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## “Wife, Today I Only Had Money for Pombe”

Gender and Food: Women's Bargaining Power and  
Agricultural Change in a Tanzanian Community

GERD HOLMBOE-OTTESEN AND MARGARETA WANDEL<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

In most societies husband and wife have disputes or conflicts that are more or less serious in nature, ranging from relatively peaceful discussions to physical fights and sometimes wife beating. In Rukwa, Tanzania, where the material for this chapter was collected, such conflicts often revolve around food. A typical situation giving rise to conflict is when the husband comes home at mealtimes to find that his wife has not prepared food for him. This conflict and the way it may be solved was described by one of the village leaders as follows:

The man becomes angry. The dispute that follows is usually by words, but if the woman tries to show that she is strong, either by the way she is talking or by beginning to fight, the husband may beat her up. If this behaviour of the wife is repeated, the husband may bring the dispute to the attention of the village elders. The advice from the elders in this case is usually that the woman should go and cook for the husband. If she still refuses, they will advise her again. The second time around she will usually obey. Such behaviour on the part of the wife would be considered a reason for divorce. However, the elders usually handle these disputes so well that they do not have such a consequence.

This short example illustrates that conflicts over food – or feeding – are a recognized area of dispute, and it draws attention to the fact that men and women often have different priorities. It also sheds light on gender roles and the underlying perceptions of male and female in this society. In general these roles and perceptions are

closely tied to food, due to the fact that a large part of people's, especially women's, preoccupations and daily activities are geared towards the procurement and handling of food.

Our intention in this chapter is to use conflicts around food as an entry point to discuss how gender relations, particularly regarding men's and women's say in decision-making processes, affect the production, distribution and consumption of food in the household. We would argue that an understanding of these processes is essential to the study of determinants of household food security and child nutrition. It has been argued that the more command women have over household resources the better for the household food supply and nutritional situation. The reason is that women, more than men, are likely to favour the basic food needs in the household above other needs; thus, if women have enough say they will not jeopardize the household food security if it can in any way be avoided (Katona-Apte, 1983; Tinker, 1979; Holmboe-Ottesen *et al.*, 1989).

Women's command over resources that are important in the procurement of food is to a large extent dependent on their ability to influence decisions regarding allocation and use of these resources. In describing the decision-making processes and conflicts, we will use the concept of "bargaining power". Women's bargaining power may be understood as women's ability to *influence* decisions in the household, independent of their authority to exercise direct power. It is thus not synonymous with "decision-making power", which signifies the power to make decisions on one's own account, i.e. to have "the final say". Bargaining implies some form of cooperation in which the parties involved would have some utility tied to it (Elster, 1989). "Bargaining power" has accordingly been defined as a form of power which usually presupposes that the partners involved have something to offer in return for what they obtain (Bülow, 1991). In Rukwa, for example, we observed that women in their bargaining take advantage of husbands' dependency on their labour in food production in attempts to influence decisions.

Many researchers have mentioned the study of decision-making processes as an important approach to analysing the food and nutritional situation in the household. However, empirical studies examining this aspect of gender relations are scant and give little information as to the dynamics of such processes. The reasons are in part that this subject is methodologically difficult and time demanding to study, and besides there seems to be no agreement on what

are the most relevant variables for investigation (Safilios-Rotschild, 1980).

The study reported here<sup>2</sup> is part of a larger project aimed at investigating women's role in food-related activities and the implications for the food and nutritional situation in the household, especially with regard to changes associated with development interventions in the agricultural sector. Its focus is on gender dynamics related to the allocation and use of household resources, such as labour, income and food, and underlying factors such as cultural norms for gender behaviour and perceptions of male and female within these areas of activity.

By using conflicts around food and food-related activities as an entry point for discussing decision-making processes, the differences in priorities and perceptions among the sexes become more clearly revealed. Conflicts can be expected to occur when the cultural norms for gender behaviour are violated by men as well as women. However, conflicts may also arise due to the ambiguity inherent in the cultural conceptions of gender roles, whereby the role expectations in one "arena" of social life are in contradiction with others in different arenas. For instance, being good housewives and mothers is often in contradiction with the role of women as effective producers or procurers of food. In Rukwa women have such a double role in production and reproduction (Mascarenhas, 1983). As the above example illustrates, women may give priority to activities other than cooking and feeding (such as production). Likewise, we shall see that men's responsibilities towards their families sometimes stand in sharp contrast to what is associated with being "real men".

In the following we shall discuss the conflicts around food and food-related activities and attempt to relate these to role expectations and the underlying perceptions of male and female. We will then explore how these perceptions influence women's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* men and their opportunities to fulfil their role as mothers, housewives and procurers of food. Finally, we describe how processes set in motion by development efforts have influenced women's bargaining power, and discuss implications for household food security and child nutritional status. The terms "food" and "food-related activities" are here used in a wide sense, including, in addition to meals and meal preparation, all activities related to procurement and handling of food.

It should be noted that the use of conflicts as an entry point in the presentation of this material will necessarily presuppose a focus on

the extreme household situations. This approach will therefore tend to expose those men who are considered to be the more "difficult" among the ones studied. Thus, the picture drawn of men and couple relationships may have a negative bias, and is not truly representative of the situation in the study area. However, we believe that the conflicts reflect underlying problem areas not limited just to the cases presented. Therefore, an analysis of the way conflicts are handled in the household will shed light on the prevailing gender ideology and power relations, as well as help explain how social change processes may affect gender behaviour around food.

