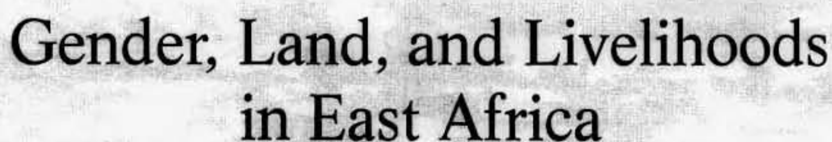
Gender, Land, and Livelihoods in East Africa

Through Farmers' Eyes

Ritu Verma



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Through Farmers' Eyes

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Foreword

Research into the relationship between gender and natural resource management in sub-Saharan Africa has, in the last few years, taken a significant leap forward. Informed conceptually by what may broadly be referred to as poststructural political ecology, this research has both deepened the analysis of the complex relationships between people and land, and given us a much clearer idea of the directions that future research needs to take (for example, Carney 1996; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Moore 1996; Schroeder 1999). In each case, the research has involved in-depth field research tied to specific locations, but connected analytically to the processes of globalization with which actors in such locations engage.

This is no easy task. As these studies demonstrate, in this era of structural adjustment in African economies, there is not some simple progression to the establishment of market relations or to a loss of local identity in the face of global forces. Rather, what is set in motion is "a complex set of articulations" which takes hybrid forms (Watts and Peet 1996, p. 266) that may or may not conform to the demands of modernity. In this context, the challenge is to investigate environmental practice at the interface of the cauldron of relations — of power and knowledge — which are stirred up as a result. In essence, this means probing the increasingly contested terrain of rights of access to land, to labour, and to the product of that labour, recognizing that such rights are mediated in complex ways by people differentiated by gender, class, age marital status and position with respect to the life-cycle. While negotiation or contestation of such rights is certainly material, it is also evident that such struggle is part and parcel of a struggle to define the cultural meanings through which it is constituted. It is a struggle over the meaning of rights to a particular resource, frequently framed in terms of the symbolic resources provided by 'custom.'

Ritu Verma's analysis is a powerful validation of an approach to the study of the relationship between people and land that recognizes the extraordinary complexity of soil management in an era of macroeconomic change. Her study centres on the social relations that inform land use practice in Maragoli District, Western Kenya. Specifically, she focuses on the micropolitics of farmers' struggles, providing evidence to demonstrate that land use practice, including soil degradation, is bound up with the negotiation of social relations at the intrahousehold and local level. In turn, she shows how these relations are imbricated in processes of macroeconomic political change. While these processes may be traced most visibly to structural adjustment programs, Verma shows that they are firmly embedded epistemologically in the whole discourse of 'development' — the particular articulation of power/knowledge that, at one level, mediates North/South relations and which, in terms of the objective of this book, informs 'conventional approaches' to soil management and land use issues in sub-Saharan Africa. The latter approaches, 'top-down' and gender blind in practice, premised in large measure on neo-Malthusian thinking, have both failed to understand the political nature of the relationship between people and land, and have silenced local knowledge of soil management and agricultural practice. Instead, Verma draws from ideas in feminist poststructural political ecology to examine the micropolitics between and among women and men in struggles over productive resources,

and demonstrates how these are played out with respect to management of the soil. She also explores how, through contestation of the symbolic meaning of those resources, women and men engage in such struggles, and how, in turn, rights to resources have become more intensely contested with recent changes in the macropolitical economy.

The study moves the research agenda forward in important ways. First, the research makes a significant contribution to the literature at the conceptual level. Drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of power, examining how power is exercised discursively at the micro level, the research gives insight into the everyday politics of soil management. The embeddedness of agricultural practice in political process is exposed as the author examines how women and men draw on different symbolic resources, frequently through a discourse of 'custom,' to negotiate their rights of access to and control of land, labour on and off the farm, and the product of that labour. For instance, in Chapter 4, through the use of people's stories, Verma shows how a customary idiom such as that of widow inheritance takes on new meanings in the contemporary situation. This 'custom,' which can, at times, ensure a widow's security of tenure to the land, may be reinterpreted and used to threaten such rights. But Verma also shows how, at times, men may be vulnerable to the manipulation of custom. The example of 'outgrown sons' is instructive here. In turn, she delineates how the crucial issue of security of tenure interrelates with soil management.

Second, the research demonstrates the need for a much more fine-grained analysis of social relations than that which is often found in studies that engage in 'gender analysis.' In this study, women and men are not accepted as unproblematized analytical categories. The identity 'woman' and the identity 'man' are shown to be cross-cut with other axes of difference — class, age, marital status, and position in the life cycle — which come into play at different times in struggles to access or maintain secure rights to land. Thus, although the lens of gender is the main one that informs this study, gendered identity is not conceived of as something fixed and immutable. Rather, it is seen as the subject of constant negotiation as, with respect to any one set of rights, a woman may be a daughter, a sister, a wife, a co-wife, a mother, a mother-in-law, or a widow. In many instances in Maragoli, where women have the main responsibility for agricultural production, the struggle is between women and men, and Verma demonstrates convincingly through the personal narratives of many farmers how women resist men's attempts to curtail their rights. She writes of 'the Avalogoli way,' the cultural meanings attached to gendered relations, and women's strategic use of public deference to men's authority, which creates sufficient political space for a more private transcript that is more to a woman's advantage. But, she also shows, through examples sucha s that of the micro-politics of banana production, how other sets of rights inform decisions about how to manage the land. In this case, she shows how a banana plot receives particular attention in terms of labour investment in soil management by a woman as a mother-in-law as it is this plot which provides her with security of tenure in later years.

Third, the author recognizes that, in trying to untangle the complex relationship between security of tenure and soil management, it is necessary to understand not only the politics of labour on the farm, but also the involvement of farmers in off-farm or non-farm activities. She thus expands the terrain of analysis substantially, showing how women often engage in multiple occupations in order to secure a livelihood in a context where this is becoming increasingly problematic. Women act strategically, subscribing symbolically to the metaphor of being a 'good' and hardworking Logoli wife. Yet, at the same time they invest their labour, on the farm or off the farm, in those activities in which they have some degree of control of the product of their labour. The renegotiation of what is often a very fluid conjugal contract is thus an integral part of the politics associated with the struggle over resources.

Finally, the research makes an important methodological contribution to the literature. In Chapter Two, Verma discusses in detail her approach to the research, demonstrating the close link between conceptualization of the research problem and the methodology. She is concerned — by writing against generalization — with exposing the diverse politics that lie behind soil management decisions. To this end, she employed a number of complementary research methods which allowed her to explore the politics of struggle and resistance at the local level. Among these, the collection of personal narratives from a number of farmers, most of whom were women, is particularly significant. Together with participant observation, these methods allow a far deeper understanding of the social processes at work than would have been possible with other methods. Their integration into the text, and the use of farmers' words, both illuminate what was going on and enliven the story that is being told. The involvement of women's groups in the research allowed a greater degree of accountability between researcher and research subjects than is often the case. And the use of photo appraisals, where a number of women were given the use of disposable cameras, contributed to this. At the conclusion of the research, there was a photo exhibition, and as well as group feedback sessions. The combination of research methods (including also a survey of farmers and semistructured interviews with officials) provides an exceptionally rich evidential base on which to construct the argument. Importantly, as part of the discussion of methodology, the author reflects on her position in the research process and the multiple identities that she herself brought to the work. This reflexivity allows a transparency to the research endeavour that is rarely found in published work in the field.

