Women's Changing Roles and Status in Thieudeme, Senegal: The Impact of Local and Global Factors

Coumba Mar Gadio and Cathy A. Rakowski
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Abstract: This paper focuses on the changing roles and relative decision making power of the women farmers of Thieudeme, Senegal. Through interviews with three generations of women--supplemented by document research and interviews with men and researchers--sociological notions of change and power are combined with women's notions to tease out the details of role change from part time subsistence farming of hardy staples to full time farming and marketing of vegetables and evaluate women's decision making. This technique also is used to compare women's perceptions of change factors--drought, economic crisis, and a "curse"--with those identified through historical and policy research, including pressures on customary rights, land tenure and markets. We conclude that women's traditional arenas of decision making power have expanded along with responsibilities for farming and marketing. As a result, increased work burdens also improved their status in the community and households and were factors in organizing and greater autonomy. Nonetheless, women are more likely to point to stress from increased burdens and conflicts than to conclude that change has brought any benefits.

About the Authors:
Coumba Mar Gadio received her Ph.D. in Rural Sociology from The Ohio State University in 1998. She is a former consultant and researcher to USAID and to non-governmental organizations in Senegal. She currently holds a position as Visiting Assistant Professor at Marlboro College in Vermont.

Cathy A. Rakowski is Associate Professor of Rural Sociology and Women's Studies at The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on Latin America primarily and currently she is working on a book on the gendering of a municipal government in a planned industrial city in Venezuela.

**Women's Changing Roles and Status in Thieudeme, Senegal:
The Impact of Local and Global Factors**

Coumba Mar Gadio and Cathy A. Rakowski[1]

Senegalese women, like other African women, are critical to household survival and the economic development of their country even though their contributions are not always recognized. Similarly, Senegalese women, like Senegalese men, are impacted by and impact the implementation of economic restructuring policies, political and economic stratification, and ecological and market change. While only highly selective data exist on changes in the roles and survival strategies of farmers in general over the last few generations, even less is known about the gendered nature of change. This is due to the lack of attention to changes in women's roles and power in general and to the failure to link changes in women's roles--when recognized--to diverse change factors at the local, national and even the global levels.

This paper presents preliminary findings from research on three generations of women in the village of Thieudeme. Research was designed to overcome empirical gaps in our understanding of the gendered nature of change. Preliminary findings reveal that the roles and decision making power of women as farmers, wives, and community members have changed dramatically in the last three generations. Although men's roles also have changed, it is women's roles and relative power, autonomy, and status that attract people's attention and provoke the greatest discussion at the local level. Women's roles in the 1980s and 1990s deviated significantly from those of women in earlier periods. In particular, women have shifted their labor allocation to emphasize farming and have switched from hardy food staples like millet and rice to higher profit but riskier production of perishable vegetables. Many women also have expanded their work to include direct marketing of produce and they are organized in small self help groups, particularly rotating credit organizations. The timing of these shifts coincides with important economic, ecological, and political changes taking place in Senegal and in the global marketplace. Interestingly, women and men of different generations are not in complete agreement regarding whether

or not changes in women's roles are for the better or the worse. Older women are the most critical of such changes.

This paper begins with a discussion of the theoretical/conceptual context within which this study was developed, presents the major questions posed and the design of the research. It outlines and explains some of the major changes in women's roles as producers and as family/community members and decision makers, and highlights some of the most important local, national, and international factors that appear to be associated with local level changes in women's roles, status and decision making power.

African Women Farmers: Roles, Status and Relative Power

The growing body of literature on women and agriculture and on women and power is limited by two problems. The first is the bias in data towards the English-speaking countries of East and West Africa. The second is the emphasis on research questions that conform more to sociological and anthropological concepts and methods than to the local context. Empirical knowledge of the empowerment and roles of African women farmers will benefit from a research approach that combines "objective," generalizable indicators of power with indicators constructed from women's perceptions and local values.

Another problem revealed by Lewis (1984), Rogers (1980), and Njoku (1980) for research on women's relative roles and status is that cash cropping, usually identified with men, has received greater attention from researchers and extension agents than has production or marketing for local consumption--usually the domain of women. These are not new issues. Regarding the issue of cash cropping in Africa and its identification with men farmers, Boserup (1970) emphasized that "the introduction of cash cropping [by the colonizers] with its attendant emphasis upon male controlled agricultural intensification is a primary determinant of women's loss of power and status" (p.7). Although there is a discussion in the more recent literature on women in development of how access to income and productive resources appears to be linked to improvements in the well-being of women and children (for instance, better

nutrition), few studies have asked whether the introduction of cash cropping by women reverses earlier trends--that is, leads to improved power and status for women or under what circumstances. Furthermore, studies of women farmers tend to focus on issues important to development planning, technical aspects of production, and farmers' organizations, while studies of women and power tend to focus on case studies of women's political organizations and social movements. Only a handful of studies focus on women's perception of their reality as farmers, women, wives, mothers or citizens and most of these are anecdotal and have small samples. Importantly, few studies of women farmers allow women themselves to define the issues of importance; instead issues are defined by the researcher's discipline and theories alone (Isern 1990). As a result, studies may have missed dimensions and/or notions of power and status that are significant in certain cultures or under certain economic conditions. This interferes with our ability to generalize and improve sociological concepts through comparative research. In the case of Senegal, there are some recent analyses available on women farmers in general or at the national level, but there are no known studies that focus on women who produce and market specific crops for a local market.

Given these shortcomings, we can situate Senegalese women in the general context of knowledge produced through other studies. Most rural women in Sub Saharan Africa (90%), are farmers (Henn 1984; Lele 1991). They perform the bulk of the subsistence production (70%) and reproductive work (Robertson 1984; Bryson 1984; ILO 1984; Boyle 1988). As producers, women's work in the field helps them feed their families but goes beyond farming alone. Women's rural activities in many parts of Africa range from agricultural production, food processing, food providing, marketing, and craft making. According to Blumberg (1984) and Lewis (1984), in some places African women contribute 70% of all human labor time spent on food production, 100% of the time spent on food processing, 50% of that spent on food storage and animal husbandry, 60% of all the marketing, and 90% of the time spent obtaining firewood and water. At least one anthropological overview of a large number of societies found that women's status has tended to be highest in those places where workloads are more egalitarian and lowest

in places where women provide the highest and lowest proportions of household sustenance. Changes in the division of labor through the implementation of macro-economic policies and development programs and projects may have changed this.

Women's domestic/reproductive roles include care of children, husbands and the elderly. This goes beyond "biological" roles of bearing and rearing children, to a role in reproducing the labor force by providing care, cooking food, fetching water and fuel for their families and communities (Brydon and Chant 1989; Boserup 1970; ILO 1984). However, African women tend not to differentiate between these roles as do social scientists: "African women do not view themselves as relegated to one or the other sphere and often operate in both. Production (usually included in the public sphere by sociologists and anthropologists) and procreation (included in the domestic sphere) are interwoven in the daily lives of African women" (Davison 1988:8; Mikell 1997:3). Furthermore, Western feminist theories tend to see domestic roles as wives and mothers as a source of women's subordination. But recent studies from Africa and from Latin American and Asia have begun to document how for some women and under certain conditions women's traditional roles can become a basis for mobilizing and demands (for instance, in the case of mothers' human rights groups and African mothers' environmental groups) (Kettel 1995; Mikell 1997).