## II. The Study Area

### 1. *Socio-economic Pattern and Gender Division of Labour*

The study was conducted in two villages on the Ufipa plateau, which is situated between Lake Tanganyika in the west and Lake Rukwa in the east. It is a mountainous area with a median altitude of about 1,800 metres. The area, which was almost completely wooded 20 years ago, is today mostly covered with grassland interspersed with trees. The rainfall is unimodal, amounting to about 1,200 mm a year. However, during the dry season most farmers still have access to water for irrigation from mountain brooks and springs.

The population is ethnically homogeneous, mostly Fipas, a bantu-speaking tribe. The tribe is patrilinear and patrilocal. The majority are Christians; mostly Roman Catholics. Monogamous and nuclear-based families are the most common forms of household set-up. Usually other members of the patrilinear kin live in separate dwellings and form separate production and consumption units. Only 10 per cent of the households in the study area are polygamous (polygynous), usually not containing more than two wives. Polygamy has become less common, probably due to the influence of Christianity. However, extramarital relationships are quite frequent. It is common to have children outside marriage, arrangements which entail few responsibilities for the men.

The household economy is based on subsistence agriculture, although the use of cash has increased considerably over the last 20 years. Due to deforestation and subsequent disappearance of game, people are presently almost entirely dependent on agriculture. At the same time there has been a gradual increase in hybrid maize production, partly at the expense of millet, and partly by expansion of the areas under cultivation. The introduction of the ox plough in

the 1950s, the government drive to increase food crop production in the 1970s, and the introduction of modern cultivation techniques especially suited for maize, have all contributed to the increase of maize production in the area. Today maize is both the major subsistence crop and the main source of cash.

These changes in production pattern have affected the gender division of labour in agriculture. Earlier the women were farmers and the men hunters. Women cultivated millet (the main staple food), local maize (in small quantities) and beans. They did all the agricultural tasks alone, except the first clearing and preparation of land, for which they received help from the men. The men have become increasingly involved in agriculture, particularly maize production. While weeding and harvesting were traditionally women's work, men now participate in these activities, except in the case of millet and ground-nuts, which are still considered "women's crops".

The majority of households keep cattle. This represents a way to store wealth. Cattle are mainly used in ceremonial exchanges and as draught power. Meat and milk production is therefore very low. Many households keep a few goats and chickens, used mostly for household consumption, but only on rare occasions. Except for chickens, animal husbandry is exclusively a male task.

## 2. *Women's Legal Position*

Women's legal position is still far from the principle of equal rights for women laid down in Tanzania's new constitution. The disparity is particularly evident with regard to women's marital position, property rights and custody of children. The Marriage Act of 1971 proclaims the principles of, among other things: (a) equality of spouses to matrimonial property acquired through joint effort; (b) prohibition of corporal punishment by husbands. However, the impact of the Marriage Act is still limited. Women are not well informed about their rights, since the laws are not widely known and not available in their vernacular language. Moreover, property and savings are usually registered in the husband's name, and in the case of divorce the woman may receive little or nothing (Havnevik *et al.*, 1988).

The parliamentary law, however, has provisions that allow the practice of the old customary laws. The option to choose between the different legal systems usually works in favour of customary law. According to the Marriage Act, custody of children after divorce



should be determined by both parents. However, the customary law proclaims that the man or his clan has the right to all children conceived in the course of his marriage. In reality this means that the husband or his relatives are given custody of the children in the case of a divorce (Government of Tanzania/UNICEF, 1985). According to both legal systems, women are at a disadvantage regarding land inheritance not only as daughters compared to sons, but also as widows, who are not eligible to inherit the land from their husbands (Government of Tanzania/UNICEF, 1985).

In the community studied there is still enough available land for cultivation. A single or divorced woman with children, originating from the community, is therefore given usufruct rights to a piece of land by her male relatives. This piece of land is usually smaller than is allotted to couples. However, a woman who has grown up in another village and who becomes divorced usually has no other choice but to move back to her natal village. The only property she is allowed to bring with her are her clothes, cooking pots and her hand hoe. She may be allowed temporary custody of her small children for practical reasons, pertaining to breast-feeding and care. However, they are considered to belong to the father, and after 7 years of age they are often taken from the mother and moved to the father's house.

### III. Conflicts Concerning Food and Food-related Activities

The most common disagreements between husband and wife pertaining to food were related to different priorities concerning the *allocation of time and labour*, the *use of productive land* and the *use of food and cash*. The following gives a description of these conflicts and the circumstances under which they arise.

#### 1. Allocation of Time and Labour in Food Production

Conflicts originating with women's failure to have a meal ready on time often occur in the labour-intensive season, when women are working long days in the fields. Due to the urgency of the work and long distance to walk, women may decide to return home later than the regular mealtime. Men would usually accept such a priority, either because they are working together with their wives or because they recognize the benefit of their wives investing time in

production. However, as the earlier example showed, men may get upset if they do not receive what is considered a very basic service from women.

Another source of conflict would be when the husband feels that his wife does not work enough in the fields, but puts other activities first.

