

THE SHARING OF THE PUMPKIN SOUP: SOME GENDER ASPECTS OF THE UPPER MGETA RURAL COMMUNITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Thierry Lassale and Benedicte Marquet

INTRODUCTION

The gender issue is often cited as being responsible for the non adoption of innovations. Programmes or projects are focused on the wrong target groups. When at least one half of whatever population is neglected, that is to say the female or male components, depending on the cases, many argue that development or the adoption of an innovation can hardly succeed. Sociologist Janett Polley, in a recent conference at SUA, discussed the conclusions of a workshop on that issue. On behalf of the workshop participants, she developed the idea that gender issues should be taken into consideration and also that a geographical approach was preferable to an ideological one.

It is assumed that any development process has to be rooted in the society where it has to take place. The diversity of the rural communities in Tanzania due to customs or natural environment, is a positive trump card to enhance sustainable development

The rural community of the Mgeta division in Morogoro district is discussed in this paper as a case study. This area has been selected to host various development projects sponsored by SUA. The gender issue *per se*, has never been really looked at. However, females show interest in the projects and participate in the activities as men do. This led us to conduct a research to find out why those women were participating when nobody seemed to encourage them to do so.

Luguru traditions especially the matrilineage, can explain the observed women's spontaneous dynamism. However, the tradition failed to provide answers to address some crucial problems of the contemporary Mgeta society. Monetarisisation affects all the sectors of the society and particularly production and land tenure. New forms of solidarity have to emerge from the traditional and exogenous patterns. At each stage, the gender issue, which was taken into account in the traditional settings, is not to be overlooked. The Luguru society had, in the past, an original gender balanced organisation. Modernization very often conveys male dominated patterns. One such pattern is the creation of female oriented activities. Any extension project has to bear in mind that the society in Mgeta already made room for both genders. Extensionists should therefore not encourage projects based on gender in a society with finely balanced gender patterns.

THE BALANCED GENDER ROLES IN LUGURU CULTURE

According to tales and beliefs narrated by elders regarding past Luguru culture, it seems that daily activities, roles and tasks were rather balanced between genders. There is no doubt that the matrilinearity culture conferred big role to women in the society.

The Roots of the Luguru Pantheon

The Luguru people originated from a mixture of various ethnic groups who migrated into what is now Morogoro District about three centuries ago. Tales and beliefs differ from place to place and there is very little written reference on the subject. One of these beliefs is that the first man and the first woman were both created by a unique god. It is remarkable that this god is considered as the "father and mother of humanity at one and the same time" (Hadumbavhinu, 1968). The same author reported that the first

human beings had both a constant free access to their creator. A very instructive tale allow us to characterize the common unconscious behaviour of this society:

"The creator gave the man a pumpkin seed and told him to sow it. The fruit was supposed to be good to eat. After several months, the man harvested a pumpkin. He gave it to his wife and told her to cook it but when it was cooked, he ate it alone. His wife felt very angry about such behaviour and went to complain to her creator. The following morning, the man went to pick up a pumpkin again. He gave it to his wife for cooking. They ate it together when it was ready. Since that time the husband and the wife have shared their meals." (Hadumbavhinu, 1968).

Behind the anecdote and its moral concerning domestic life is the fact that when the wife is not satisfied with her husband's behaviour, she gets the opportunity to appeal to the power in place. This power enforces her rights.

A Balanced Partition of Tasks

"Do you know why it is said that a Luguru male can give birth? It is because he can carry his child on his back" This small guessing game is reputed to belong to the first priests who reached the Mgeta area at the beginning of the century. Nowadays, it is still very common to meet fathers with their young children huddled in a "khanga" on their backs. When the husband and his wife are going to the fields, either one or the other carries the child. When a child is sick and needs to be sent to the dispensary, the father carries him or her while the mother may go to the field or remain at home with the other children. This habit is practised even by the children themselves, who carry their younger brothers or sisters as their parents do. The mothers, however, remain more physically involved than the fathers in the caring of young children. But when the mother is preparing the meal, the father can hold the baby and play with it for quite a long time.

Firewood collection is generally shared by the whole family, whatever the age and the gender. A man who is working near the forest will come back home with a load of firewood. At home, again either the boys or the girls will split it. Water is generally collected by the females although boys are also expected to do this task. Other tasks linked to the preparation of food are quite exclusively done by the women.

Both the husband and the wife work in the fields. "If the couple worked in the field, the harvest is theirs in common. But, if the work was done by one person, the harvest belongs to her or him only. The husband or the wife do have the right to cultivate separate fields whose harvest will belong to him or her only. The profit gained is known in the vernacular language as "ghane" (Hadumbavhinu, 1968). this description is adequate. Whenever a of a couple is asked a question about fields, crops or harvests, he or she very often answers by using the pronoun "we".