One fact is well documented. Despite its centrality in the economy and domestic life, African women's critical role in agriculture and marketing has not been adequately valued. They remain poor and do not get recognition from policy makers and economists for their massive and vital contribution to African societies. In addition, they have been discriminated against and denied needed access to critical productive resources that would enable them to increase productivity. These include resources such as land, credit, extension services, and technology (Rogers 1980; Lewis 1984; Guyer 1984; Monimart 1989; Njoku 1980). Scholars at the African Regional Seminar on Women held in Dakar in June 1981 argued that "National plans and agricultural policies perceive women only as housewives and mothers, and not as

farmers. As a result, most women are denied access to land, credit, extension services, technology..." (ILO 1984). With respect to women's right to land Rogers states that "with the trend towards Western style ownership of land rather than customary and communal rights it was women's rights to land which suffered most" (1984:38). In that same sense, Henn (1984), emphasized that "as property rights became individualized under the influence of colonial legal changes and the planting of tree crops, African men who had been powerful in the pre-colonial era were able to accumulate much of the best land. Women's access to land for subsistence farming and especially for market farming was highly circumscribed" (p.12).

The importance of African women's involvement in marketing or trading their crops has been documented in various studies conducted in different African countries such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Kenya, respectively, by scholars such as Robertson (1984), Lewis (1976), Hay (1976) and Callaway and Creevey (1994). These authors show how marketing provided the women studied with income, self esteem and empowerment--at least at the household level. Relevantly, in her study conducted in Nigeria, Barbara Lewis noted that in Southern Nigeria as well as in Southwestern Ivory Coast "women's strategic role in commercialization offers them far greater social leverage and access to income. On a smaller scale, women who are able to market the surplus of their subsistence food crops are also better off" (1984: 174). In some places, marketing is a traditional activity of women (Ghana, Togo), but in others it is a new role for women. Most researchers conclude that marketing plays an important role in women's empowerment. It exposes women to risks, reduces the ability of families and communities to control their movements, and provides new, competence building experiences. It also combats the invisibility of women associated with farming and household based production by putting them in the public's (and policy makers') eyes. While there are some good studies of women in marketing, including some by feminist scholars (Robertson 1984), there are few if any studies of women who combine *traditional* farming activities with *new* roles in marketing. Yet it seems likely that such a dramatic shift in roles and different

demands of the two activities would have a profound impact on women's values, relations with family and community members, and perceptions of self and others.

An important outcome hypothesized for changing roles for women is a change in their relative status and power, as measured through decision making. Blumberg and Chafetz define two different aspects of power: a) resource power or "the ability of a person or group to extract compliance, even in the face of resistance, by real or threatened bribery or coercion" stemming from control over greater income and productive resources and b) definitional power which is rooted in resource power and refers to "the ability of a person or group to impose values, norms, standards of judgments, and situational definitions on others." Studies conducted in Mexico (Garcia and de Oliveira 1995), Guatemala (Blumberg 1984), Venezuela (Rakowski 1991), and Java (Wolf 1991) have demonstrated how women's greater control over relative income can increase women's decision making in the household.

Economists, sociologists, and planners tend to conceptualize households as appropriate units of economic and social analysis and appropriate targets for policies and programs. The underlying assumption is that members of a household--particularly if they coincide with a “family” unit--share not only a common roof and common cooking pot, but also a common budget, common goals, and common needs (Blumberg 1991). On the other hand, Sen (1991), in considering the case of India, conceptualizes intra-household relations as "cooperative conflict" (for instance, pressures to pool resources for survival compete with differential individual rights of access to scarce resources) and problematizes women's perceptions of their contributions, rights, and responsibilities (see also, Dwyer and Bruce 1998). Women, he argues, have been socialized in ways that make difficult a separation of their identities/rights as individuals from their identities/responsibilities as wives and mothers who measure their self worth in terms of their ability to respond effectively to the needs of others. Empirical studies in other settings (for instance, urban Mexico) reveal that intra-household relations vary by the age, education, income, and employment status of married or cohabiting couples (Garcia and de Oliveira 1995). This leads us to

hypothesize that where women's roles as mothers/wives have intersected with their roles as farmers historically, the introduction of new activities and roles, such as women's marketing, and/or declines in men's inputs to the household (for instance, due to economic crisis or emigration) may lead women to reassess notions of their contributions and their rights relative to those of men in the household and community.

Nonetheless, reassessments may be hindered by preconceived notions or lack of consciousness of the situation in which women find themselves. Molyneux (1985) and Moser (1993) attribute, at least in part, tensions between identities, rights, and responsibilities to differences in women's awareness of their practical needs (what allows them to fulfill daily their social roles as wives, mothers, producers) and their strategic needs (what reduces their dependence on and subordination to the decisions of others). One way in which women may try to increase their decision making power or simply to reduce constraints on meeting practical needs is through organizing. Studies carried out in the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Senegal respectively by Lewis (1976), Wipper (1984), and Gadio and Rakowski (1995) detail ways in which self help organizing functions as a survival strategy for women in Africa, especially under conditions of economic crisis and in areas where traditional farming strategies were becoming less viable. But, regardless of the reasons behind women’s organizing, collective organizing can increase women's self esteem, confidence, power and income in some cases. In her study of African Women's Voluntary Associations, Wipper concluded that women's self help organizations "provide financial and psychological support and training, and established standards" (1984:80). The same view was anticipated by Little in 1973 when he described the importance of African women's organizations in the sense that "they regulate and promote trade, extend credit, teach new social and occupational skills and provide monetary and psychological support" (Qtd. in Wipper 1984:69). More recently, Gadio and Rakowski's (1995) study of Serer millet pounders in Dakar found that "self-help organizations support women's individual business activities and help them confront harassment and hardships. Through collective organizing, women have

had the opportunity to see themselves and other women as competent, important members of their households, their community and their society. Thus, group organization had the potential to break down male dominance and control and to promote female autonomy and empowerment" (p. 12). The same was found in diverse African countries for women's organizations mobilized around environmental issues (Kettel 1995).

Most research on the impact of structural adjustment and neo-liberal economic reforms (national and global) on women in Africa and elsewhere has emphasized negative impacts (Bakker 1994, Elson 1992, Nzomo 1992, Sparr 1994) such as expanding poverty and an increase in women´s work burdens. However, Gordon (1996) and Mukhopadyay (1994) pose the possibility that women's status and power can increase--as can their aspirations. Gordon believes that "the current climate of reform does present a window of opportunity for women to improve their lives" because "modernization and development stress the importance of autonomy and separation of individuals" [heretofore men]...from the household and familistic relations [heretofore represented by women]...." (p. 11). In other words, despite socialist feminist claims that capitalism and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing systems of domination, in "developing countries" the new forms of capitalism emerging present the potential to reinforce women's subordination or to reverse it. Under certain conditions, especially where economic power is a critical component of status and power in general and where men's claim to dominance is tied to notions of men as breadwinners, households' dependence on women's income can shift the balance of power significantly (1996, p. 33).

The Study

To explore the above issues, intensive research was conducted in Thieudeme, a small village in rural Senegal during 1996-1997. Preliminary research had been conducted over several months in 1994.[2]

The main objectives of the study were: a) to determine what factors--economic, cultural, institutional, legal, etc. at both the macro and micro levels--are associated with changes in women's roles, statuses, and relative decision making power and b) to explore the relationship between relative decision making power and access to productive resources. Factors considered likely to influence/determine the options for income generation and decision making open to women include the sexual division of labor, social pressures from other community members, religious proscriptions, etc. and--beyond the community--inflation, extra-community markets for products, alternative income opportunities, and laws and regulations that impact gendered rights, production and marketing, etc. Close attention was paid to women's histories and perceptions to document how women cope with their diverse roles, problems, and responsibilities, and to explore how interpretations of cultural norms and women's values influence the ways and relative autonomy with which they structure their roles and decisions. The study also assessed how changes in opportunities and needs (increased access to extension, credit, etc.; male emigration/abandonment of farming) and the relative importance of women's production to household survival/well-being do or do not translate into an increased role in decision making (about farming/business or household management, and how to allocate labor) and/or increased access to productive resources. (Increased access to resources can be, alternately and under specific conditions, an input to and an outcome of relative power.)

The dependent variables in this study were "decision making" (the expression of power in everyday life) and "change" (in roles, status, and decision making power). Three arenas of decision making were explored: decision making in the arena of production (usually farming, but in some cases marketing, craft production, wage work and others), in the household/domestic arena, and in the community.