Early morning Hugo<sup>3</sup> asks when Telesia is planning to go to the fields. She tells him that she is not going today, she will go to the church for bible lessons to prepare for Easter. The husband then complains that she is going late to the field every day, and he says he is sure that she will not be able to finish weeding the field. Telesia says: "Even you work less hard than you could. So it is not good that you complain about me, both of us are late." After some time Telesia went to the field, but Hugo stayed home the whole day.

As is evident from this example, women may also complain about the labour contribution of their husbands. Men may promise to do their share in the fields, but they may drop out at the last moment, or make their workdays short. Many leave the fields in the middle of the day to drink pombe (beer) in the local bar.

Lusia says that her relationship with the husband is filled with conflicts, mainly because he is lazy. He refuses to work in the fields. When they have a dispute over this, it often ends with silence. Sometimes they do not talk to each other for a whole week.

Lazaro and Salome have a big maize field of three acres. Salome is going to the field to weed every day, except Sundays. The field is 2½ hours' walk from the house. She usually leaves at 7 in the morning and returns between 2 and 4 in the afternoon. It takes 1 month to weed the field. This is done twice during the cultivation season. In addition she has to weed the ground-nut field which takes two weeks. Lazaro is helping her to weed in the maize field, but only twice a week. He leaves the house at 6 in the morning and returns at 11 a.m. Salome thinks she does not get enough help in weeding from Lazaro, but she has not tried to raise this issue with him, because she thinks it would not help.

## 2. *Use of Productive Land*

The men generally show a great interest in increasing the surplus production. Due to the limited productivity of the land and the lack of funds to buy fertilizer, an increase of the area under cultivation is the only way of increasing production. Their wives do not always agree to such plans of expansion:

In the evening Chales and Saudina discuss plans for cultivation. Chales suggests they make a larger maize field next year. Saudina disagrees, saying it will be too much work for her to weed. After some discussion she is able to convince Chales that her capacity is stretched to the limit, and they agree that the field they have is enough for them.

Husband and wife may also have vested interests in producing different crops:

Divinus has been cultivating a field where he produces onions for sale. He wants Leokadia to come and weed it for him. Leokadia refuses and argues that she has to finish weeding the maize field first, so as to secure food for the household. The discussion ends in a physical fight.

A woman may want to produce crops, such as millet and groundnuts, to get cash which she can control. The most important of these crops is millet, which is used for beer brewing, an economic activity that is controlled by women. The cash rendered by selling beer would be handled by women.

## 3. *Use of Food Crops and Cash*

After harvest the main part of the staple food crops, such as maize, millet and beans, is stored for household consumption. All adults know how much of these crops their households will need until the next harvest. What is considered surplus produce is usually sold immediately. The money is used to pay back loans and to buy agricultural inputs and household necessities as well as other consumption items, such as beer. The problem arises later in the



season when all the money has been spent. Food from the household stores may then be sold to obtain more money, thus putting the household food security in jeopardy:

Velidiana says she becomes very angry when Helmani wants to sell so much of the food crops that they do not have enough for their own use. They do not usually fight, but they will go to his parents and ask them for their judgement.

John has come home from the pombe bar. Sophia is clearly showing her disapproval. She starts complaining about his drinking and that he is using more money than they can afford. She is pointing to his practice of taking food from the household stocks to obtain money for drinking beer. He argues: "You, a woman, do not understand economics. My economic dispositions are in fact very sound and may yield more money. In addition to sale of maize I earn money on the production of tomatoes and onions. Although I drink for part of my earnings, I also use the extra income to buy fish in another village, which I in turn sell for a profit in the village."

Later in the evening he tells her that he does not want to eat ugali (porridge) and beans which she is planning to prepare. He says he wants meat or fish. She says: "Why didn't you buy meat and fish at the market, if that is what you want?" He says: "Wife, today I only had money for pombe, not for fish or meat."

Even though both men and women are interested in production to earn cash, women tend to give first priority to the subsistence needs of the family, while men are more likely to emphasize other more dubious needs, as the examples show. This fact may in itself give rise to disagreement on how the food crops should be used. This type of conflict was the most common disagreement registered during the field study. Men who use the cash on beer have less to spend on household necessities and are less likely to fulfil their responsibility to buy clothing, kerosene, school uniforms and books, and agricultural inputs.

Women have little control of the cash that their husbands earn. Many women complained that they had no idea of how much money their husbands received for the sale of maize, beans, fruits and vegetables grown for sale. When men are in need of cash and have exhausted their own opportunities to generate cash, they can demand assistance from their wives. The women may earn cash

through activities such as beer brewing or sale of ground-nuts. Although women "control" these cash-generating resources, it is difficult for them to refuse their husband's request for money.

#### IV. Local Perceptions of Male and Female

In order to understand the factors and processes influencing women's and men's views and priorities, exposed through the conflicts, it is necessary to look more closely at local socio-cultural norms governing the behaviour of men and women as well as the underlying perceptions and ideas of male and female. We will shed light on these factors by focusing on work, within both the productive and the reproductive sphere of activities. Work will here be discussed as suggested by Moore (1988):

It is not just a matter of what people do . . . it will also include the conditions under which work is performed and its perceived social value within the given cultural context.

Thus, work not only has a practical, but also a symbolic dimension. The symbolic meaning of work is closely tied to personal identity: What you do, or do not do, may say something about who you are. Hence, work is an important factor in shaping male and female identity (Melhuus, 1988).