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Preface

Improving the quality of life of impoverished and marginalized rural people in Africa and the Middle East is the primary mission of IDRC's People, Land, and Water (PLaW) program. Vast numbers of them struggle to maintain their livelihoods in ecosystems that have been highly stressed by an interplay of complex forces that compromise women's and men's roles as farmers and stewards of the soil. Food and water security for all will not be possible without major innovations of appropriate policies and technologies. These innovations will not be successful without substantive changes in individuals' understanding, attitudes and behaviour. Furthermore, they affect women and men differently. To ignore these gendered differences invites failure in any attempt to foster rural development and resource conservation. Understanding the power relations that underlie inequitable access to natural and financial resources is a pre-requisite to progress. In 1997, PLaW enabled Ritu Verma to undertake a case study in Western Kenya to better understand the gendered context that creates the constraints and opportunities that drive women's and men's capacity to adopt better soil management practices.

Ms. Verma observed the diverse and complex coping and livelihood strategies of women and men in a representative community of the sub-humid highlands of Western Kenya. She demonstrated the value of new techniques and tools, drawn from the social sciences, that complement more traditional biophysical approaches to agricultural research. Her research unveiled the profound complexity of people's individual lives and the myriad of individual, household, community, and global influences that affect the farmers' choices and decisions. She confirmed that marginalized and poor women are particularly vulnerable to stress generated by excessive demands on their time and cash resources. They must constantly juggle numerous short-term priorities, often diverting their time and attention away from sustainable but labour-intensive soil management.

Agricultural research generates knowledge, technologies, and policies intended to improve people's livelihoods. This study elucidated how the unique bio-physical and socio-economic contexts in which local women and men find themselves have been reshaped over time, most often and quickly by external forces that have left farmers, especially women, in a constant struggle to survive. External forces, including structural adjustment programs, greater openness of the national economies, and the information and communication revolution, confound this struggle and often diminish the benefits expected from these interventions. More immediate policies on governance, land tenure-distribution, education, health, technologies and technology dissemination, marketing, community organizations, and institutional support also contribute to the complex constraints in which the rural poor attempt to sustain their well-being. All these factors have increased the burden on farmers, weakened their capacity to cope, and made proper soil management a lower priority. The lack of coherence among policies, technologies, institutional and organizational arrangements, and the beneficiaries' circumstances poses a major challenge to PLaW and all other individuals and institutions dedicated to improving the well-being of the rural poor.

We believe that the insights arising from Ms. Verma's narratives can greatly assist agricultural and community development professionals' understanding of the complex relationships within which agricultural interventions must fit. We hope that this case study will stimulate new thinking and result in new ways by which integrated natural resource management can contribute to increased soil and water security and the improved well-being of the rural poor in sub-Saharan Africa.

Luis Navarro and **Don Peden**
International Development Research Centre

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the women of Maragoli, whose power, generosity, and humanity have moved me countless times.

Also, in memory of Patrick Sikana, whose genuine and sincere dedication to local farmers has been an inspiration.

No book is ever written alone and no research endeavour is ever carried out in solitude. I owe my deep gratitude to a great number of people. I would like to begin by saying that without the dedication and commitment of the research assistants involved, this research would not have been possible. Wycliff Ngoda was more akin to a colleague, cultural guide, and friend, than a research assistant. His invaluable field interpretations and knowledge of Avalogoli culture, history, people, and society enhanced the research immeasurably and provided a compassionate insider's view. Patricia Lugalia, the primary transcriber, carried out outstanding work, shared important reflections on the research process and added doses of laughter. Leah Mukaya patiently taught me Kiswahili and later joined in the transcribing, along with Nicholas Ndolo and Janet Ojango — all of whom gave up valuable time from farming and family activities to ensure that the work was completed on time. Knight Olesia kept my life in order and provided a caring environment for me in which to live and work. In November 2000 — two-and-a-half years after the main research was completed — I returned to Maragoli for feedback and dissemination of the research findings. Once again, Leach, Janet, Patricia, and Knight together with Eunitor Ngoda, Benson Chunguli, and Joan Adenya, assisted me in obtaining feedback and conducting interviewing sessions. Eunitor Ngoda, Benson Chunguli, and Joan Adenya. George, Mary, Edward, Henry, Rose, Paul, Neha, and Mercy inspired me with their friendship, hospitality, and warmth, thereby enriching my research experience immeasurably.

This book is a revision of the dissertation, *"Walking Where Men Walk": The Gendered Politics of Land, Labour and Soils in Maragoli, Western Kenya*, my M.A. thesis for the Department of International Affairs, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), Carleton University (1999). The case study presented is based on fieldwork carried out between October 1997 and April 1998, in Maragoli, Western Kenya, mostly in the town of Mbale and the villages of Luduguyiu, Chambiti, Luyaduyia, Kegoye, and Viyalo. This book is also the result of research that was funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa, Canada, and supported by the People, Land and Water (PLAW) Program Initiative and the Gender and Sustainable Development Unit (GSD). IDRC provided invaluable institutional support in both Canada and Kenya. Joachim Voss, Kathleen Clancy, David Brooks, Guy Bessette, Ola Smith, Eva Rathgeber, Wardi Leppen, Susan Joekes, and, in particular, Don Peden and Luis Navarro, continuously engaged me in stimulating intellectual discussion and provided a valuable and compassionate space for critical explorations of development, research, and gender. The manuscript of this book was reviewed and discussed with the following people at IDRC: Don Peden, Luis Navarro, Eva Rathgeber, Fiona Mackenzie, and Simon Carter. Their valuable comments provided me with thoughtful and insightful feedback, and have helped me both to sharpen and nuance my arguments and to avoid countless errors and several omissions. This research was also made possible through the support of Norma E. Walmsley Award For

International Understanding (a MATCH International Centre award for work that furthers international understanding between Canadian women and women of the South), as well as by NPSIA graduate scholarships and teaching assistantships.

In Kenya, the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme (TSBF-UNESCO), provided invaluable institutional and logistical support, and played a key role in supporting the research. Simon Carter shared his home, family, and research experiences, and continuously engaged and challenged me with thought-provoking debates about research. Cheryl Palm, Patrick Sikana, and Mike Swift provided much support, encouragement, enthusiasm, and interest in the research. They, along with Michael Misiko, Katry Okusi, Andrew Khabeleli, Paul Otuma, Meshack Shikanga, and Evelyn Wasia, generously shared their work, field experiences, insights, and knowledge on soil management in Kenya and East Africa, gained through sustained and continual research over many years. Bashir Jama and Amadou Niang at ICRAF provided valuable administrative support from the Maseno Research Station in Western Kenya. Government officials at the Ministry of Culture and Social Services and the Ministry of Agriculture in Western Province also provided valuable information towards this research. However, the conclusions, opinions, and other statements in this book, unless otherwise stated and referenced, are those of the author and not necessarily those of the above people or organizations.

In Canada, I am deeply grateful to a group of academics at Carleton University who have profoundly and systematically affected the way I conceptualize 'development.' In particular, my thesis supervisor, Fiona Mackenzie, my thesis advisor, Villia Jefremovas, and Simon Dalby perpetually challenged me and continuously 'scrambled my categories,' which were rooted in the physical sciences, illustrating that knowledge is a powerful process which requires a great deal of learning, as well as unlearning. They took on a student with no prior social sciences background — who continuously showed up during office hours with persistent (and sometimes existential) questions — and provided the possibilities for thinking about fieldwork and 'development' in a thought-provoking and critical manner. The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs provided an invaluable opportunity for changing fields drastically. The Women's Caucus at NPSIA provided an important space within which to discuss critical theoretical ideas, share fieldwork experiences, and translate ideas into action. Colleagues at Carleton University, including Sam Landon, Alice Hovorka, Cory Huntington, Rob Opp, and Eileen Stewart, engaged me in challenging and critical academic discussions on 'development' and made my intellectual journey a richer experience. Abra Adamo shared thesis-writing and fieldwork dilemmas and assisted in pulling me out of seemingly large conceptual and methodological 'craters' when I first begun to write. Susan Lenon provided volumes of support and encouragement, reading the manuscript of the thesis with critical eye, and offering invaluable advice and comments.