Research methods included a household survey, policy research and document analysis, and interviews with men, but emphasized in-depth interviews and life histories of women and participant

observation. Thus, the study used an innovative approach that combined feminist research techniques with standard sociological methods: the issues and variables explored were defined through an interactive process that contrasts the researcher's interpretation and concepts as a feminist sociologist with women's perceptions, concepts, definitions, and concerns. Indicators were constructed from both.[3]

For this study, power was understood to be a socially-constructed, multi-dimensional concept (Blumberg, 1984; Chafetz, 1991). As such, the construction of indicators/measures of power (for instance, through multiple item scales) as expressed in decision making benefitted from the interplay between measures grounded in sociological theories and methods and, alternately, those emerging from the deconstruction of women's experiences and conceptualizations. For instance, we abandoned questions which women derided as making no sense in their reality such as “Who decides what to plant?” Women’s response--accompanied by derisive laughter--was “If we don’t decide, who will?” And we modified indicators of power to fit decision making examples that emerged during interviews (i.e., young women’s purchase of “status” goods such as furniture and clothing). In this way, both theoretical and instrumental validity was bolstered by the researchers’ asking "the right questions" and "hypotheses were continually tested in stronger and stronger ways in the pragmatic routine of everyday life" (Kirk and Miller 1986:22-25, 30).

Although the final construction of measures of decision making power took place during field work, preliminary fieldwork and feminist sociological research on gender stratification and power suggested the following dimensions were important to guide question construction: Measurements/indicators of power should differentiate between power "over," "to" or "with." That is, power can be expressed as the ability to get others to do what you want, the relative autonomy to make decisions for oneself, and the freedom to associate for mutual benefit. Measurements/indicators differentiated between decision making to address practical needs (for daily survival and to fulfill gender role obligations) and strategic needs (increased autonomy in all arenas, improvement in one's status

relative to others) (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1993). Feminist social scientists point to access to productive resources, control over surplus (not subsistence) goods and income, and ideology/definitional power (laws, customs, the gendered nature of authority and changing norms) as important factors that contribute to power differences (Chafetz 1991). To these was added the question of whether this has translated into greater relative power for women, which women (for instance, are there age or caste differences), under what circumstances, and in what arenas? Furthermore, how would women see links between their roles and their rights to make demands (for instance, access to land in order to produce food for their children)? Questions about production focused on activities (planting, weeding, handicraft production, etc.) and the diverse responsibilities that women juggle. This was a means to identify the content of "roles" and the terms used to talk about these roles (for instance, mother, farmer, daughter). A focus on activities was important to help avoid confusion that may arise from a combination of role-normative responses and alternative meanings that women and the researcher may attribute to responses.

The population under study was women farmers in Thieudeme and these were selected from approximately 123 households located in Thieudeme. Since “households” can consist of several houses within an invisible “compound,” local authorities and informants helped in identifying households and in classifying them as better off, middle range, and extremely poor. Once likely households were identified (and confirmed by an in-household visit), a sample was drawn of 180 women in 60 households with three generations of women--Generation 1: "young wives/mothers with only small children," Generation 2: "older wives/mothers with primarily older children," and Generation 3: "elderly wives/grandmothers whose children are fully grown/married." (Most households have 10-15 members and include three generations though health problems have increased death rates among the elderly and very young.) The sample of 180 women was stratified to include women from all three strata. However, the majority of households are poor and, therefore, interviewees come from poor households. Additionally, a small sample of men was drawn from selected households to allow for comparison between women and men's perceptions of

change and decision making over time. All men interviewed were older men, long-term residents in the community with wives and daughters who were interviewed for the study. (Older men are more likely than younger men to have observed and formed an opinion on wives' and daughters' changing roles.) In addition, village authorities, local service workers (education, health), and researchers who had worked in the region were interviewed. Their perceptions of changes (and explanations of change factors) were compared with those of women for possible contradictions and clues to differences in perception (e.g., different access to information on more macro-level events).

A survey in the 60 households obtained a range of background information on household structure, demographic and socio-economic information on resident and temporarily absent members, income sources (cash, in kind) and degree of pooling, the division of labor between productive, reproductive, and community roles, etc. Qualitative data were produced primarily through original, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and life histories of women, supplemented by abbreviated interviews with men and extensive participant observation. Interviews were critical to produce information on 1) roles and decision making experiences of all three generations of women compared at a same point in time (1997-98) and 2) roles and experiences of all three generations of women at a particular point in the life cycle--when each was a "young wife/mother." These data were important for evaluating the relations between individual characteristics (such as age), household structure, division of labor, and other factors in women's multiple roles and decision making at the time of the interview and at a particular point in the life cycle across generations (which can be compared with information on relevant age-related rights and responsibilities and historical events such as changes in agricultural policies in the 1980s, changing markets for vegetables, structural adjustment policies, demands for male labor in wage work, entry of non governmental organizations targeting women, etc.).

As roles were identified by women for each conceptual arena (though women did not distinguish between them and there was significant overlap in activities--for instance, subsistence production

overlapped with production for the market), questions were asked regarding decisions that must be made (for instance, how much produce goes to consumption and how much to the market), how those decisions are made (when and who is involved), and--in the event of conflict--whose will prevailed. This approach corresponds to methods applied to comparative studies of decision making by Sachs (1983) and by Garcia and de Oliveira (1995). To control for normative-response errors (telling the researcher what is socially acceptable/expected/generalizable rather than the range of real experiences), women were asked to describe some specific decision making events, and the researchers repeated questions at different points in time (varying the form of the question) to double check responses and recalled and compared these to men's accounts when mentioned by men.

For instance, with respect to productive roles, questions included decisions on type of produce, inputs, methods and tasks, participants, costs, control over output and income, etc. With respect to the domestic arena, questions on decision making focused on reproductive choice, division of labor, budgets, polygyny, authority (including among wives), income pooling, discretionary expenditures, children's schooling, savings, etc. With respect to the community arena, questions were asked about women's roles in extra-familial organizations and important festivals/events, extension, adult education, other social programs sponsored by government or private agencies, leadership/office positions in mixed-gender organizations, access to land, travel to markets, etc. When medicines were donated to the community in January 1998, this provided an opportunity to observe the formation of mixed gender committees to manage distribution and funds raised.

There are several ways that change was measured and this has been discussed in part above. First, three generations of women provided information on their roles, tasks, decision making, etc. when they were "young mothers." The differences in their experiences at different points in time represent change over time/across generations. Second, the three generations of women provided information on their roles, tasks, decision making, etc. at the time of the interview. For older women, these responses can

be compared to their responses regarding when they were "young mothers." This represents change over time in the lives of individual women and--potentially-their age cohorts.[4] Third, a select group of 15 older women provided more detailed accounts of changes in their individual lives through their life histories and a focus group discussion. These three approaches to change as a dependent variable focused on the form/structure of women's roles at different stages in the life cycle and different time periods.

A fourth way of assessing change focused on exploring likely causal factors that might explain and predict differences among women. This was broken down into at least three sets of variables: a) the characteristics of women (for instance, age, marital status, number of children, educational level, etc.), b) the characteristics of local context such as households and community-level organization (class, caste, household structure, division of labor in the household, land tenure arrangements, structure and range of local organizations, extension practices and programs, local traditions, etc.), and c) factors outside the community (economic crisis, changing market demand for vegetables, wage opportunities for men, legal reform in rights of women and land tenure, etc.) that are associated with the content of roles, opportunities and constraints, problems and pressures that impact choices.