In Rukwa, women's identity seems first and foremost tied to their role as mothers and housewives, in which their moral obligation is to prepare food and make sure that all members of the household get their rightful share. Since women are active in agricultural production of food, their identity is also tied to this work. However, as we shall see, their moral obligation to secure food for household consumption is closely tied to their caring role. A woman who fails to live up to this obligation is considered a "bad" woman and is socially condemned. Therefore, the quality of women's reproductive work and care is an important determinant of their social esteem. Any obstacle that may prevent women from fulfilling this role may be seen as a threat, not only by husbands, but also by the women themselves.

Men's traditional role was tied to hunting and may have contributed to shaping male identity in the past. Since very few men are involved in this activity at present, they have lost an important domain for their social esteem. However, the introduction of "modern" technology related to hybrid maize (the use of the plough

and agro-chemicals) and the orientation towards the market have provided entry points for male participation in agriculture distinct from women's role. By defining their role in agriculture as "farm managers", in charge of planning and resource allocations in cultivation, men have "created" work appropriate for themselves. Socializing with other men is also an important source of confirmation of their identity. It is important for the male image to participate in discussions wherever men gather, e.g. in beer bars and in the shade under a tree or in formal village meetings.

Gender identity is to a certain extent based on the negation of activities related to the opposite sex. In the Fipa society a "man" may not cook, he may not feed and dress children, which are defined as female tasks. Likewise, a "woman" may not plough and she may not engage in activities which require "intelligence", such as the operation of machines, e.g. the maize mill. A negative attitude to women in management positions is also in part a reflection of this view. However, there are many indications that it is more difficult for men than for women to transgress the prescribed fields of activity.

Table 1 indicates what tasks women and men usually perform, what they seldom do – but can do without social condemnation – and what they cannot do under any circumstances. The table is based on the responses of wife and husband jointly about the division of labour within the household. Women and girls do housework, while men and boys look after the cattle and do construction and repair work. Women and men, girls and boys are all involved in agricultural activities. Interestingly, both men and women stated that most of the agricultural work is shared equally between them. However, more in-depth interviews and observations indicated that these answers overestimate men's labour contribution in agricultural tasks (for instance in weeding). Table 1 shows, however, the current pattern of how the division of labour is perceived. Thus, the findings may be interpreted in the direction that men may share agricultural work equally with women concerning the crops where men have their cultural and economic interests (such as hybrid maize and beans), without damaging their male image.

The tendency for both men and women to overestimate men's contribution to work tasks where women have the main responsibility and men only give "assistance" to their wives is a phenomenon that has been registered in very different cultures. For instance, studies on time allocation in Norwegian households showed the

Table 1. Division of labour: Who does the work?<sup>1</sup>

Activities	Women	Girls	Men	Boys
<b>Food-supporting activities</b>				
Collect water	3	1	0	(+)
Collect/split firewood	2	1	2	1
Make fire	3	1	(+)	(+)
Taking maize to mill	3	2	0	(+)
<b>Housework</b>				
Prepare/cook food	3	1	0	(+)
Tidying/cleaning	3	2	0	0
Child care	3	1	0	0
Washing clothes, mending	3	1	(+)	(+)
Sweeping yard	2	2	(+)	(+)
<b>Animal husbandry</b>				
Watching/feeding cattle	0	0	2	2
Slaughtering animals	(+)	0	(4)	(+)
<b>Agricultural work</b>				
Land preparation, seeding, manuring, weeding, harvesting	2	1	2	1
Ploughing	0	0	2	1
Hoing	2	1	2	2
Put pesticides	2	(+)	3	(+)
Transporting from fields	1	(+)	3	1
Threshing	3	1	1	0
Keeping seeds	4	(+)	0	0
<b>Income-generating activities</b>				
Making charcoal for sale	0	0	4	0
Brew beer	4	(+)	0	0
Fishing/(hunting)	(+)	2	3	1
<b>Buying/selling</b>				
Selling crops	(+)	0	3	(+)
Keep money	2	0	2	0
Going to shop	2	1	2	(+)
<b>Building/maintenance</b>				
Making bricks	(+)	(+)	3	1
Building/repair	0	0	3	(+)
Collecting timber				
Plaster/paint walls	3	1	0	0
<b>Medical care</b>				
Child med. care	4	(+)	(+)	0
Collect/prop. trad. medicine	2	0	2	0
<b>Other</b>				
Adult education	3	0	1	0

<sup>1</sup> Code: 4 = does all work; 3 = does most of the work; 2 = does a substantial part of the work; 1 = does only a small part of the work; (+) = does the work occasionally; 0 = never does the work

same tendency to overestimate men's sharing of household work (Haavind, 1984).

Even though men help more in agricultural tasks now than before, women still carry the main burden of work. The following quotation was overheard when a husband and wife were working in the field:

"You know my wife, I am just helping you with this work. It is not my work. Actually my time is just to rest. So when you see me here at the field you should just be happy. I can choose whichever time I want to go back and you should not complain about me. I have already helped you enough." They continue weeding for a while. After less than an hour he says: "You are not forcing me to work. I am going back home." He took his hoe and left. Later, the wife returns home to cook. After eating, the husband went to the pombe bar and the wife resumed weeding in a field closer to the house.