I am grateful to James Ferguson for providing much appreciated input, interest, and encouragement in this research, as well as invaluable guidance and advice on certain theoretical questions and dilemmas. His writings on 'development' have resonated in powerful ways, and have encouraged me to think critically about 'development' processes.

On a personal note, I am indebted to Laura Brian for instilling in me the power to believe that the world can, and should be, a different place. Larysa Voss-Jefremovas, Joachim Voss, and Villia Jefremovas shared their home, generosity, and support at critical times in the writing of the book and in my personal journey. Fiona Mackenzie and Villa Jefremovas showed me how the personal is also political, by sharing stories of profound strength, compassion, understanding and solidarity at a time when it was most needed. François Nadeau Albert provided space in which to explore professional boundaries through his belief in me. My friends, Hiedi, Cathy, Cyril, Alain, Joseé, Santo, Greg, Karen, Jane, Kristin, Dianne, and Jen, have provided much encouragement, support, and laughter over the years. I am also grateful to a circle of women in San Diego, the "pink helmets," who showed me just how powerful the individual and collective action of women can be: Cathy, Stacey, Yvonne, Rebecca, Shariz, and, most of all, Trish, thank you! Finally I would like to thank my parents: Raj Verma, for providing me with rich, cross-cultural life experiences, including a first-hand lived understanding of rural life in the South — which proved invaluable in Maragoli — as well as a love for cross-cultural experiences; and Savita Verma Puri, for her boundless love and affection ... but most of all for her encouragement to read, photograph, paint, dream, and explore the interfaces.

Ritu Verma
March 2001

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PART I

Introduction

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Introduction

Chapter One

> *With about 1100 people per square kilometer, Vihiga [Maragoli] has one of the highest rural population densities in the World (Vihiga District Annual Report, 1994), and would seem to lend itself to simplistic interpretations of agrarian change driven by population increase. Such interpretations obscure complex patterns of change and, by failing to understand the nature of change, actually make it harder for applied research to achieve its potential impact. ... If agricultural research, applied and interdisciplinary, is to make a significant contribution to raising the standard of living of poor people in Western Kenya and elsewhere, its point of departure must be a more informed understanding of this complexity. (Carter and Crowley 2000, p. 1)*

This book focuses on the complexity and gendered dimensions of farmers' lives in Maragoli, Western Kenya, as the farmers struggle to sustain their soils and their farms, and negotiate a complex web of opportunities and constraints to survive in an increasingly stressful local environment. By focusing on the diverse experiences of differently positioned individuals in Maragoli, this book aims to 'bring to life' the undifferentiated and 'lifeless' categories commonly used in conventional approaches to soil management and farming.[1] Using local people's own words and photographs, this book demonstrates that competing priorities and demands influence farmers' investment strategies in sustaining their soils, their farms and their livelihoods.

By recognizing farmers' knowledge and agency in managing their natural resources, it is possible to move beyond problematic assumptions that place *all* the blame for soil degradation and unsustainable farming practices on land scarcity, population pressure, and local 'ignorance' without taking into account the role of history, political economy, and gender. This study contends that multiple and complex factors lead to unsustainable soil management and farming practices. These factors are embedded in complex gender relations at the local level, and are inseparable from broader political-economic and historical processes. In today's political-economic environment, soil management is not necessarily a top priority for farmers, who do not have an endless supply of land, labour and time with which to carry out the labour-intensive practices required to sustain their soils and farms. When one looks more closely, at the local level, at farmers' livelihood strategies and their diverse options, aspirations, and dilemmas, it becomes evident that farmers, and women in particular, are juggling numerous priorities in increasingly precarious economic circumstances. These circumstances are exacerbated by ongoing political, economic, and historical processes that inevitably undermine farmers' capacity to sustain their soils and farms. Therefore, focusing on the micropolitics of farmers' struggles over productive resources (such as land, labour, and capital), and on "the symbolic contestations that constitute those struggles" (Moore 1993, p. 381), allows for a better understanding of the constraints and incentives encountered by local people in their everyday efforts to sustain their soils and farms and meet their broader livelihood requirements.

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1 *Similar to farmers' views, this book takes an integrated approach that considers soil management and farming practices intertwined and inseparable from each other.*

Throughout this case study, personal narratives and farmers' photographs provide a critical medium for exploring people's stories, experiences and realities. Logoli women and men demonstrate that relations of production are central to soil management, and are deeply gendered and continuously negotiated. Gender mediates not only women's and men's differential access to and control of important resources for sustaining the soils, but also cultural constructions pertaining to other relations of production that are inseparable from those struggles (Moore 1993, 1996). Bearing in mind the dangers inherent in ethnographic particularism, this book argues that examining the micropolitics of women's and men's struggles over resources elucidates the manner in which broader historical trends, political-economic conditions and 'development' policies are experienced in the context of everyday life.[2] These are not monolithic conditions that act on people *en bloc*; rather, they are negotiated, transformed, and experienced differently by women and men. Examining the micropolitics of these struggles sheds light on the complexity, variability, diversity, and human dimensions of local soil management and farming.

This case study uses gender as a lens for exploring one important dimension of difference (others include class, age, and marital status) in order to understand the different constraints that women and men face, and the different opportunities available to help them manage their environments within their gendered roles and responsibilities on and off the farm. It should be pointed out at the outset that, while the central focus of the book is on the complex and gendered aspects of local natural resource management, the majority of the participants in this study were women. This focus on women is deliberate, for several reasons. First, it reflects the fact that women are often the most vulnerable strata of local communities in sub-Saharan Africa (IDRC 1997). This is especially the case for economically poor, young, and unmarried adult women. However, although men are often privileged in gender relations in terms of power and authority, this study does not exclude cases in which men are also in vulnerable positions in terms of access to resources. Second, as in most other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, women in Maragoli are predominantly the farmers and managers of the soil, and, increasingly, the providers of income for their families. Rather than making up a unified, homogenous, and powerless 'Third World' category, they are diverse and dynamic actors with extensive knowledge of their environments and skill in managing natural resources.[3] They actively shape the material and symbolic worlds around them. But their power, expertise, and knowledge are often hidden from view by conventional approaches to soil management and farming in sub-Saharan Africa. These gender-neutral[4] approaches suspend gender from their analysis and use a universal yardstick of measurement, analysis, and research based on the assumption that men are by default the 'farmers' and 'providers.' Women are considered the 'other' — the farmers' wives and 'assistants.' As the

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[2] *While this case study is concerned with the contemporary dynamics of soil management and farming in Maragoli, references are made throughout the book to historical evidence cited in people's accounts as well as in secondary literature.*

[3] *Throughout this thesis, the book uses both single inverted commas and quotation marks for highlighting certain terms and concepts. Inverted commas are used to problematize or call attention to terms or concepts that are normally taken for granted (such as 'development'). Quotation marks are used for terms and concepts quoted directly from participants or secondary sources.*

[4] *The term 'gender neutral' is used within this book the same way that Ferguson (1994) refers to the politically neutral discourse of 'development,' which suspends politics from even the most politically sensitive operations of instituting 'development' projects and initiatives.*

evidence in this case study demonstrates, this is a major oversight. The serious imbalance in past research that has ignored women's multiple realities is the main problem that this study redresses.