Alternately, independent variables were organized according to whether they are "structural," "cultural," "demographic," or "socio-economic" in nature. Structural factors include those related to productive activities, organizing, access to resources, caste/class and related. Cultural factors include traditions, beliefs about appropriate gender roles, legal proscriptions, technology and material artifacts, values and related. Demographic factors include age, number of children, marital status (and monogamous or polygamous) and related. Socio-economic factors include income, local labor market distribution, farm size, demand and supply of labor and related. Independent variables will not be discussed in detail here since their hypothesized associations with change and decision making are widely acknowledged and amply discussed in the sociological and anthropological literature on decision making

and gender issues in development and social change (see, among others, Blumberg, 1991; Blumberg et al., 1995; Tinker, 1990b; Stichter and Parpart, 1990; and Young et al., 1994).

The Setting

Senegal in general and Thieudeme Village in particular presented an appropriate setting for addressing these issues. Senegal is located in extreme tropical West Africa and the official language is French (though Wolof is widely spoken in the north, including in Dakar). Major ethnic groups in Senegal are the Wolof (42.7% of the population), Serer (14.9%), Fulani (23.7%), Diola (5.3%), Mandingue (4.2%), other ethnic groups (9.2%). The Senegalese society is primarily Islamic with 94% Muslim, 4% Catholic, and 1.6% Animistes. Agriculture is the most important sector of production since it "provides approximately 70% of total national employment" (Rice and Gustavo 1989; USAID\Senegal\ADO, 1990; De Wilde 1984). In addition it provides both "subsistence and income through cash crops" (Isern 1990:22). While cash cropping for export (e.g peanuts) tends to be dominated by men, Senegalese women are the main actors in other agriculture, growing food crops for local consumption and sale, and providing labor for cash crops. According to Marie A. Savané (1984) "women comprise 25% of the formal labor force and perform approximately 60-80% of all agricultural labor" (Qtd. in Isern 1990:1,23). Women are important in marketing and in the provision of social services. And nontraditional exports such as textiles--where women find some new sources of employment--are becoming important to foreign exchange.

In recent years Senegal has gone through tremendous economic restructuring, structural adjustment policies, and institutional reforms. These include, in the last five years, successive devaluations of the Senegalese currency, the liberalization of both domestic and international trade, decentralization of delivery of government services and of political authority/elections, closing of many parastatals and privatization of others (all part of Senegal's structural adjustment package as agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund). These changes have varying impacts on almost all sectors of the Senegalese economy including the agricultural sector. For instance, marketing networks for agricultural

inputs and products have been transformed. Rural-urban migration has increased, resulting in increased demand for produce marketing and new sources of cash for rural families with members in urban areas. Also, prices for equipment, pesticides, fertilizers and seeds have gone up which has affected farmers ability to purchase them, increased pressures for cash production, and negatively impacted their productivity. These changes also contributed to government policy shifts--for instance, reductions in support for traditional cash crops--and to changes in the availability of imported produce. For example, the financially-strapped and understaffed extension service, once mandated to support export crops like peanuts, must now attend to the production of foodstuffs for local markets as well. Farmers complain particularly about problems such as the withdrawal of price supports and controls, shortages in capital and extension services, and shifting demands for certain agricultural products and for services. Another important impact related to inflation has been the decline in wages, layoffs in what used to be stable jobs--particularly in the public sector and among men in general--even as the cost of living has increased dramatically.

These factors have contributed to new survival strategies among both men and women--including increased efforts by men and women to seek wage work and women's increasing involvement in farming, especially nontraditional cash crops to meet the demand in local markets. The particularities of these strategies vary from region to region and have been themselves impacted by the differential impact of a prolonged drought that has affected certain regions of Senegal--including Thieudeme, the research setting.

Thieudeme was chosen because of the historical importance of women in farming, its persistent poverty, and its reputation as a village that specializes in vegetable production. Most Thieudeme women are engaged a combination of farming to provide for the subsistence needs of their families and, particularly young women, in marketing the vegetables and fruits consumed throughout the Dakar region. These Lebou-Wolof women not only sell in nearby villages, but also travel long distances to urban markets. However, Thieudeme is still very poor relative to nearby villages.

Thieudeme Village is located in the Thies region within the rural "county" of Diender, about 70 kilometers from Dakar, the capital city of Senegal. The population of Thieudeme is about 1700 inhabitants of which 51% are men and 49% are women. The village counts 123 households living in 57 concessions (extended family units) or "kër" (one concession consists of one or more households related by blood or marriage [for instance, 2-3 wives and their respective children; offspring of the head of household and their spouses, etc.]).

The population of Thieudeme originally was composed of the Lebou who migrated from the Delta River Valley of Senegal. The Diender zone was part of the former Cayor province in the Lebou Republic. The Lebou Republic, which existed in the eighteenth century, was different from a modern republic since power was held by one family and transmitted from father to son. This system has always been a traditional and parallel power to the official government before and after independence and the Lebou Republic has its own organizational structures. Nowadays, the population of the area is composed of 90% Lebou-Wolof and 10% Peulh (Executive Secretary of Rural Community 1986).

Because all residents of Thieudeme are Muslim, men have religious obligations to support the household and to provide food staples. Women also are guaranteed rights to a piece of land to farm and to manage any money they may earn independently. Thus, traditionally women and men each have had clearly designated spheres of authority and responsibility. However, in practice, until recently few women had significant need for an independent income before the growing importance of cash production in the colonial period and in the early decades of independence led to a reduction in women's farming and income generation relative to men's.

Findings: Changing Roles and Relative Power in Thieudeme

The population of Thieudeme is relatively young and a majority work in agriculture. For instance, in 1997, all but 3% of the male heads of household interviewed and 100% of the women worked in agriculture. This suggests a recent increase in agricultural production since a study carried out by the

office of the Executive Secretary of Rural Communities in 1986 found slightly more than three out of four adult inhabitants were active in agriculture. Economic crisis and the decline in wage work might explain greater dependence on agriculture. The annual income of the small holder farmer was estimated at around 400.000 CFA (roughly $800) in 1986. However, in 1997 it was not possible to calculate a reasonable estimate of income in cash equivalents due to difficulties with record keeping and the mixing of subsistence and cash production.

We observed that each male farmer works about one hectare of land divided into small gardens; women farmers average less than one hectare. The women who work larger plots are those whose spouses are absent frequently. In the early 1980s and earlier, women's plots were much smaller since men tended to keep more land for their own cash cropping activities. In part this was due to the fact that, as is the custom under Islamic law, men were responsible for the "dépense"--providing food and other goods to meet household needs on a daily basis. Women's production and income supplemented men's. In 1997, women's agricultural participation is as high or higher than men's and men are more willing to cede land to wives for production. Again, in part this is due to the fact that men say they are unable to provide the "dépense" on a regular basis due to lack of cash income. So women's production has become more important to maintain the household rather than to supplement men's maintenance. This confirms reports that in the early 1980s and the 1970s women's production tended to be (more) part time and (more) subsistence oriented. In 1997, women's production is more market oriented even though they have increased their supply of food to the household.

In the early 1980s and before, men marketed their own produce and they marketed women's surplus or sold it to the occasional wholesaler who visited the village. In 1997, women of the first and second generations marketed their own produce or sold directly to wholesalers who continue to visit the village. Direct marketing, however, brings higher prices.

Landholding has changed though there is much confusion over why and how. Under customary land laws (pre-colonization), women did not have rights to "own" land, but then most land was held communally anyway. Men were charged by customary law to provide land to wives, sisters, and daughters for farming. However, trees could be sold or inherited and the willing of trees to women family members was a way to provide them with a source of cash income and with access to land independent of husbands. Colonization and the introduction of a cash economy greatly undermined women's customary access to land and their usufruct rights. Women began to receive smaller and smaller pieces of land and their farming became supplemental to male household support. In 1964, four years after independence, a law known as the "Loi sur le Domaine National" was passed and stipulated that all land is reserved to the state though allocation of use rights and inheritance is left to rural community authorities. Theoretically, women and men have equal rights of access before the law. Nonetheless, most rural authorities allocate land to heads of household/concession--the "borom kër." Usually the eldest male and authority, he takes care of allocating land to other male heads in the concession. Each man is responsible for allocating a piece of land to each wife to farm. The more wives in a household, the smaller will be their farms. About 58% of the women are in polygamous households.