Thus, in Luguru culture we can consider property as comprising the common and the "ghane". In general, among the Luguru, some activities are "reserved" to men or women. The brewing of a local beverage made from maize bran and sorghum, for example, is handled by the women. However, a few men are involved in the brewing of fruit, while others go to neighbouring wards to get the necessary ingredients such as sorghum or millet on behalf of their wives. Petty trading of external products (e.g. sugar, salt, cigarettes) is done by young men while young women deal more with meal ingredients produced either locally or in nearby villages. They also make and sell buns and baked potatoes while their male counterparts prepare and sell grilled pork. All these activities are performed in the same places (e.g.

markets, village streets, clubs) for all. Trading of cash crops in bulk is mainly done by males but a woman may also be involved in it without shocking or being rejected. Joint ventures also exist.

The Transmission of Land in the Matrilineal Society

The Luguru tribe is constituted of clans. These clans are subdivided in lineages. Tradition distributed land to each lineage according to needs. Actually, so long as land was available, a lineage cultivated it. The others respected it as a right for this particular lineage. Inside the lineage, the land was distributed by the elders to all the children of a family, female and male; according to their need. For the second generation, the daughters and sons could continue to cultivate the land distributed to their parents but the daughters could transfer it only to their children. The land that was used by the sons was meant to come back in the lineage and be redistributed to their aunts' children. The son's eldest maternal uncle (Baba Mrithi) was in charge of the sharing. If all the men were deceased, the eldest woman inherited the task. Land inheritance among the Luguru was thus characteristic of a matrilinear society.

However, there were some variations in the land distribution scheme outlined. Many villagers who were interviewed pointed out that the sharing of land took into consideration the needs of each member. A unmarried woman could be given more land than her married sister who also got access to land through her husband. One thing to remember is that in the past land was still available. New plots were incorporated in the lineage by members who settled on virgin lands by deforesting.

Community Honours for Girls

Many tribes impose an initiation period to their members when leaving childhood. During this stage, the future young man or woman is taught the traditions of his/her tribe and his/her role in it. He/she is initiated to the reproduction tasks. In the Luguru tribe, a girl who reached puberty is confined to a house for a couple of months. During this time the young girl is known as "mwali". She is not allowed to go out during daytime and be seen by men. Her sisters and aunts educate her about her responsibilities as a woman. At the end of this period the "mwali" is allowed to go out ceremoniously. The young woman is re-born to her society (Koponen, 1988). She is ready to become a wife and mother. A similar initiation is also available to men, but it has almost disappeared. The tradition remains stronger for the women. They are still honoured and such celebrations cost a lot of money for the parents. The eldest women are active participants in initiation. Among other things, they sing meaningful songs about life cycles and women roles.

The Decay of Traditions

At the end of the 20th century, a society can hardly reproduce itself without taking into consideration the external world and change has overtaken even the Luguru. The Luguru society in Upper Mgeta has had to face two major factors which forced them to break with pure tradition. Rapid population growth has contributed much to the break with tradition. The space cannot absorb all the members of the society. The causes for this eventuality have been analysed a great deal. On this point, the Luguru society is very similar to many others. Land has become scarce. This is an indigenous cause for change. The second main cause is exogenous. Colonisation of the area at the beginning of the century and christianisation introduced new systems of value in the society. Independence and the application of national law introduced yet newer referent points.

Scarcity of land and the new value systems modified traditional practices. The roles attributed to each member changed. But the foundation stones laid by tradition are still solid and can be used to build on a new social order.

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

Change in a social system is a gradual process. It is not possible to pinpoint precisely when it began. Both endogenous and exogenous factors are involved.

Some of the factors include intensification of the production process, change in land tenure and the creation of interest groups.

The intensification of the Production Process

Luguru people in Upper Mgeta are mainly dependent on agriculture. The altitude confers a temperate climate to the area. Its relative closeness to Dar es Salaam provides a wide market. These two reasons caused the introduction of temperate fruits and vegetables by the early settlers. The local population rapidly got the necessary skills to grow these profitable horticultural crops which became the cash crops of the area. As regards food crops, maize and beans are the staple crops. The livestock kept in Upper Mgeta are mainly pigs, which are found in 65% of households. Sheep and goats are also found (Paul, 1988). While horticulture has always been cash oriented, pig husbandry has other functions such as producing manure for the vegetable plots and improving the local diet of the Christian population. However, it can be considered as a cash generating activity as long as the animal is sold to butchers who slaughter it and retail the meat on the local market.