The central argument in this book is that in an area of intensely farmed small-holdings, the increased dependence on cash for meeting day-to-day livelihood needs, sustaining agricultural production, and managing the soils has intensified already complex struggles over resources within the highly charged context of gender relations in Maragoli. This, in turn, has led to an escalation of gender-based conflicts at the level of the household, centred on the renegotiation of the "conjugal contract" (Whitehead 1981) — the terms by which spouses exchange resources. Gender roles, responsibilities and rights to access resources, and the cultural norms, idioms, and taboos that perpetuate these roles, rights, and responsibilities, are fiercely contested and struggled over. Men have the upper hand in these struggles because cultural meanings are constituted within patriarchal ideology and gendered power relations that privilege men's power and authority.

On the other hand, men's roles as farmers have been transformed by high levels of out-migration that began as a result of colonial policies. Male farmers also face major challenges in terms of their ability to live up to their culturally defined financial roles and responsibilities in the current economic situation. This situation is exacerbated by structural adjustment programs (SAPs), high rates of unemployment (Abwunza 1997) and by inequitable resource and development distribution within Kenya's political geography. Increasingly, women have taken on gendered roles, responsibilities, and labour burdens in farming, soil management, and income generation — all areas that were once the domain of men. The ability of women to act as farmers and providers has direct implications on the long-term sustainability of the soils and farms, and depends on several factors. The extent to which women invest in soil management and farming is contingent on their ability to maintain long-term security in land tenure, which in turn depends on their positioning in terms of age, life cycle, class, and marital status. Similarly, women's differential labour burdens on and off the farm and their ability to control their labour and its products are the key determining factors in their ability to invest in sustainable soil management and farming practices.

Demands other than soil management and farming have also had a significant impact on women, shifting their top priorities away from the long-term sustainability of their soils and farms. These new priorities, which include meeting the escalating costs of school fees, health services, and food, have intensified women's requirements for cash and their labour burdens and responsibilities both on and off the farm. The intense pressures have increasingly compromised women's capacity to be effective farmers and sustainers of the soil (Mackenzie 1995a). In order to meet these multiple demands, women engage in diverse off-farm income-generating activities and occupations, such as informal and non-formal petty trading and waged labour. In addition, they turn to barter and exchange as a way of making ends meet. Faced with an increasingly stressful economic environment, women diversify the channels by which they access resources by investing in multiple coping strategies, often negotiating both socially sanctioned and non-sanctioned social institutions to gain access to the resources necessary to maintain their soils, farms, and livelihoods.

Pointing to men's failure to provide household income and other livelihood requirements, women argue that they need greater mobility and autonomy to generate income and to

control the proceeds of their labour. Women are faced with a difficult situation: they cannot turn to large-estate commercial sectors to earn off-farm income, as in other parts of Kenya (Mackenzie 1993, 1995, for Central Province); nor can they work on individually acquired land, as in other African contexts (Schroeder 1996; Carney and Watts 1991, for the Gambia), because land is unavailable. Instead, they strategically focus on micro-niches on the farm (such as banana and vegetable garden plots) where they have long-term control and security in tenure, and on cash crops (such as tea) where they are able to get better returns on their labour and can better control the proceeds of that labour. Women continue to farm and implement soil management measures on land they do not own, where their security in tenure may be threatened and in terms of labour they do not control — as a symbolic gesture to their husbands and the community that at the very least they are "good" Logoli wives and farmers, and to avoid strong social sanctioning, stigmatization and monitoring. However, they do this to a lesser extent than on land and in terms of labour they do control. In addition, women maintain a public posture of deference to patriarchy that reproduces patriarchal discourse in which men are "commanders" (Abwunza 1997) — a strategic gesture designed to buy freedom of movement and room to maneuver. This posture inevitably reproduces men's privileged positions of power within gender relations.

As farmers, as sustainers of the soil, and as providers, women operate within inequitable gender relations that are shaped by patriarchal ideology. And in diversifying and expanding their roles, by "walking where men walk," women have taken on increased labour burdens and responsibilities. In the process, they have gained some autonomy and freedom, but not the rights, privileges and status that go along with it.

Theoretical points of departure

Development and research organizations have just recently begun to integrate gender analysis and diversity into otherwise gender-neutral soil management and agricultural conceptualizations and initiatives. In doing so, they have also initiated the practice of including into their objectives, projects and institutions the component of gender. The role of organizations such as Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme (TSBF) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in supporting this research illustrates the emerging commitment of research and development organizations to exploring and incorporating complex human dimensions, including gender realities, into the research agenda. Nonetheless, it is important to outline oversights of the past that have flattened the complexity, variability, diversity, and gender realities of farmers, all of which are central to soil management and farming.

This study aims to make explicit the gender-neutral generalizations within conventional approaches to soil management and farming. It argues that specific 'Third World' locations are constructed within inequitable North-South relations of power, that knowledge is never neutral but always 'about somewhere' and 'from somewhere,' and that location and conceptual framework are central in determining the type of knowledge produced (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, p. 35). Further, it argues that if "thinking is as 'real' an activity as any other" then ideas have important and very real social consequences in people's everyday lives (Ferguson 1994, p. xv). Ideas are connected with and implicated in broader political processes (Ferguson 1994, p. xv). They are constitutive forces that do something. Conceptualizations of 'development,' soil management, and agriculture construct social reality and shape natural resource management in local environments. They are continually

reproduced and contested within various constructions of Africa — constructions that are grounded in discourses of knowledge and power (Mudimbe 1988; Mackenzie 1995b). Therefore, instead of taking the theoretical realm for granted, it is important to pry open and scrutinize the epistemological foundations inherent in the construction of the 'problem' and 'solutions' put forward in various approaches over time. These include conventional as well as alternative approaches to soil management and agriculture. By examining these constructions, it is possible to discern how they represent the complexities of people's gendered lives and diverse local environments, and how they impact them.

Before describing the organization of this book and moving on to the case study findings from Maragoli in the chapters that follow, the following section makes explicit the discourse, problems, omissions, and drawbacks in conventional approaches to soil management and farming. It then outlines an alternative perspective — one that addresses these issues within a theoretical framework of analysis that considers aspects of culture, political economy, history, and gender.

Conventional approaches to soil management and farming

This section outlines specific aspects of conventional approaches to soil management and farming that perpetuate top-down, gender-neutral, non-participatory, and homogenizing perspectives of local realities. Recent critiques of conventional approaches to sub-Saharan Africa (Hinchcliffe et al. 1999; Mackenzie 1998, 1995b; Scoones, Reij and Toulmin 1996; Keeley 1996; Leach and Mearns 1996) have provided researchers and development practitioners with an indication of where these challenges exist and which issues require further attention. Bearing these critiques in mind, this section investigates the theoretical and political underpinnings of mainstream approaches, and the specific assumptions that flatten local complexities and gendered realities. It argues that in order to comprehend the past successes and failures of conventional approaches to soil management and farming, it is first necessary to explore the discourses of 'development' that construct certain types of social and environmental realities. This section begins by exploring briefly the notion of 'development' and 'development as discourse' from a broad theoretical perspective, before bringing it to bear more specifically on soil management and agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa. It reviews the problems and shortcomings of conventional approaches, focusing on the striking similarity and connections between contemporary and colonial approaches, the problems inherent in the construction and use of 'doomsday' scenarios, and the shortcomings of standardized solutions and macrostructural frameworks that homogenize and flatten local complexities.