One feature of the Lebou inheritance is that different households related by blood or marriage and who usually live together in the same concession or compound continue to produce together or at least to assist each other. However, each household eats separately--a feature introduced, according to respondents, because of the economic crisis and due to the large families making up the "kër." Within the "kër," authority and hierarchy are determined by gender and age followed by marital status and position within the marriage (first, second wife, etc.).

Changes in productive roles

In general, changes have taken place in the relative time most women--especially younger women--dedicate to domestic and productive roles, in the crops produced and farming techniques, in the

division of labor between women and men and between young and old, in the ways in which these women farmers organize themselves at the community level, and in women's relative autonomy and decision making power in the household. Younger women have added a new productive role--marketing--and they are increasingly willing to break with cultural traditions that limit their autonomy and relative power in the household.

The greatest differences were found between women of the first and second generations and those of the third generation. That is, it appears that dramatic changes took place in the 1980s and 1990s. One pronounced change in production is that women—and men to a lesser extent since they were involved in cash production since colonization—have shifted from producing hardy staples such as millet and rice to producing higher profit but more perishable crops such as tomatoes, squash, carrots and other vegetables. Furthermore, women's roles have expanded from an almost exclusive focus on combining domestic tasks with subsistence farming and the limited sale of surplus (in that order of importance) to a combination of farming, marketing, and domestic tasks (in that order) and from subsistence farming to greater production for the market. Women have increased the amount of time dedicated to farming relative to domestic tasks and they provide a greater proportion of their households' food and income today than in past decades. Even though women in polygamous households tend to rotate domestic responsibilities (every other day), most women spend a great portion of their time in the field. Therefore, some domestic tasks have had to decrease. These tend to be those involved in the direct care of children--bathing, teaching, and supervising.

Some changes are generational in two senses (both to be expected)--first, women's lives are different for women at the same stage of the life cycle ("when you were a young wife and new mother") in different time periods and, second, lives are different for women who were at different stages of the life cycle in 1997. For instance, whether in the absence of men--due to their migration in search of wage work--or in their presence, in 1997 younger women are more likely than older women had been in their

day--and are in 1997--to organize, to spend time outside the household, to work their "own" fields (under their control), to market their produce, to purchase items for personal use, and to demand a greater say not only in decisions traditionally in their domain (whether domestic or farming), but in decisions once left solely to the husband such as how to spend money contributed by both to the household.[5] Interestingly, in this Muslim community, younger women, unlike their mothers and grandmothers, discreetly yet firmly reject male authority and the practice of taking multiple wives (though their wills do not always prevail). Older women are often critical of younger women's values and behavior and of the behavior of older women who are financially successful but not "dutiful" wives.

Some changes have affected older women as well. For instance, in general women's independence has increased over time and women today, more often than men, organize into cooperative savings and credit organizations, one of which has received (from the state) and manages a millet grinding mill in the village. Several older women have assumed leadership roles in the community. On the "down side," however, the price of these changes has been a decline in younger women's involvement in domestic tasks, a decline in education for girls, and a significant increase in the work burdens and stress on all women and the children on whose labor they depend for assistance.

The tasks in which young women engage and the tools they use as farmers and traders in Thieudeme have changed compared to those of their grandmothers and mothers. Older women reported they used to seed, weed, cultivate and harvest after men had cleared the land. Rainfall was the only source of water. Younger women said that the agricultural tasks in which they engage include clearing and digging (usually with men's assistance), making the soil even and smooth, starting the nursing bed or growing seedlings, transplanting, weeding and cultivating, spraying fertilizers, spraying pesticides, watering, harvesting, and marketing. Each activity has its own matching tool. One informant describes it clearly: "I use a hoe to turn the soil, a pitchfork to mix up the soil, a shovel to start the nursing bed , a spade for weeding and cultivating, a sprinkle can and buckets for watering. These are new tools which

were not used by our grandmothers and mothers." Women of the third generation confirm that they did not use many tools. Younger women use more tools because the kind of crops they grow (vegetables) require more tools. In contrast, older women needed few tools for their hardier tubers and grains. According to all generations interviewed, older women used primarily a spade, hoe, and cutlass when they were young wives.

Logically, the crops and the farming systems have changed over time. The crops grown by the first generation of women were primarily millet and peanuts (for which they also provided labor for their husbands' plots) and secondarily beans, maize and sweet potatoes. Farming used to take place only during the rainy season, from July to October. In contrast, the two younger age groups of women are now concentrating their efforts on vegetables such as carrots, turnips, cabbage, green beans, tomatoes, onions and hot peppers. These foodstuffs reflect changes that took place in the Senegalese diet. As urban centers grew in size, imported foodstuffs changed eating habits and previously exported vegetables became more readily available to local markets. Thus, vegetables are more marketable and potentially more profitable than hardy staples.

Division of labor, rights and responsibilities

Special attention was given during interviews and observation to ascertaining differences between the tasks in which women and men engage and potential collaboration among them. It appears that a sexual division of labor in agriculture is not as clear-cut in 1997 as it was for previous generations. Women in their 60's and 70's stated that when they were younger wives not only did they not participate in marketing their crops, but other activities such as clearing land and weighing produce were men's domain. Direct observation in 1996-97 of younger women and men in the fields revealed that both women and men perform the same activities with few exceptions. The main difference noted is the amount of time spent on particular activities. For example, women spend more time watering than men do and women are more likely to help men with routine tasks like watering and weeding than vice versa. Men do

more of the clearing and digging to prepare fields for themselves and their wives. All younger women interviewed confirmed that clearing and digging (known as "gab") are very hard physically and they usually get help--if not from their husbands then from other family members or, for those who can afford it, from a seasonal migrant agricultural wage worker. Even as men call on women's labor to assist with their farming, women call on the labor of children.

Women's workload in productive tasks far exceeds men's even though women farm on average less acreage than do men. Since men control the allocation of land, they have been able to reserve advantages for themselves. In past decades, men and women shared the same type of tools, but men's income was greater because they reserved more land for themselves. As men's income increased--especially through programs that assisted them in increasing cash crop production--they were able to purchase labor saving tools that greatly increased their production. Again, their income increased. Over time, some men have been able to purchase water pumps and machines that greatly increase their productivity. So, in part, the "freeing up" of land for women's use comes from men's greater productivity. Because these are "new" tools not tied into customary rights of women, men are not under pressure to share them with women. Because women control their own earnings, men have little to gain directly by sharing these tools with women. As a result, more land for women greatly increases women's workloads with traditional tools and watering techniques (drawn in buckets from shallow wells).

Women were asked to assess their workloads as young wives for the purpose of comparing generations. Women of different generations do not agree on whose work was more onerous and in what time period. Here is a typical answer from a woman in her 60s:

> "We old women used to farm like men. We carried our babies on our backs, and then started with the spade. We seeded, weeded and gathered the harvest, and then men were supposed to separate the peanuts and the weeds. We did a lot in farming and on top of that we had to fetch water from long distances for the house. Farming has changed a lot. It is easier nowadays, they

have all kinds of devices available for all kinds of farming duties and steps. They do nothing in farming compared to us... We used to wake up early, pound a big quantity of millet, cook breakfast, fetch water before going to the field. We were overworked."

Younger women described the situation differently:

"My grandmother did not water her field; they were not farming like us all year round. They farmed only during the rainy season. Now, because of the drought, we have to water everything we plant. Our grandmothers used to plant but not to water; they also were not involved in marketing as we do today."

