and environmental change is an inevitable outcome of economic growth and development. Economic activity – whether it be that of hunter-gatherers, agriculturalists, or modern industrial societies – shapes the social and ecological systems with which it interacts. As the patterns and scale of economic activity change, so too do societies and the natural environment. Sometimes they change for the better and sometimes for the worse. The commercialisation of African agriculture offers social and environmental benefits as well as posing potential threats. Whilst there are potential trade-offs between economic goals on the one hand and social and environmental ones on the other, there can be positive synergies too, and the harmful effects of agricultural commercialisation need to be weighed against the negative social and environmental effects of not commercialising agriculture. Where rural populations are growing rapidly, as is the case in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, these negative effects can be substantial. The goal of sustainable development is to achieve economic growth whilst minimising the more disruptive and harmful effects of rapid social and environmental change. It is not about avoiding such change altogether.

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