'Development'

Soil management and agricultural initiatives are but one sector of the global industry of 'development.' Nonetheless, mainstream approaches to soil management and agriculture within the sub-Saharan African context are embedded within broader processes and discourses of 'development.' They represent an important example of how hegemonic discourse and processes set the main agenda of 'development.' It is therefore useful to briefly foreground 'development,' not simply as an unproblematized, static, and monolithic force, but as a valid site for critical inquiry in itself (Ferguson and Gupta 1997; Gardner and Lewis 1996). Such an inquiry might begin by recognizing that 'development' is a firmly entrenched, organizing concept of our time, as Ferguson points out in the following passage:

> *What is 'development'? It is perhaps worth remembering just how recent a question this is. This question, which today is apt to strike us as so natural, so self-evidently necessary, would have made no sense even a century ago. It is a peculiarity of our historical era that the idea of 'development' is central to so much of our thinking about so much of the world. It seems to us today almost nonsensical to deny that there is such a thing as 'development', or to dismiss it as a meaningless concept, just as it must have been virtually impossible to reject the concept 'civilization' in the nineteenth century, or the concept 'God' in the twelfth. Such central organizing concepts are not readily discarded or rejected, for they form the very framework within which such argumentation takes place. ... Each of these central organizing concepts presupposes a central, unquestioned value, with respect to which different worldviews can be articulated. 'Development' in our time is such a central value. Wars are fought and coups are launched in its name. Entire systems of government and philosophy are evaluated according to their ability to promote it. Indeed, it seems increasingly difficult to find any way to talk about large parts of the world except in these terms. (1994, p. xiii)*

Rather than discussing at length how 'development' is defined within various theoretical frameworks, the primary focus here is what it "has meant for those spaces and people who it defines as its objects" (Crush 1995, p. 21). Resisting the basic impulse to fix, define, categorize and bring order to a heterogeneous and constantly multiplying field of meaning (Crush 1995, p. 2), it is perhaps more useful to view 'development', as Ferguson suggests, as

> *a dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us. Within this grid, a host of everyday observations are rendered intelligible and meaningful. Poor countries are by definition 'less developed', and the poverty and powerlessness of the people who live in such countries are only the external signs of this underlying condition. ... Within this problematic, it appears self-evident that debtor Third World nation-states and starving peasants share a common 'problem', that both lack a single 'thing': 'development.' (1994, p. xiii)*

The power that the 'development' problematic wields over the social imaginary of 'Third World' countries — the way that social and environmental realities are constructed and controlled — indicates the dominance of one portrayal of reality over alternative ways of representing reality (Opp 1998, pp.13–14). Illustrating how and why this dominance is established and maintained requires an examination of the formation of the hegemonic discourse of 'development' (Opp 1998, pp.13–14). By conceptualizing 'development' as an apparatus that institutes its own language and does something in response to a problem that it has a hand in constructing, it is possible to investigate both the discourse and the effects of 'development.'

'Development' as discourse

'Development' produces its own type of language and form of discourse. By investigating the discourse of 'development,' it is possible to explore the forms in which it makes its arguments and establishes authority, the manner in which it constructs the world, and the ways in which its ideas are translated into real effects and can bring about intended and unintended changes (Ferguson 1994; Crush 1995). In this sense, discourse is much more

than language. It embodies social roles, cultural practices, and political positions — from the micropolitics of the household to broader North–South politics — that deploy and channel power (Opp 1997, p. 14). Influenced by the work of Foucault, Parpart and Marchand define discourse as "a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs ... the site where meanings are contested and power relations determined" (1995, pp. 2–3). Power is inseparable from this conceptualization, because "the ability to control knowledge and meaning, not only through writing but also through disciplinary and professional institutions, and in social relations, is the key to understanding and exercising power relations in society" (1995, pp. 2–3).

The belief that knowledge is inextricably intertwined with power is reflected in Foucault's argument that establishing "the criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know involves acts of power" (1971; cited in Scoones and Thompson 1992, p. 12). Within 'development' discourse, the definition of the 'problem' that must be tackled, along with the representation of the needs, priorities, and constraints of local people, must be understood as social constructs that exist within political contexts and inequitable global power relations (Ferguson 1999; Pottier 1993). Gardner and Lewis argue that 'development' knowledge and expertise are historically and politically specific constructions of reality, which may "have more to do with the exercise of power within particular historical contexts than presenting 'objective' realities" (1996, p. 71).

One way of highlighting the political processes inherent in 'development' is to focus, as Crush contends,

> *on the vocabularies deployed in 'development' texts to construct the world as an unruly terrain requiring management and intervention; on their stylized and repetitive form and content, their spatial imagery and symbolism, their use (and abuse) of history, their modes of establishing expertise and authority and silencing alternative voices; on forms of knowledge that 'development' produces and assumes; and on the power relations it underwrites and reproduces. (1995, p. 3)*

By focusing on in its discursive elements — the ways in which 'development' is written, narrated, and spoken — it is possible to move beyond a preoccupation with whether 'development' is a 'good' or 'bad' thing. Rather, this type of focus makes it possible to see 'development' as a name for a "complex set of institutions and initiatives encompassing multiple, and often contradictory, interests" (Heyer et al. 1981, cited in Ferguson 1994, p. 14). The task then becomes to improve the visibility of 'development' discourse and practice as it operates in various spheres of life, highlighting the fact that planned interventions do something and contribute to some kind of change, most often unintended (Ferguson 1994; Pottier 1993):

> *Whether initiatives introduce new power relations and ideologies or support existing ones, every intervention remains a political statement the significance of which must be grasped. (Pottier 1993, p. 7)*

In this vein, if one is to understand their political significance, the discourse of conventional approaches to soil management and agricultural issues in the African context must be made explicit — both in terms of what is articulated and privileged, *as well as in terms of what is subjugated and silenced.*

The problems and shortcomings of conventional approaches

Many scholars have pointed out the problems and shortcomings of conventional approaches to soil management and agriculture (Hinchcliffe et al. 1999; Mackenzie 1998, 1995b; Scoones, Reij and Toulmin 1996; Keeley 1996; Leach and Mearns 1996). To draw important lessons from these critiques, it is useful to review them with a view to highlighting specific elements that tend to perpetuate a top-down, non-participatory, and gender-neutral perspective. These elements include colonial discourses, 'doomsday' scenarios, standardized solutions, and macrostructural frameworks.

Colonial discourses

Soil management and agricultural efforts have been carried out repeatedly — from colonial times to the present day — in a variety of countries and conditions. One problem in the past has been the way these efforts have been framed and legitimated through colonial discourses. Such discourses evoke emotive images that construct Africans as 'unscientific exploiters' of their natural resources (Mackenzie 1995b, p. 101) and 'degraders' of their environment, in the context of a rapidly growing population. Like colonial interventions, such ethnocentric discourses construct African environments as 'degraded, eroded, neglected, and unruly,' and indigenous practices as 'backwards, traditional, and unscientific.'[5] Based on these constructions, African knowledge is disqualified as 'unscientific' in the face of what Mudimbe has called the "epistemological ethnocentrism" of Western scholarship and privileged claims to know (1988, p.15). Implicit in these constructions is the notion of trusteeship — the idea that "those who see themselves as 'developed' believe they should act to determine the process of development for others deemed less-developed" (Cowan and Shenton 1995, p. 28).