Men's role as "farm managers" defines the limits to their actual labour contribution in the various agricultural tasks. It is inconceivable to establish an arrangement whereby the woman in principle could stay at home, doing housework while her husband is weeding in the field. As a norm, the "upper limit" for men's participation seems to be an equal share of the work. The example below shows that this man's behaviour is at, or beyond, the limit for what is considered proper conduct of a man:

Philbert helps Rose with the weeding every day, even when she is not going to the field with him. He starts off to the field at 6 in the morning, while she is leaving home later, because she has a small child to take care of first. They usually return home together. Rose is aware of the fact that she is getting more help from her husband than most women in the village. She says some people are laughing at her husband because he is doing more weeding than her.

In order to get some idea of the prevailing gender ideology in married relationships, women were asked about what qualities a "good husband" should have, and men about the qualities of a "good wife". Interestingly, both men and women put up "hard working/industrious" as the most important quality for a spouse. In other respects the answers differed, women estimated highly a



husband who "does not beat his wife" and "does not drink too much" and one who "looks after/cares for wife and children". Men valued other qualities in a wife, such as "be respectful to husband" and "give husband many children" and "do what she is doing well". Thus, higher standards are set for women's performance than for men's. By using negations of unwanted qualities, women seem to be content with men that are not "too bad", while men want women who are "the best".

Food and eating are often strong symbols for sense of community, setting of bounds, as well as hostility (Borchgrevink, 1987). This is because food is often used to express fundamental human feelings, such as respect, love and care, as well as the opposite. A change in food behaviour may therefore be interpreted as a change in the relationship between husband and wife. In Rukwa food was used in many instances to signal the power hierarchy between the sexes. For instance, husbands expect their women to show respect, i.e. show deference. There are many ways of showing "respect". Greeting the husband with a smiling face, not talking back in the case of an argument, refraining from showing too much "strength", are ways of indicating respect. Respect is also demonstrated through the cooking and serving of food, which are regarded as services to the husband. Therefore, when a wife does not have the food ready on time, the husband may interpret this as a strong signal of lack of respect or love, or as a threat to withdrawal of such emotions. Men may in certain instances demonstrate their superiority by demanding service or care from their wives outside regular hours.

Agnes tells that Paskali often comes home drunk from the bar. "At such times he will ask where the food is. Then he asks me to come and wash his hands before he eats. He has the idea that a loving wife should do this to her husband. If I do not have food ready or do not want to come and wash his hands, he beats me."

Women seem to get their sense of worth confirmed more through *work* than anything else. Our data on time allocation, from both observations and recall interviews, showed that women were engaged in all sorts of activities all day, while men spent more time drinking, talking and resting. In addition, when the women were asked what they would do if they had more time, or what they did when they were not working so hard in the field, they seldom mentioned resting/relaxing as an alternative. Most women would

mention activities such as more housework and handicrafts as being those in which they wanted to spend more time. Women's wish always to be busy must be interpreted on the background of the gender ideology existing in the area.

The data indicate that women, more than men, are dependent on living up to the idealized picture portrayed by the other spouse. A woman may be eager to do this, because it is also the picture of mother, nurturer and food procurer with which she confirms her identity. However, a contributory factor may also be that there is a constant threat of negative sanctions, such as physical violence and even divorce, if she does not live up to her husband's expectations. Since a woman's legal position is still weak, and she may lose most of her assets, including her children in the case of divorce, she will usually put down a great deal of effort to avoid this.

The idealized picture of men as portrayed by the women does not include the socializing behaviour. Such behaviour, usually accompanied by beer drinking, is important in confirming maleness. Thus, a man's picture of himself as a man may be different from a woman's picture of him as a good husband. In addition, a man does not fear the same sanctions as women do, when not living up to the other spouse's expectations. He may, therefore feel more free to indulge in activities such as beer drinking, which may in turn give rise to conflicts between the spouses.

## V. Decision-making Processes

### 1. *Bargaining and Control of Resources*

In a questionnaire survey husbands and wives were asked separately about decision-making in relation to different tasks/activities (see Table 2). These activities were assumed to influence directly or indirectly the food and nutritional situation in the household. The most consistent feature is that wives seldom make any decisions alone. Most decisions are taken either by husband and wife jointly or by the husband alone. There was a high degree of correspondence between husbands' and wives' answers, except in a few cases. However, there seemed to be a slight tendency for women to think that decisions were taken jointly, while men were of the opinion that they were taking the decisions alone.

It is interesting to note that the decision to buy food is seldom taken by women alone. As indicated by Table 2, this decision is taken by wife and husband together. In reality this means that

Table 2. Who Decides? Decision-making related to selected activities\*

Activity	Decision taken by:					
	Wife's answer			Husband's answer		
	h	w	b	h	w	b
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Preparing land	29	19	52	30	5	65
Crops grown	45	10	45	38	10	52
When to plant	53	6	41	50	0	50
When to harvest	27	9	64	20	0	80
How to cultivate	64	5	32	95	0	5
What to sell	43	7	50	53	0	47
What to cook	0	95	5	0	95	5
When to cook	0	100	0	5	95	0
What to eat	0	81	19	5	63	31
To make beer	5	90	5	6	83	11
To buy food	23	9	68	60	10	30
To buy soap	10	10	80	24	10	66
To buy clothes	30	5	65	40	0	60
To buy livestock	48	0	52	30	0	70
To slaughter pig/goat	58	0	42	37	5	58
Children's schooling	59	0	41	60	0	40
Children's medical treatment	18	27	55	10	5	85

h = husband, w = wife, b = both husband and wife

Sample size: n = 22

\* Because of variation in the number of responses, the figures are given in percentages to render comparable results.