Both men and women are involved in farming activities (horticulture and pig husbandry), which require a high level of labour force and a good level of expertise. If they are expected to be run with a high level of profit, inputs have to be purchased. Apart from recycling the wastes of the farm, pigs are fed with maize bran purchased outside of the farming system. Beside the organic pig manure, vegetables are fertilized using industrial fertilizers. This intensification needs capital to be invested in the production process in order to generate substantial profit. Thus, satisfaction of family requirements is getting more production whose transfer and exchange are not under the control of traditional rules. Cash management introduces a new concept of decision making within the nuclear family at the expense of the lineage. Hence, the nuclear family becomes the centre of decision-making.

Three years ago, dairy goat keeping was introduced in ten Upper-Mgeta farm families under the supervision of a SUA based development project sponsored by Danish Volunteers (Mtenga and Madsen, 1991). Couples, who are basic decision-making units, were always considered in the dairy goat project. They participated as such in all the training seminars organized for the purpose. On the farm, the whole family becomes involved in dairy goat keeping without gender differentiation unless one felt more at ease with a particular task rather than the other. Gender differentiation did not appear to be a limiting factor to the adoption of this innovation.

A chicken keeping project was started this year (1991) for egg production. Even though female farmers were the target group, dairy goat keepers are the main partners of the project. During the sensitization process for farmers, only a limited number were involved. On paper, the woman is the one to handle this activity, but in reality, the couple integrated this new activity in its farming system as it did for the dairy goats, sharing the tasks. In many cases, the chicken house was built by the husband. The activity is known to be under the management of the woman but in close collaboration with her husband.

During the intensification process of the farming systems, farmers have to find and control new production technics. Regardless of gender differentiation, some people may feel more interested and adapt and change their system faster. In this process, it is still important to direct innovations towards

both men and women to reduce the innovation rejection rate.

The Transition in Land Tenure

Due to demographic pressure, the acreage under lineage control is split in small plots between the numerous heirs. Settling on virgin land in order to extend the property of the lineage was the usual practice. Nowadays, due to the scarcity of such land in the surrounding areas, such a method is not anymore possible. As land inherited from the lineage was insufficient to meet the family needs, people were forced to increase the size of their farm by other means. Gradually, the land became an asset that could be bought and sold. It could be purchased from a lineage member outright or by paying rent. Nowadays, both systems can be found and are usually combined.

Margelina and her husband are cultivating six plots. Four of them have been inherited by Margelina from her lineage. The two other plots have been bought. None came from her husband's lineage. No doubt that the tradition secured the welfare of the woman rather than that of the man. One plot had been bought from a male cousin from Margelina's lineage. Although she was supposed to inherit a portion of this plot, by buying it, the couple was sure that it would not be split between all the other heirs. They were also securing the future of their own children. However, buyers have to cultivate the land in order to see their right recognized. The second field which had been bought was rented to another lineage member by Margelina's parents. When she intended to cultivate it, the renter forced her either to buy it at a high price or to return it to its original lineage. The plot will escape the traditional rules in the second generation. This case shows that the cousin was allowed to sell his plot to somebody else within the lineage, although the plot was given by the lineage. As the land has been purchased by the couple, the woman has to renounce her traditional rights to it. Access to land is not anymore related to the needs of the family but to ability to acquire.

As far as the site of habitation is concerned, people also tend to move away from tradition. A couple was supposed to build its residence on a site provided by the wife's lineage. In many cases, this rule is not anymore followed. A couple will equally build its house on a piece of land inherited by the husband or bought from somebody else, if the opportunities in the wife's family are not satisfactory.

Women are losing their dominant role in the transmission of land in the Luguru society, but they are as involved in the changes as the men. The introduction of a value given to land, emphasizes the importance of the nuclear family which is the owner of capital. The emergence of new patterns of land acquisition shows that within the Luguru society, monetarisation is becoming a substitute for customs, as the traditional rules cannot respond any more to the needs. This tendency notwithstanding, decision making patterns continue to be balanced between men and women.

The Creation of Groups with Common Interests

The Luguru society must not lose the strength of its community life with the depreciation of the power of the lineage. In order to face the intensification of production and the increasing requirement for cash, it appears that new forms of solidarity have to be sought. A technical innovation is adopted when it fills a gap. We also assume that the farmers spontaneously adopt methods of work in accordance with their concept of life. The attitude adopted by the promoters of the new farmers' groups based on interests is a decisive factor of adoption.