Despite the fact that new productive devices have been introduced in farming (such as tools, technology, and fertilizers, which in fact can reduce time spent in the field or allow women to increase production), it seems clear that younger women involved in market production have more responsibilities in productive work. This is associated with the nature of their farming system. As discussed above, women now farm all year round in contrast to rainy season farming of the past, they must water vegetables twice a day by hand, and they are more involved in direct marketing--an activity once left to men. The level of production required of young and middle aged women farmers today also suggests their workloads are greater than those of third generation women whose production supplemented men's "dépense" whereas women's contributions to household support in 1997 typically surpassed those of men.

All women spoke of access to and control over land as critical to successful farming--but, as indicated above, women do not have the same rights to land as men. One change detected was in women's perceptions of access to land across generations. Through interviews and focus group discussions with women and men, it became clear that younger women have access to more land than did

their mothers and grandmothers. Though both had to rely on men for access to land, there are important differences in how they deal with access. Older women claim to have had "customary" rights that guaranteed access to land held by the men of the household. The older generation of women also referred to family status and position in defining relative access to land at the level of the village (for instance people from the "noble" caste could own land and distribute it to their subordinates). According to one older woman: "Some women "owned" land because of their family status. They owned it because they were from a "noble" family. Such a social status automatically gave them the right to have land."[6]

The women in the two younger generations, on the other hand, put more emphasis on the relationship between a husband's and a woman's "ownership" of land (meaning rights of use and inheritance as well as emerging systems for the purchase and sale of land use rights). The current norm in Thieudeme is for a husband to allocate a piece of land to his wife as soon as she joins his household. The women have usufruct rights that extend to decisions regarding what and how to farm and to control over any income made from it. (Older women also had control over what to farm and money earned. However, since husbands marketed women's produce with their own, some income might not have reached women.) According to the younger women, they have more powerful alternatives than the older women since they have access to land whatever their family class and status is, provided they are married and their husbands have land.[7] Moreover, in-depth interviews revealed that women in their 20s-40s, unlike their grandmothers, have other opportunities for accessing land. These include renting and borrowing from male owners who are facing financial difficulties. Given the need for cash, men's reduced access to wage work, and inflation, any barriers to women's direct land "ownership" break down in the market for land. In this sense, money has become an important source of power for women despite customs and lack of legal reforms to improve women's rights.

As confirmed by this study, the introduction of cash cropping combined with the multiple responsibilities and roles of women both in production and reproduction increased the productive work

load of young Thieudeme women compared to their mothers and grandmother. Regarding reproductive roles, interviews, direct observations and other studies used as a basis of comparison confirmed that few changes have taken place in domestic tasks assigned to women. Younger women are the ones who take care of cooking, washing, feeding their families, taking care of the elderly and children even when older women no longer engaged in farming reside in the household. One problem that interferes with older women's ability to assist is their poor health. Another might be the expectation that older women should not substitute the labor of younger women. Since the younger generations of women have more economic responsibilities than their grandmothers and mothers had, they have had to reduce the time dedicated to reproductive/domestic tasks. On a typical day, women do washing and cleaning before going to the field. If there is no co-wife or it is the woman's turn to take charge of cooking, the woman will return at midday to cook and do more cleaning. They return to the field late in the afternoon to resume farming and often return late at night.

Decision making, organizing and autonomy

Another important change has taken place in women's organizing. The older women revealed that they had one large organization at the village level. This organization was primarily for helping organize women for harvesting, processing food, or for ceremonies and celebrations, and it served as a source of psychological support and community bonding. At times, women would pool together their savings for celebrations, but they did not pay dues nor did the organization have any kind of rotating credit function. When older women needed money (as young wives), they might have borrowed money from their husbands or they might have pawned gold jewelry or cattle they had received when they married. In 1997, there were four organizations in Thieudeme: three self help (rotating credit) organizations and one "daaira" (a mixed gender religious, ceremonial and celebration) organization whose women's branch can and does operate autonomously at times. The self help organizations are an important source of capital for younger women.

Older women had individual savings (kept at home) for household emergencies. They claimed that they almost never made "selfish" personal purchases and did not feel a need for material luxuries. In contrast, younger women do not maintain individual savings (because the organizations preclude this need) and because they must pay daily dues to the organization (as much as $2.00 per day). When younger women receive money from the organization, it can be used to buy seeds, cloth, jewelry, to sustain the children and family ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and birth ceremonies. Women of the two younger generations appear to be very interested in acquiring luxury goods when possible. For women, furniture, clothing and jewelry are means of expressing economic status.

When asked about decision making, women most commonly expressed surprise, especially when the topic of discussion was farming or income. A typical response from an older woman: "We [women] are used to making decisions about what and how much to plant according to our family size. We made decisions on harvesting and seeding. We used to sell peanuts, but marketing and transportation were done by the husbands." The choice of crop was not difficult to make for old women (first generation) because they were mainly growing millet, beans, sweet potatoes and providing men labor for peanut cultivation. Also, men were usually in charge of peanuts, the main cash crop, while women took care of millet destined for family consumption (with surplus for sale). Younger women (20s-50s) say they have more power over production since, in addition to their decision making capacity, they are involved as much as men in cash crop production, in marketing what they produce, and finally, in controlling their income. They also claim a role in negotiating with the husband over his production and income generating strategies. When older women were active in farming, the cash economy was not as important as it is today. They were farming mainly for family consumption; only the surplus crops were sold at nearby markets by men. Most of the time, women saved any extra cash after buying a few things such as cloth and helping their close relatives. Extra money might also be used to buy cattle and valuable items to be saved in case of household emergencies. In contrast, just as younger women are more active in marketing their own

produce, they spend more on personal items such as clothing, jewelry and furniture. They invest more of their money in their self help organizations. Paying dues to their self help organizations is one reason younger women say they need cash beyond meeting family obligations.

Older women often criticized younger women for their independence and lack of submissiveness to male authority. Younger women, however, claimed the right to intervene in men's decisions because they are now important contributors to the household's support. They are not content to allow men make major decisions that affect the well-being of the household. Such major decisions would include things like taking another wife or spending money on luxury items for personal use when there is not sufficient money for the man to fulfill obligations of the "dépense." However, just as men do not intervene in women's production decisions, women do not intervene in men's with one exception--decisions to switch men's labor out of farming and into wage work or decisions involving migration. Younger women also are taking greater initiatives in birth control and mixed-gender community organizing. This reflects possible attitudinal change and value change.

Though the official authority structure in the village is made up exclusively of men, there are women leaders. Women leaders emerge from women's organizations, but they are demanding a say--if not publicly, then in private sessions--in community business. The two most important women leaders (both in their 50s) reflect the diversity in women's leadership opportunities. One woman is affiliated with the leading political party. Through her contacts, she founded a woman's organization (village level) that received a loan to purchase a millet grinder for use by women in the village.[8] The second important leader emerged through a grassroots organization and recognition of her consistent commitment to work for the community. Both women participate in a village level organization that oversees a rotating medicine fund that guarantees medications for the village walk-in clinic (constructed by villagers). A third important woman, not a leader however, is a woman who became very wealthy through farming and marketing and who now has a fleet of trucks for use in wholesale marketing. However, there are no

visible younger women leaders--possibly because of the burdens of women when they have small children. There are, however, young men who are emerging as leaders. They tend to be the better educated and committed to democratization outside the control of party politics.