women usually have to obtain their husbands' permission before anything is bought. Thus, women are placed in a difficult position: they are responsible for cooking and serving the food, but they are not able to buy food without consulting their husbands. This is all the more necessary since men usually keep the money. The following story illustrates this problem:

The salt was finished and I did not have any money to buy some. As I knew that my husband was drinking pombe in the bar, I decided to go there and ask for money. When I reached the bar and told him about the problem he got very upset with me for not having chosen a better time to ask, and he told me to go to hell. I

thought it was important, as my husband would get very upset to get food without salt when he would come home after drinking. The men have just small reasons for beating their wives, especially if they are drunk. And I just wanted to avoid that.

Men seem to make decisions alone more often in activities related to cultivation, particularly in regard to cultivation methods and use of inputs (i.e. how to cultivate) than in other food-related activities. Women participate more in the decision concerning how much of the produce to sell. About half of the husbands as well as the wives reported that they were taking this decision together, while the other halves were of the opinion that the husbands take this decision alone.

There are important nuances which are not reflected in the answers given in Table 2. Our in-depth interviews show a great deal of variation, even in households where most decisions are stated to be taken jointly. In some of these households men in practice took all the decisions, even though the women were consulted. In a few households women took the final decisions alone. In general, women's ability to make decisions on their own would, among other things, depend on the type of crop involved. As expressed by a key informant:

Usually the men make all the decisions concerning cultivation, but nowadays they will often consult their wives first. They take these decisions because they are the leaders of the household. It is the men who decide how the maize should be planted. Even millet cultivation is decided by the men. However, women usually take the decisions concerning ground-nuts and green vegetables (minor crops).

A woman's status relative to her husband was also important for her bargaining power and her ability to make decisions alone. It was, for instance, noted that in households where women had relatively high education, they had more bargaining power and had more say in decision-making than in households where women had little or no schooling.

Even though the authority to make decisions officially rests with the men, women may find ways to have their views accepted. This would among other things depend on their smartness and ability to find arguments that the husband could accept.

In the evening, after working together the whole day in the field, Adamu and Josephina are discussing plans for cultivation. Josephina suggest that they should enlarge the maize field next year so that they can earn some more money. Adamu does not agree. He suggests they make a large millet field. Josephina disagrees and argues that extending the millet field will give her much more work than if the maize field is extended. In the end both of them agree that the best thing to do would be to extend the maize field.

According to Willis (1989) the Fipa women have a strong standing compared to their counterparts in other East African tribes, such as the Bemba. In the 1960s Willis found that decisions were usually taken on the basis of discussions in the household, but that the man had the final say. This seems still to be the general rule, though it entails that the women, despite their relatively good position, have a subordinate position in decision making.

However, the importance of women's ability to bargain in disputes with their men should not be overlooked. When a husband demands more assistance in the fields, the woman may point to her limited capacity to supply labour and argue that other important tasks may not be done if his will prevails. By the force of the argument she may also be able to convince her husband that his use of money may jeopardize the food security in the household or the satisfaction of other essential needs. In such disagreements women often have the support of the existing norms or moral codes in the community. She may raise the problem with parents-in-law, or with village authorities to get the necessary backing for her views. If she is "right" and he is "wrong" according to these norms, it will be easier for her to push her views through. Hence, the social norms governing the behaviour of men and women are important determinants of the bargaining power of women.

## *2. Decision-making and Socio-economic Change*

Even though the development processes aimed at improvement of women's position in Tanzania have been slow and sometimes fraught with failure, there has been a definite change in the life of women in some aspects. This is probably best seen in regard to education. The socialist policy of the Tanzanian Government has opened up for better education for both boys and girls (Government of Tanzania/UNICEF, 1985). As a result, the educational "gap" between men and women is closing in the area studied, as



elsewhere in Tanzania. Whereas few of the older women had any schooling and were illiterate, most of the younger women have had some schooling. In addition, adult education classes for women are given on a regular basis in the area.

Furthermore, the Government has launched information campaigns through the mass media about women's issues and equal rights for women. The establishment of a local branch of the national women's organizations (UWT) under the auspices of the local party (CCM) offices has made it possible to bring women's issues to the attention of people at the grassroots level.

Changes in the socio-economic conditions in the project area have to a large extent occurred as a result of development efforts within the agricultural sector. Although agricultural production is still mostly concentrated on food crops, it is no longer exclusively oriented towards subsistence – but also towards marketing. This transition is the result of the increased use of modern technology implements (such as hybrid seeds, fertilizers and pesticides), which has entailed an increased need for cash. The need for cash has been met by increased production. At the same time, the better access to markets has opened up the opportunities for increased consumption of all sorts of goods, thus furthering the need for surplus production for cash.