In this manner, African environments have been socially constructed within the discourse of 'development' (Mackenzie 1995b; Escobar 1996). Africa is problematically constructed as 'backwards,' 'traditional,' and 'less developed,' and the vast diversity, differences, and, complexities of a whole continent are reduced to generalizations. These generalizations pave the way for the application of the same 'development' blueprint across diverse regions and nations within Africa (Roe 1991), including Kenya,[6] without regard to context-specificity, variability, or complexity.

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[5] *Often, these constructions put forward dualisms such as 'traditional' versus 'modern'; agrarian and customary versus urban and industrialized; and subsistence versus highly productive economies (Mudimbe 1988, p. 4).*

[6] *Within the discourse of 'development,' African countries are constructed as 'Third World' countries. This construction has real effects in terms of affecting structural change. In the case of Kenya, it is further affected by the 'special' place Kenya holds within western imaginations through romanticized visions articulated by western mainstream culture and as put forward by novels and films such as "Out of Africa" (Dinesen 1938), and "West With The Night" (Markham 1942). Indeed, images of Kenya in western media and 'development' discourse portray it as a choice tourist destination. For instance, 'development' organizations consistently highlight Kenya's role in tourism in documents and texts (World Bank 1996a, 1996b, 1989). Further, westerners know little about it other than what they see within and between the bounds of national parks and five-star hotels — taking away snap-shot images of 'poverty' on the one hand, and 'adventure,' 'wildlife,' and 'safaris' on the other. This is not to say that Kenya's status within Africa can be reduced to romantic visions embedded in popular culture and media images, but that these visions have played a very real role in influencing the type of 'development' that is privileged. For instance, 'development' is targeted towards infrastructure and 'opening it up' as a hub for travel.*

The 'doomsday' scenario

Another problem has been the legitimation of soil management and agricultural interventions over time through a particular language that strikes a strident, urgent tone and presents an imminent 'crisis' or 'doomsday' scenario, which, as Stocking describes,

> *will usually include one or more of the following features: huge, canyon-like gullies, with bare and collapsing sides caused by waves of sediment-choked off runoff; 'moonscapes' of stones, or treeless slopes littered with the debris remaining after erosion; or the remains of a once-pristine forest, the blackened stumps still giving wisps of smoke, with the soil baked hard into nodules of brick. (1996, p. 141)*

Such images imply that something is 'not right,' and, therefore, something must be done to improve and reverse the situation to avert an assumed and inevitable 'crisis.'

There are several problems and omissions inherent within such perspectives. First, they rest on the assumption that soil degradation is an escalating problem and a major 'development' challenge in sub-Saharan Africa (Leach and Mearns 1996; Scoones et al. 1996) brought about by endogenous 'neglect and 'deficiency.' Such an assumption paves the way for a 'logical' need for external intervention and management without sufficient consideration of local people's agency, knowledge, expertise, and needs. Inherent in this discourse is an epistemological ethnocentrism that puts forward the idea that "there is nothing to be learned from 'them' unless it is already 'ours' or comes from 'us'" (Mudimbe 1988, p. 15). In this process, local farmers are constructed as the 'other' in the face of exogenous technical and modern expertise (Mackenzie 1995b, p. 101).

Second, the construction of a 'doomsday' scenario evokes an image of a Malthusian apocalypse and is based on the supposition of an inevitable and widespread collapse of the African environment (Keeley 1996; Scoones et al. 1996, p. 3; Roe 1995). Accompanying this 'crisis' scenario is an assumption of causation that is construed as endogenous, implying "tribalism, primitivism and barbarism in older versions; ethnicity, illiteracy and ignorance in modern incarnations" (Crush 1995, p. 10). This environmental 'crisis' is blamed solely on local population growth, which in turn is blamed on what are described as 'traditional' African cultural practices that place a high premium on fertility and perpetuate 'loose' reproductive customs such as polygamy.

Such perspectives support the uncritical idea of a 'degrading' environment that is distant from local realities and dynamics described within various case studies and contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, studies in Kenya have documented that increased population pressure does not necessarily lead to soil degradation, unsustainable farming and increased conflicts over resources, and in fact, has led to more incentives to conserve the resource base and manage the soils (Tiffen et al. 1994). Other case studies from West Africa have illustrated that a more positive relationship exists between population growth and the management of local environments (Fairhead and Leach 1993, 1995; Leach and Fairhead 1994). Corroborating these findings further, studies undertaken by Percival and Homer-Dixon have demonstrated that there is no clear-cut causal link between population pressure, land scarcity, and increased conflicts over resources. And while there might be an indirect link, it has, at most, a limited role in aggravating resource conflicts, in light of other issues and factors (Percival and Homer-Dixon 1994, p. 1).

This long-standing Western obsession with the assumed causal links and negative effects of population growth has been reflected in the discourse of contemporary development organizations in the recent past. For instance, it has been argued that

> *the link between accelerating population growth and environmental degradation is especially worrying. In several countries overpopulation is putting unsustainable pressure on agricultural land. In many places traditional farming land is already over-cultivated, and more fragile land is being exploited to meet the needs of the growing population (World Bank 1989. p. 41).... The pressure of population is causing desertification to accelerate, because it forces people and their livestock farther into marginal grassland. The productive capacity of land is falling because of shorter rotations, soil erosion, and overgrazing. Growing population also raises the demand for fuel wood and cropland, and the resulting deforestation increases runoff and erosion, lowers groundwater levels, and may further reduce rainfall in arid areas. Pollution is a growing problem. (World Bank 1989, p. 22). ... Where environmental abuse leads to loss of arable land, wildlife, and water supplies and even to local climate change, the effects are felt in declining incomes and a diminishing quality of life. (World Bank 1989, p. 44)*

Similarly, it has been argued that there is a causal link between population growth and environmental degradation, and therefore that "obstacles on the path of sustainable development" include population growth:

Poverty is exacerbated by a demographic explosion unprecedented in human history ... poverty and high population growth often induce land degradation and deforestation, which lead to growing food insecurity and loss of biodiversity. (World Bank 1996b, p. 2)

In this discourse representing an uncontrolled "demographic explosion," Kenya has taken a special place as an environmental "hot spot":

> *Kenya, an extreme case, has only 0.1 hectare per capita. These small areas, which seem at odds with usual perception of the vast, unlimited African lands, reflect the uneven distribution of population ... as well the low levels of technology and the unsuitability of wide areas for farming (World Bank 1996b, pp. 11–12). ... [The natural capital of Kenya], which is renowned for its unique scenery and the diversity of its natural parks and reserves ... is at risk because of the extreme pressure of population on arable lands. ... Permanent intensive cropping is the current pattern in favourable highlands, but degradation is high under low-input technology and without enough erosion control measures. Forests cover less then 20 percent of the total surface of the subregion. Of those forests, the small remaining pockets of primary mountain rain forests with their unique biodiversity are at risk because of extreme population pressure due to scarcity of land. (World Bank 1996b, pp. 29–31)*

A third problem with this discourse is that the roles of history, politics, and development interventions in affecting change are suspended from the analysis. Such discourse silences history and relegates all the blame to endogenous 'local factors.' Despite studies documenting the existence of local soil conservation, farming knowledge, expertise, initiatives,

and policies (Mackenzie 1998, 1995a, 1995b; Tiffen et al. 1994; Zimmerer 1996; Scoones et al. 1996; Rocheleau 1995), it has been argued that "no wide-scale attempt" to address these requirements has been made in Africa (World Bank 1996a, p. iv), and hence African countries should be assisted in implementing actions that would lead to the regeneration of soil productivity.