Older generations of women grew up in a period when the importance of education was stressed as a factor in social mobility. But the current economic and political reality have left people disillusioned with the power of education. Who you know is more important than what you know for the people of Thieudeme. Political affiliation is of primary importance. And even those with high educational levels in Senegalese society are faced by a shortage of demand for their skills. The job market is not a source of optimism. Not surprisingly, women's attitude toward education reflects this. Less than half of all school age children actually attend school, and boys predominate overwhelmingly in the class room. Since women now have the dual burden of producing food for consumption and of making money to purchase additional foodstuffs and to pay for--in some cases--children's education and clothing (once men's responsibilities), their need for children's labor to assist them and the absolute subsistence needs of the household conflict with children's educational needs.[9]

Factors Influencing Change

. When asked to explain changes, women of different generations cite different factors as influencing change in women's roles in general and the roles of women in their own families in particular. Although the study emphasized women's perceptions as the basis for negotiating sociological concepts and indicators, the analysis had to take into account limitations on women's knowledge of change factors in general. Additionally, interviews detected great differences among women regarding their understanding of diverse change factors and these are related in part to age [experiences] and in part to variations in relative isolation/dependence in the household and in educational levels. For instance, younger women engaged in marketing have knowledge of factors they hear about outside the village whereas older women tend to emphasize their understanding of local factors. Women also are not in complete

agreement regarding whether or not such changes are positive--for women, for families, or for the community. Nor do they completely agree on whether changes in women's roles have benefitted women relative to men or disadvantaged them, adding to their burdens. They do agree, however, that men's ability to meet their obligations to support households has declined and they blame this change on the economic crisis.

Document research and interviews with researchers and political authorities at the national and regional levels were combined with local interviews to compile a list of factors to be considered in assessing and analyzing change. This list--organized chronologically to facilitate comparison with life histories--includes local, national and even global factors that directly or indirectly influence the changes that are taking place in women's roles and decision making power. The following section points to factors that women and other sources indicate are likely to have an important impact, though the relative importance of some factors is less well known by women and not all outside sources are in complete agreement regarding impacts.

Villagers believe that many of the problems faced by Thieudeme can be attributed to its "curse" (an issue that was not discussed openly and was difficult to identify until villagers' confidence in the researcher increased). Though public services and infrastructure are deficient throughout Senegal, many villages in the Thies Region have benefitted from nearness to Dakar. In comparison to its neighbors, Thieudeme has been neglected by authorities. Its only public service is a primary school where grades 1, 3, and 5 and grades 2, 4, and 6 function in alternating years. They receive no extension assistance. The clinic built by villagers has never been staffed or supplied with medicines (though villagers sent a resident for medical training and made many requests to local authorities for training and medical supplies). The only medical service is provided by two midwives and the volunteer nurse.[10] Apparently, in the not so distant past (exact date and details unknown) some government agents died while trying to collect taxes or to impose official regulations in the villagers. As a result, a myth of danger arose that led many

government employees to refuse to visit the village. This explains in part the lack of basic infrastructure such as a complete primary school and government sponsored health care facilities. Not only has this created a situation of persistent health problems (in an area of malaria, parasites, and chronic skin infections), but it has impacted villagers' self esteem and initiative.

As is the case in other settings, health problems (and productivity) are exacerbated by other infrastructural problems related to government responsibilities that have been ignored. The village has three wells and three public faucets (few for the number of households) and one main mosque where inhabitants of Thieudeme and surrounding villages gather for prayers. There is no electricity in the village. However, there is the "moulin à mil" for grinding millet which is used by women of Thieudeme and of other nearby villages.[11]

The changing Senegalese economy--local and national--has greatly influenced women's roles. Women, though, have a limited understanding of how. Since the early 1980s, Senegal has undergone significant macro-economic policy changes and restructuring--many as a direct result of the implementation of structural adjustment reforms but some as a result of changing international demand for Senegalese exports. For example, peanuts have lost export market value though they remain the main export crops. This has combined with changing tastes of the growing urban population to greatly increase the demand for vegetables to export to Europe and for local consumption. Women state clearly that their decisions to shift from hardy staples to more perishable vegetables is due to the opportunities opened by the local demand for vegetables (and, potentially beyond their knowledge, a parallel decline in the importation of higher priced vegetables produced elsewhere). They also attribute the shift toward year-round farming and to direct marketing to both the demand for vegetables and to the decline in men's incomes and, in some cases, men's periodic absences due to wage work and emigration. These changes are not limited to Thieudeme. Since the mid 1980s vegetable production has been one of the most dynamic sectors in agriculture, since "it provides farmers with an economic activity during the dry season,

improves nutrition and is a source of revenue for rural women" (USAID Senegalese agricultural sector Analysis, May 1997).

Another national factor that has repercussions at the local level is that in Senegal the basis for the state managed organization of the rural sector was, and remains, the 1964 land law, which reserves virtually all land to the state. Since allocation of land and transfer between generations is left to the rural communities, more power is left to rural communities than in the past. This can affect women in contradictory ways. Where women's rights to land might not be explicit at the national level, they are explicit in local custom. But, while women have more well established political and individual rights at the national level, local level authority is firmly in the hands of men at both the community and the "kër" levels. As political and administrative decentralization is implemented in Senegal, the transfer of even greater powers to the local level might jeopardize women's relative gains unless they are able, individually or through their organizations, to insert themselves into the local power structure.

Women also are very aware of the impact on farming of natural phenomenon. In the last two decades, much of Senegal--including Thieudeme–has suffered from prolonged drought and desertification brought on by peanut production for export which has led to a significant loss of topsoil. The drought made it difficult for villages like Thieudeme to rely on rainfed agriculture as they had in the past. Drought also intensified the economic crisis stimulated by structural adjustment reforms, particularly in the agricultural sector. Women and researchers alike share the opinion that the combined pressures of drought and adjustment policies are the major factors underlying changes in the sexual division of labor in farming and, as a result, in women's claim to greater decision making power.

More negatively, as drought leads to a deterioration of agricultural land in Senegal, there will be less land available to households and, hence, to women farmers. Drought and soil deterioration, combined with the shift to vegetables, also play important roles in the adoption of new techniques and attitudes towards farming. When they were young, the women farmers in their 60s-70s did not need to water their

field themselves and they did not perceive a need to use chemical fertilizers or pesticides to increase production. In only a few cases did women report using natural fertilizers such as cow manure. With the drought and impoverishment of the quality of the soil, women farmers of 1997 practice intensive watering manually with buckets twice a day as well as extensive use of chemical inputs. This physically exhausting watering and chemical system creates pressures for women to farm smaller fields and creates a need for cash to purchase inputs. Women raise the lack of sufficient seeds, tools, and fertilizers as being major constraints in increasing their productivity. Yet the cost of inputs means less income for the household and often contributes to reduced production for women unable to purchase needed inputs or who do not have access to children's labor or to a co-wife to share domestic responsibilities. This is compounded by a lack of extension services such as credit and the inflationary prices of agricultural inputs. Because of the drought some men farmers migrate periodically to the cities for paid jobs leaving women behind with even more responsibilities. As can be seen, most women farmers are under great stress--a situation reflected in their interviews.

Structural adjustment reforms with their ensuing cutbacks in public services, a job crisis, and inflationary tendencies have contributed to the expansion of poverty in urban and rural areas. Women find it increasingly difficult to afford nutritional food (since the state favors exporting food). Inflation has been particularly hard on prices for basic foodstuffs such as sugar, rice, milk, and oil.

Macro level changes linked to the global capitalist system can be related to changing values and aspirations. For instance, younger women appear to be more materialistic in their aspirations than older women. They are exposed to new ideas, new products, new services, and alternative standards and lifestyles when they go to urban markets. They are exposed to media messages that stress consumerism and introduce them to products and behavior unknown previously. Since, paradoxically, the economic crisis, shifting market demands, and structural adjustment emphasis on cash production forced many husbands to accept women's demands to move into new levels and types of production and marketing,

patriarchal power has been weakened. On the one hand, men have lost a great deal of economic power and the breadwinner role--a role linked ideologically to their privilege and domination. Men, unable to meet their "dépense" responsibilities, arrived at their own conclusions that women's roles had to change if households were to have any hope of maintaining a desired level of living. Subsequently, women's increased relative contributions combined with cultural ideology regarding rights and responsibilities in ways that encouraged some degree of "consciousness raising"--a reexamination of men's control within the context of men's declining responsibilities for household survival. Women's needs for financial and other types of support in fulfilling their "practical"--everyday, socially assigned--needs led them to found women's self help organizations. In filling these practical needs to meet their responsibilities as wives and farmers, women were empowered through an all women environment in which several women leaders emerged and offer alternate models for women.