Many of our informants expressed the opinion that there are more conflicts between husband and wife nowadays than before. Although there are no available historical data to support this notion, other findings from our study point in the same direction. If this is so, it may indicate that the developmental processes have led to changes in the underlying factors governing decision-making and gender relations in the household. We will especially point to two possible explanations for the increase in gender conflicts:

1. The socio-economic change has led to an increase in women's bargaining power, thus leaving more "space" for women to bring up controversial issues with men.
2. The change processes have created more pressure on household labour and resources, thus exposing more clearly the gender differences in priorities and expectations.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, these processes may in fact reinforce each other. The relevance of the *first explanation* is illustrated by several statements made by both women and men:

In the old days men decided everything. The women did not have any power at all to make decisions. This has changed very much. Now both women and men decide on household matters and matters of cultivation. (Edwina, born around 1910)

In the old days they never discussed anything in the family. The men decided everything. There has been a change in this matter. Nowadays the man will usually tell his wife about his ideas and then they discuss. (Edinata, born around 1905)

The men had the same view:

The men used to take all the decisions concerning cultivation, but nowadays they will often consult their wives first. (Malius, a middle-aged model farmer.)

... Today women think more of themselves than they used to do... (Zenohi, about 80 years)

The improvements in women's social status have been slow and women are still non-assertive, i.e. due to fear of physical punishment and divorce. However, in spite of this, most women feel that there has been a definite change. Better education and a slowly awakening awareness of their rights may have given the women the psychological strength and the moral backing to start to push their views *vis-à-vis* their men. In fact the men were complaining about this situation:

Deusi is inviting two neighbours to share his food while he and his wife are taking a break to rest from field-work. While they are eating the men start to talk about how life has changed lately. They say: "These days men have a much more difficult time than earlier. The women have become more demanding. They voice so many more needs, they even want nice clothing and jewellery." They conclude that it is difficult for a man to have more than one wife if he should be able to meet all these needs.

*The second explanation* points to the linkages between changes in the resource situation and decision-making processes in the household. There are several indications that also support this explanation. The first indication concerns our finding that there are variations in household food availability according to degree of

integration into the market. Although the two study villages are similar in many respects, such as access to land, production pattern, socio-cultural and ecological aspects, one village is more integrated into the market than the other. The more market-oriented one is characterized by a greater internal cash flow, and there is a better access to markets both within and outside the village. In the other village people rely to a greater extent on the traditional system of bartering and have less access to outside markets. Despite the high degree of similarity, a marked difference was found in the household food security situation in the two villages. Even in an agricultural year when the average harvest of the major food crops, maize and beans, was almost the same in the two villages, the more market-oriented village ran out of household food stocks faster than the other village (Wandel and Holmboe-Ottesen, 1991). It was more common in this village for the men to take from these food reserves in order to obtain money, and use the cash to buy non-food items and beer.

In addition, our interviews and observations indicated a clear tendency of more conflicts between men and women in the more market-oriented village. The increased need for cash leads, sooner or later, to a situation where the food stocks run so low that men's and women's divergent priorities concerning these stocks will be in conflict. In order to meet their obligations as food providers of the family, thus living up to their ideal as "good wives", the women feel forced to fight their husband's decision to sell from the food stocks. As we have seen, women are not always successful in such attempts. However, many women, by force of their arguments alone, are able to get their men to change their minds.

Commercialization of agricultural production leads not only to pressure on household food stocks, but also to constraints on women's labour. Larger areas are cultivated, resulting in more work for women in the fields, particularly in weeding. The larger work load in the field forces women to make priorities within their area of responsibility. Housework, child care and feeding, as well as cooking, are activities that receive less attention when women are busy in the fields. This, in turn, exposes women to the criticism of being "bad women" and to husbands' anger for not having food ready when they expect it.

On the other hand, the increased acreage put under cultivation has opened up greater involvement in agricultural activities for men, even in weeding, which used to be entirely a "women's task". The following explanation made by one of our informants regarding

why they were not engaged in weeding was typical for many of the men we interviewed:

The men are taking part in weeding now, because this has become necessary after we started cultivating big fields. If the men are not helping, the women will not be able to finish in time. Then the weeds will grow large before they are removed and the yields will be less. . . . Men are able to help in weeding because now maize is cultivated in rows, and not broadcasted as earlier. They can help when maize and beans are cultivated separately [which is the modern way of cultivation – our remark], and not intercropped. This is because men are using a bigger hoe than women, and with that they cannot weed with a small space in between the plants [which is the case when broadcasting or intercropping is practised – our remark].

The fact that men have become engaged in weeding, the most heavy and time-consuming task in the field, opens up the possibility for women of negotiating with their husbands about their labour contribution:

Edwina says that she always has to ask her husband to come along to the field to help her weed, otherwise he will not go, even though he does not have any other work to do.

Fortunata says that last year Didasi hardly helped her with the weeding at all. This year she asked him to help her more with the weeding than he did last year, and he is now doing that.

The wives may argue with their husbands for all the benefits entailed if they get help, both in terms of higher production and in terms of more time for cooking and other household tasks. The fact that the women are nowadays able to ask for more help from their husbands in weeding, and sometimes get it, indicates that women have increased their bargaining power.