Through various ways, groups have been formed to implement common technical interests. The way the gender issue is dealt with by the people themselves varies from case to case.

Six farmers were chosen to handle fruit tree nurseries on their farm. They should be able to run them as an income generating activity after two years. Amongst the forty five volunteers, the gender ratio was 12 women and 33 men. The selection was made on technical experience and motivation of the candidates. Gender was not taken into consideration. However, three among the six are female. The group elected the eldest woman as their spokesperson.

In order to ease input supply and marketing of the fruit and vegetables, eighty farmers formed an association. One quarter of the members are women. But only one has been elected in the nine member management committee. The members also selected five young farmers to be trained to become the marketing officers of the association. After two months of on-the-plot experience, the management board decided to retain only two of them. The two women have been put aside although one of them performed very well. When looking at economic figures, it appears that she was the only one who generated a profit each time she was handling the business. The situation was then rectified and she was then confirmed in the post. It is crucial for the extensionists to be aware of such behaviour. Let us not forget the pumpkin soup that was cooked by one and eaten by the other.

Coming back to the dairy goat keepers, it was observed that in spite of the fact that the project team considered the couple as the focus of attention, a group was formed by the males only. In some cases, they were not at all involved in this activity on the farm. Again, we think that if we wish to introduce a social innovation such as a livestock keepers group, it is very important not to duplicate male dominated patterns that, of course, are always welcomed by the males. The males must not be considered as the exclusive ambassadors of the couples in the world of innovations.

Recently, the National Bank of Commerce opened a sub-branch in Mgeta. In order to promote the use of the bank by the local populations, a public information meeting was organized when the bank officers exposed the different services offered. The speaker emphasized specially the women issue. He quoted various examples taken in the male dominated Tanzanian context and presented his bank as a protector of the oppressed women's cash. Nobody dared to put him to task because his message was too caricatural and not representative of the habits of the public in Mgeta. He should have consulted a sociologist/anthropologist first.

Twelve small groups with various technical interests are working with the extensionists in order to develop a cash generating activity on their farm. Those groups have been formed on the basis of a positive feeling among members. Quite small in size, with five to ten members, eight groups exist. None of these groups are oriented towards defense of women's interests. Such a role is under the authority of the not very active local branches of the mass organization affiliated to the ruling party.

In order to ensure that gender issues are promoted, the attitude of the extensionist is the crucial condition for women involvement in the new kinds of organizations. There are not enough female extensionists to go around, and even if there were, they are not might be ineffective, if they came from male dominated societies. When the agricultural field officers (Bwana Shamba) are male, it is important to make them gender conscious. The society from where they originate may influence their work as far as the gender issue is concerned. In Mgeta, a native woman hired by the project as a field assistant is now considered by the farmers as a technician.

CONCLUSION

The Mgeta society is on its way from a traditional structure based upon matrilineage to a new social order. This new pattern has to integrate the various changes that are affecting the Luguru people.

The role and the room left for the women or for the men remain undefined. It appears, however, that the traditional balance in roles is moving to address the challenge of the present. Spontaneously, gender participation occurred. Unfortunately some of the changes also carried a hidden social agenda that disadvantaged women.

In Mgeta, the gender issue is an invisible issue that a stranger may overlook. Women do not need to be taught that they have to fight for their rights, they know it as a second nature since the time they had to struggle to obtain their share of the pumpkin soup. They just have to be listened to as much as their male colleagues.

REFERENCES

- Delobel, T. and T. Lassale, (1990). "Upper Mgeta Horticultural Development Project" SUA, Morogoro.
- Hadumbavhinu, R.L. (1968). Waluguru na Destori Zao, Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, pp. 11-12., 39.
- Halfani, M.S. (1974). "Some Luguru Clan Histories, Utani Relationships, Ancestors Propitiation, and Land Ownership: A Case Study of Langali Community in Mgeta", in Utani Relationships Vol. III, Dar es Salaam: Central Library National Collection.
- Koponen, J. (1988). People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania. Uppsala, Sweden. pp. 319-324.
- Madsen, A. and Mtenga, L.A. (1990). "The Introduction of Norwegian Dairy Goats in the Upper Mgeta Livestock Keeping System", SUA, Morogoro.
- Mzuanda, C.J. (1958). Historia ya Uluguru. Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau.
- Paul, J.L. (1988). "Farming Systems in Upper Mgeta," FTHDP/SUA, Morogoro.
- Poley, J.K. (1991). "Gender Issues in Agricultural Production: Analysing the Invisible" Paper presented at the SUA Workshop on Women in Development (WID), Morogoro, 12-16 August.