Changes in the environment and modifications of soil practices are assumed to be destructive, and are blamed on local African farmers and local governments (Williams 1995, p. 166), effectively hiding from view the effects of historical, colonial, and political processes, as well as the role of external interventions in producing some of these phenomena. From this perspective, further arguments are put forward for new measures to repair

> *the damage caused by years of neglect or to correct a natural deficiency in the system (1996a, p. 20) ... [and] ... for a special focus on soil productivity in order to devise a strategy to overcome the economic, social, and environmental problems caused by its long neglect. And it proposes a special programme of technical and investment support to assist SSA countries in dealing with these problems. ... The regeneration of soil productivity would, with the appropriate accompanying policy measures and investments, enhance the productivity of farm lands, contribute to the rehabilitation of degraded lands and relieve pressure to open new lands for agriculture. (World Bank 1996a, p.1)*

In this manner, 'development' institutions have tended to overlook historical processes, including the role of their own interventions in bringing about failures. What is left out is the role of old policies, interventions, and discourses of 'crisis' in perpetuating some of the conditions (Rocheleau et al. 1995, p. 1038).

The fourth problem with the discourse of the 'doomsday' scenario is that such perspectives do not take into consideration other factors that might also contribute to soil degradation and unsustainable farming. When the focus is solely on population pressure, land scarcity, and 'local ignorance,' other important factors — such as history, politics, economic policies, society, gender, and the myriad of constraints and dilemmas local farmers face that influence their decisions — are omitted from the analysis. Supporting this argument, Homer-Dixon has argued that the factors leading to scarcity of resources cannot be analyzed in isolation from the history and political economy of resource distribution, and that factors other than population growth (such as environmental change and inequitable social distribution) must also be considered (1994). Another problem is that local people are construed as lacking knowledge and expertise in devising their own solutions. They are viewed as "powerless," when, in fact, they adapt to changes and attempt to find alternative means of accessing resources and sustaining their livelihoods, with varying degrees of success, in response to a rapidly changing local environment.

The privileging of technical and standardized solutions

'Development' is a global industry with an extensive spatial reach of power that affects peoples, territories and environments in vastly different contexts (Crush 1995, p 7). However, despite this variability and diversity, its institutions and interventions tend to be similar. This homogenizing tendency of development institutions (the tendency to formulate manageable and similar internal structures and projects) is in direct contradiction with the

variance and diversity of the different contexts in which they work. Critiques of conventional approaches argue that this may be an important reason why soil management and agriculture initiatives have a checkered history (Scoones et al. 1996, p. 1) marked by the failure of some projects to meet their objectives. These failures are a direct result of old problems, omissions, and shortcomings that are sometimes masked by the co-option of the language of participatory development, indigenous knowledge and gender analysis. Scoones et al. contend that the distance between the rhetoric and the reality of participation and gender analysis means that some projects are simply vehicles for the imposition of technical solutions (Scoones et al. 1996, p. 9). Despite the growing body of case studies and evidence showing the importance of taking local realities and gender issues into account to better understand natural resource management, both soil and agricultural analysis have operated in a gender-neutral mode in the past. The assumption has been that farmers have undifferentiated options, interests and opportunities. This view is clearly untenable and unrealistic in light of the inherently gendered realities of farmers (Leach 1991a, p. 18).

Another reason for the past failures, omissions, and shortcomings may lie in the fact that 'development' discourse does not allow the role of 'development' institutions to be political (Ferguson 1994, p. 27), and therefore cannot allow for gender, history, culture, and politics. Rather, it has a tendency to de-politicize poverty and de-historicize the past, reducing 'development' to a static technical problem that can only be solved by incorporating 'traditional' societies into the 'modern' world through technical initiatives (Williams 1995, p. 172; Ferguson 1994, p. 256; Blaikie 1989). History is often frozen, and the past is obliterated. From this perspective, it is assumed that poverty and 'the widespread problem' of soil degradation and erosion can only be solved through a standardized technical package of inputs formulated within the practice of 'development' (Ferguson 1994).

Projects are often formulated as gender-neutral technical and standardized packages. Williams points out that "complexity and variation, the stuff of history, geography, sociology, gender or anthropology, is not easily managed within the practice and discourse of 'development'" (1995, p. 173). In Kenya, for example, technical approaches to soil conservation and agriculture have been carried out repeatedly since colonial times, instituting standardized and gender-neutral technical 'solutions' without regard to ecological specificity, spatial variability, changes in microenvironments, or the complexity, diversity, and variability in farming and sociocultural systems (Keeley 1996; Carter and Murwira 1995; Mackenzie 1995b). Ferguson argues that this is not surprising because in much of Africa and the 'Third World' there exist very similar 'development' institutions and a relatively small, interlocked network of experts who operate within a common discourse of 'development' (1994, p. 8), and similar gender-neutral ways of defining the 'problem.' This leads to a single and undifferentiated stock of free-floating 'development' expertise that is "untied to any specific context, that is so generalized, and so easily inserted into any given situation" (Ferguson 1994, pp. 258–259). Ferguson offers the following example:

> *In Zimbabwe. in 1981, I was struck to find local agricultural 'development' officials eagerly awaiting the arrival and advice of a highly paid consultant who was to explain how agriculture in Zimbabwe was to be transformed. What, I asked, did this consultant know about Zimbabwe's agriculture that they, the local agricultural officers, did not? To my surprise, I was told that the individual in question knew virtually nothing about Zimbabwe, and worked mostly in India. "But," I was assured, "he knows development." (Ferguson 1994, p. 258)*

Critics of conventional soil interventions argue that justifications for 'new' interventions are predicated on data and statistics regarding soil loss, degradation, and erosion derived from a variety of sources that are often not transparent, and are perhaps even suspect (Stocking 1996; Scoones et al. 1996; Ferguson 1994; Blaikie 1989, 1985). They argue that figures rarely make explicit how the measurements were derived or what scales were used. More often than not, figures for soil loss, for example, are extrapolated from a small plot to increasingly wider scales (Scoones et al. 1996; Keeley 1996). Studies are beginning to show that the figures for 'lost' soils do not match the levels of river or dam siltation in the same catchment area and further down (Scoones et al. 1996, p. 2). This 'lost' soil must go somewhere, and that 'somewhere' is usually located within the agricultural landscape rather than being lost permanently (Bojo and Cassells in Scoones et al. 1996, p. 2). Based on these problematic statistics, conclusions are drawn and interventions are justified. For example, a 1996 World Bank publication put forward the following statements evoking strong images, but referring simply to the "UNEP/ISRIC" and "GLASOD" methodologies without further explanation or elaboration:

> *About half a billion hectares are degraded, with one-third of all cropland and permanent pasture moderately to severely degraded (1996b, p. 12). ... Some 5 million ha of land in Africa as a whole are degraded to the point where their original biotic functions have been fully destroyed and rehabilitation would probably be uneconomic. Another 321 million ha have been degraded through deforestation, overgrazing, mismanagement of arable lands and other causes to levels at which their productivity is moderately or severely affected. Another 174 million are regarded by this study as having undergone light degradation. Other methods of estimating soil degradation have resulted in somewhat different assessments of its geographical distribution and areas affected, but all indicate that it is a problem of major proportions which affects the incomes and even survival of farmers in Africa. (1996b, p. 3)*

What is deemed as 'technical' and 'scientific' data is privileged within 'development' discourse in order to justify technical intervention. This means that conventional research methods, which are construed as 'objective' and 'factual,' are used as instruments for constructing reality in such a way that only that which is deemed quantifiable qualifies as 'real' (Mies 1991, p. 67). Thus, the complex reality of variance, diversity, and change is silenced by scientific and technical argumentation that is sometimes based on unsubstantiated statistics and technical data. Gendered life-worlds, knowledge, and experiences are not included in the analysis. Local realities and gender relations change over time and space, are imbued with conflicts, inconsistencies, ambivalence, and contradictions, and do not fit into simple, linear models of 'development' (Mbilinyi 1992, pp. 36–39). This is a major oversight and a challenge that research and policy must address in the future.