## VI. Implications for Household Food Availability and Nutrition

Our findings support the notion that the more command women have over household resources (including food, cash and labour), the greater their chance of securing adequate food supply and

nutritional well-being in the household. The reason is that women more than men tend to favour basic food needs above other needs in the household. Similar results have come from studies elsewhere in Tanzania (Tobisson, 1980; Mascarenhas, 1983), and from other countries in Africa (Skjøsberg, 1981; Kumar, 1985; Bérió, 1984). In fact, this gender-specific pattern seems also to be common in other developing regions (Holmboe-Ottesen *et al.*, 1989).

The extent to which women have command over household resources relevant to food depends mainly on two factors: first, on women's direct access to these resources, and second, on their ability to influence decisions concerning the allocation and use of them (i.e. their bargaining power). In this community, women's direct access to food resources is limited to what is left to be stored in the household granaries after the surplus from the harvest has been sold. From this time women are faced with the problem of trying to prevent their husbands from selling food from the household stores. In addition, women have direct access to cash from their own income-earning activities, which for most of them is limited to beer brewing and sales of small quantities of ground-nuts. However, since men can demand a share of these earnings, women's control over these resources depends on their bargaining power *vis-à-vis* their husbands.

The processes of change in Rukwa have, by changing women's situation, influenced the food and nutritional situation in the household both positively and negatively. As mentioned earlier, there are many indications that women's bargaining power has increased as a consequence of the Tanzanian policy on education and women's issues. It can therefore be expected that nowadays women stand a greater chance of influencing the decisions where men still have the final say. This is particularly important with regard to sale of food stocks, and the way in which cash is used.

The increased bargaining power of women may also have been important in men's partaking in field-work, especially in weeding. This may be one factor that has led to increased yields, and thus augmented the opportunity of securing food for the household all year around.

One possible effect of men's increased involvement in agricultural work could be to relieve women of some of the time constraints they encounter in providing adequate nutrition to the family. One could perhaps expect that when men involve themselves more in production, women could work less in the fields, and thus have more time to spend on cooking and on child care. When



women are busy working in the field, they are not able to cook proper meals and children are fed less often (Wandel and Holmboe-Ottesen, 1989). However, data on time use showed that women who have husbands who are highly active in the fields have to work more than women who have husbands who contribute much less in this respect (Holmboe-Ottesen and Wandel, 1991). As pointed out earlier, this is due to the fact that women are considered to be the main ones responsible for this work, while men in their role as "farm managers" are just "helping out" in the field. An industrious man thus requires a wife who works at least as hard as he does.

The nutritional status among children was found to be markedly worse in the more market-oriented village. Children were found to be fed less often during the day and this discrepancy was particularly pronounced in the pre-harvest season when food is short and women have a high work-load. Analyses of the data revealed that there were many reasons for this difference (Wandel and Holmboe-Ottesen, 1991). However, a main factor was found to be the lower food security in the households in the market-oriented village.

Market integration has thus led to a squeeze on the food resources in this community, which in turn has had adverse consequences for child feeding and nutrition. Similar findings have been obtained from other studies (Biswas, 1979; Dewey, 1981, 1990). On the other hand, the modernization of agriculture which has been part and parcel of the market-integration process has increased production and thus improved the potential for better food security and nutrition. It can therefore be argued that there is no inherent negative aspect of commercialization of agriculture in terms of food and nutritional effects (Pinstrup-Andersen, 1985). It is more a matter of household priorities in terms of allocation of labour and the use of food and cash.

When discussing the implications of market integration for the food and nutritional situation in the study area, it is important to draw attention to the change in beer drinking habits which has occurred concomitantly. Beer, earlier offered seasonally on special occasions, has now become highly commercialized. Due to surplus production of grains in many households and the preference for cash earning activities, beer is available every day, the whole year around. Since the social life at the beer bars is held in high esteem, especially by men, there is a great temptation to spend substantial amounts of their time and money this way, even at the expense of household food security. It is important to emphasize that men do

not get their "maleness" confirmed by excessive drinking. However, it can be assumed that many men have been caught in an evil circle, from which alcoholism becomes a likely outcome of this type of socialization among men.

Women have also been active in this change of drinking habits. They have a vested interest in increased beer production, since they have a larger control over money earned this way than over production of the main crops, such as maize. However, none of the women wanted their husbands to be large consumers of their own products, since that would mean more hardships for themselves, in terms of violence as well as a deterioration of the household food situation.

In order to secure a more positive nutritional outcome in the area it will be necessary to promote development efforts that come to grips with these negative trends. The foundation needs to be laid for a larger fraction of the men to become "good husbands", i.e. drinking less and helping their wives in the fields, and for nutrition to be given higher priority by both men and women.

## Notes

- 1 We wish to acknowledge the helpful contribution of Elisabeth Frst and Siri Gerrard to an earlier version of this chapter. In particular we want to thank Marit Melhuus, who spent quite some time and effort in helping us restructure and sharpen our arguments in this chapter. We are also especially indebted to the two editors, Kristi Anne Stlen and Mariken Vaa, who guided us safely through the lengthy process of writing.
- 2 The field research included both qualitative and quantitative data. This chapter is based mainly on the qualitative data from interviews with women and men, single or in groups, as well as participant observation and notes from discussions between villagers in the fields and at home. For a more thorough description of research design and methods, readers are referred to Holmboe-Ottesen and Wandel (1991) and Wandel and Holmboe-Ottesen (1991).
- 3 All names used in the examples are fictitious, but names commonly found in the Fipa society.

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