Conclusion

Many Africanists point to a link between colonialism and the introduction of a cash economy on the one hand and a decline in women's status and their displacement from agriculture on the other. Although this may have been true for Senegalese women through the 1960s and early 1970s, it does not describe the general situation of women of the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, it is not the case of women in Thieudeme and may not be the case of women in other vegetable producing villages.

Case studies of the impact of structural adjustment programs and neoliberal reforms emphasize their negative impacts on women (AWID 1995; Bakker 1994; Elson 1992, 1991). Most of these studies do not, however, consider how--in the longer term--the very hardships brought on by reform may also open opportunities for women's empowerment (Gordon 1996; Gordon and Stewart 1990). At the same time, it is the case that women themselves are more likely to perceive and to feel the weight of their new burdens than to understand strategic changes that ensue in the decision making arena. Even when the women of Thiedem complain about and oppose husbands on issues they believe directly affect women´s burdens and

the welfare of their children, they stop short of public criticism or drastic measures such as divorce which might support their demands more effectively. This certainly is the case with the pattern of conflicts over men´s decisions to take additional wives. It seems likely that women´s continued dependence on men for access to land in all but a few cases introduces contradictions into spousal relations. Women fear both loss of access to land (divorce) and decline in the amount of land (when some is allocated to a new wife).

With few exceptions, studies of women in African agriculture fail to consider multiple sources of change, both negative and positive, through comparisons of women of different generations in a same setting or by comparing standard sociological concepts with women's perceptions of their reality. The study of three generations of women farmers in Thieudeme sought to overcome these gaps in empirical knowledge. In fact, our findings both differ from and support findings of some research on the gendered impacts of structural adjustment. Women in Thieudeme, like women elsewhere, suffer from expanding poverty, declining public services, and a greatly increased work burden. However, comparisons of different generations of women farmers reveal also that women's status has improved in some respects on indicators of empowerment and other studies--bound by a more selective time frame--did not address this possibility.

Whether or not women aspire to greater power in order to meet the demands of their social roles or in order to improve their personal status and control varies greatly. From women's perspective--at least that presented during interviews--they emphasize sacrifice and hardship and their primary goal of supporting the family. Nonetheless, the fact that younger women also purchase status goods such as furniture, clothing and jewelry--even as they lament hardships--suggests that some change in perceived rights is taking place whether or not women talk about it or are aware of it. It also is telling that neither men nor women would criticize the opposite sex, but older men and women were very quick to criticize younger members of their same sex. Perhaps women avoid direct confrontation with spouses by blaming shortcomings on drought and crisis. This clearly is the reason they give to justify moving into new roles--

even when their interviews show clearly that women perceive other benefits such as freedom of movement, comraderie, control over new sources of resources (e.g., savings and credit).

In general and with respect to their productive roles, younger women show greater involvement in agriculture and claim to have more decision making power over access to productive resources than the oldest generation of women. Men and women's comments about improved status relate status to women's income, households' dependence on women's contributions, and women's independent involvement in self help organizations. Men persistently express "appreciation" for women's contribution. Women often include in their interviews references to men's declining contribution and how this justifies women's increased power and control on the farm and in the household. However, the gender division of labor has broken down in production but not in reproduction. This has led to a situation of extreme stress for women and seems to have led to a declining quality of life for both children and women.

Less clear from the research is whether or not household power might eventually transfer into greater power and participation in community affairs. Few women, primarily older women, have achieved important roles as community leaders and even then they are limited primarily to women's organizations. Among the strongest evidence for the link between income and status/power--what Gordon refers to as the opportunities presented by a capitalist market--is the fact that younger women reveal nontraditional behaviors and attitudes that include being more autonomous, more materialistic, and less attached to what appear to women to be certain cultural values such as polygyny, men's control over land, men's rights to decide how much of their income will go to the "dépense," and even hierarchical arrangements among wives which were one of the few mechanisms for some women to achieve power in the past. (To the extent these arrangements confirmed the dominance of men as a group over women, they can be considered "patriarchal.")

If the system of patriarchal values is breaking down in Thieudeme, it is because, as women themselves report, women and men have had to find alternative survival strategies to fulfill their

responsibilities and, in some cases, have had to shift responsibilities. In this sense, Amartya Sen's notion of "cooperative conflict" applies here. Interviews presented often conflicting statements that showed a certain ambivalence or ambiguity in the "rules of the gender game" and real behaviors. It also is true that more responsibilities have shifted from men to women than vice versa. Ironically, it is women's perception that this shift takes place more because women demand it than because of men's abandonment or desire to evade responsibilities.

These important changes are associated with a greater, but selective, consciousness of women about their condition as farmers and wives and of the importance of their work for their family and community. There is less consciousness of strategic needs--for instance, legal reforms that might give women rights of inheritance or political power. Women's perceptions that role changes are explained by the economic crisis, drought, and change in market demand is upheld by document research and by the timing of the introduction of such change (for instance, they coincide with certain key economic and political events).

In conclusion, factors such as prolonged drought, the expansion of poverty related to the implementation of structural adjustment reforms, and complementary shifts in government economic policies and market demands have created pressures and opened opportunities for important social change. However, the particularities of how change takes place and in what aspects of women's roles are also determined by the cultural, political, ecological, and economic context at the local level. Thieudeme's women have opportunities in vegetable production not just because of market shifts locally or internationally, but also because Thieudeme is located in an area with a shallow water table and with relatively easy transport routes to local markets. Thieudeme's women have opportunities to demand greater access to land for production not just because men's contribution has declined, but also because of the gender division of rights and responsibilities that support their roles as farmers and their rights to control their own income. Nonetheless, these rights present a double edged sword because men's inability

to control women's income acts as a deterrent to share more land with women. This is a situation noted in other parts of Africa as well (Mikell 1997; Besteman 1995). It presents an additional irony: cash cropping and involvement in "the market"--which initially benefitted men and marginalized women in farming--is now the means by which women, particularly members of certain religious and ethnic groups which customarily guarantee women control over their income, are able to expand their opportunities and privileges. At the same time, it brings women increasingly into conflict with their households and communities over customary limitations such as land tenure and polygyny. Whether or not the eventual breakdown of limitations and women's new sources of empowerment (such as women's groups) will be associated with other changes--such as the breakdown in households--remains to be seen in the case of Thieudeme. For now, neither women nor men desire such a future.

Endnotes

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[2] The first author is Senegalese and her first language is Wolof, the language spoken in Thieudeme. She conducted all interviews, at times with an assistant who helped with note taking.

[3] The research differed from "participatory research" in that women were not involved in data production.

[4]Life cycle changes are to be expected. Nonetheless, asking about such changes provided an opportunity for women to compare their expectations with the reality imposed by changing context and household division of labor.

[5] Interestingly, first wives continue to expect to have greater authority than younger wives, but younger wives also demand a say in decisions once reserved to first wives. This may explain some of the tension

between generations and the complaints of older women that younger women are disrespectful of values and norms.

[6]The concept of "noble" referred to by this informant means the highest level in the "caste system" which divides the Senegalese society into groups of nobles, freemen and slaves. This system of land "ownership" is particular to the Lebou-Wolof ethnic groups.

[7] In fact, when asked, the majority of adults in Thieudeme claim to be from the "noble" class--effectively invalidating any caste-based differences in rights of access to land allocated by village authorities.

[8]Ironically, this millet grinder which greatly reduces women's workload has increased their need for cash since it frequently breaks down and women are responsible for paying for repairs and maintenance.

[9] Only one woman in the sample had completed primary school.

[10]A donation of medicines and private training arranged by the authors in January 1997 led villagers to organize two committees to manage distribution and replacement of medicines.

[11]This project resulted from the recent targeting of women by government and non governmental assistance agencies as part of international agreements for social funding. Government interest in women also is encouraged by democratic reforms designed to increase women´s political participation.

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