Often when socioeconomic, gender, and cultural analyses of local context-specific realities are carried out, they are done so as add-ons or boxes to be checked off to satisfy donors. Rapid and superficial methods are used to evaluate complex sociocultural contexts. Although problematic, the results are subsequently marginalized both in project texts and analysis, and in practice.

Macrostructural frameworks

Sociocultural and gender analysis within conventional approaches tends to employ macrostructural frameworks that focus on overly deterministic conceptualizations of social structures:

> *The reality of development planning and implementation is marked simultaneously by the recurrence of broad, seemingly universal patterns and by a diversity of local contexts. However, while the broad patterns receive ample attention in the work of economists, statisticians and agronomists, the importance of diversity remains largely under-reported and insufficiently understood. ... There is growing concern about the use of 'hold-all' categories that describe what appear to be universalistic phenomena. ... These broad categories do little to reveal the vast heterogeneity of location-specific conditions, but a lot to generate bland analysis and nonsensical prescription. (Pottier 1993, p. 2)*

This type of analysis ultimately produces misleading monolithic representations of 'development' and homogenizing accounts of local actors and experiences (Moore 1993 p. 381). Hence, important complexities and human dimensions of resource management are omitted. These include the gendered micropolitics of struggles over access to material resources, and the symbolic contestations that constitute those struggles among differently positioned and differentiated individuals in a state made up of multiple actors with sometimes disparate interests (Moore 1993, pp. 381–382) who act within inequitable political relations.

Given the tendency of past 'development' projects to omit important realities and flatten local complexities, one question that remains is why local people allow such 'development' projects (and specifically soil management and agricultural projects that do not directly reflect their needs) to be deployed repeatedly over time. Sikana suggests that local people view these projects as strategically linked to much-needed resources, even when they do not agree wholly or even in part with the aims of projects that are formulated without taking their knowledge, expertise, input, or interests into account (1995). As the book will demonstrate in later chapters, this is evident in the lengths to which local people go in reproducing the discourse of the 'unknowledgeable and illiterate' farmer and the 'modern and knowledgeable' researcher as a strategy in vying for valuable resources that have long been associated with Western intervention.

This practice of vying for access to resources by strategically reproducing 'development' discourse — while, on the other hand, filtering, rejecting, and manipulating aspects of 'development' intervention with which they disagree (Sikana 1995) — highlights an important reality. Contrary to conventional conceptualizations of soil management, development practitioners do not simply impose or transfer interventions and policies wholesale, en bloc, but rather, local people actively negotiate and contest them. People exert their agency by actively filtering, manipulating, and transforming external interventions and policies, and according their own meanings and understandings to them. As Long asserts:

> *A more dynamic approach to the understanding of social change is therefore needed which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of 'internal' and 'external' factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and consciousness." (1992b, p. 20)*

Hence, social change does not take place in isolation. Many changes do indeed occur as a result of external forces and an understanding of these outside forces is vital in understanding people's life-worlds. Nevertheless, social actors actively define and shape these external forces in the context of their own life-worlds. In doing so, they set in motion a new and unique set of emergent changes, practices, and strategies, most often resulting in unforeseen and unintended impacts.

These emergent changes take place in specific contexts and are influenced by social, cultural, economic, political, ecological, and historical processes. For instance Carter et al. have demonstrated how 'macro' national policies and interventions in Kenya have led to different patterns of land-use change within Western Province, with very different implications in Kabras in comparison to Maragoli in terms of agriculture, soil management, and on- and off-farm livelihood strategies (1998, p. 3). These differential patterns call into question the conceptualization of social change as homogenous, top-down, linear, deterministic, and driven from the outside. Rather, they show that environmental change is something that is discursively and historically constructed, and is context-specific. Long argues that local realities and practices encapsulate 'macro' representations and are only intelligible in situated contexts:

> *They are grounded in the meanings accorded them through the ongoing life-experiences and dilemmas of men and women. (Long 1992, p. 7)*

Using an alternative approach, it is possible to understand the interconnectedness of 'micro' and 'macro' changes over time as they affect farming, soil management, and people's complex livelihoods, and the way in which these changes are grounded in women's and men's everyday experiences. Such an approach addresses some of the problematic assumptions about the 'farmer' as an undifferentiated and gender-neutral category, and reconceptualizes natural resource management in a way that places the complexity, diversity, and gendered life-worlds of farmers at the centre of analysis.

An alternative approach

This book argues that a feminist poststructuralist political-ecology conceptual framework is a valuable alternative approach that addresses some of the problems, omissions and oversights in conventional approaches to soil management and agriculture. This alternative approach allows research and analysis to focus on the human dimensions of agriculture and the complex gendered experiences of women and men. Hence, it offers a more subtle understanding of the local contexts of soil management and farming that better reflects people's everyday lived realities. This section begins by reviewing the major elements of the feminist poststructural political-ecology framework, and concludes by arguing that the household is a critical point of departure for understanding context-specific aspects of soil management and farming from a gendered perspective.

The feminist poststructural political-ecology conceptual framework

The feminist poststructuralist[7] political-ecology conceptual framework brings together two alternate and critical ways of conceptualizing natural resource management. It combines a feminist poststructuralist emphasis on gender and household relations — as a focal point through which relations of production are mediated within the context of natural resource management (Carney 1996, p. 165) — with a political-ecology perspective on the ways that 'development,' the market, the state, 'culture,' and multiple regimes of property rights affect land-use practice (Carney 1996, p. 165). The framework centres on interrelated factors that shape conflicts over environmental resources. These factors include the micropolitics of women's and men's struggles over access to productive resources, the symbolic contestations that constitute those struggles (Moore 1996, p. 126; 1993, p. 381), and the linkages between these 'micro' struggles and the 'macro' level — in terms of political economy, history, culture, and social relations (based on class, gender, kinship, and other structures). Moore explains:

> *By fusing together an understanding of the mutual constitution of micro-politics, symbolic practices, and structural forces, it may be possible to unravel how competing claims to resources are articulated through cultural idioms in the charged contests of local politics. (1996, p. 125)*

The importance of gender within natural resource management

Carney argues that a feminist poststructuralist conceptualization of gender offers political ecology a more subtle conceptualization of the complex and historically changing relations that shape rural land-use decisions (1996, p. 165). Recognizing multiple voices, identities, and experiences brings to the analysis of natural resource management, and soil management in particular, an understanding of diversity and multiplicity — not just among women and men, but among different epistemological perspectives on feminism itself.[8] While there

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[7] A poststructuralist perspective parallels and is often conflated with a postmodernist perspective (defined below) (Marchand and Parpart, 1995, p. 245). Poststructuralism is a movement within social sciences and literature that is critical of the assumptions embedded in Enlightenment thought (Marchand and Parpart, 1995, p. 245). Poststructuralism rejects a rationalist worldview which rests upon dichotomies or dualisms, assumes an objective reality, and sets out to develop grand theories and meta-narratives (Marchand and Parpart, 1995, p. 245). A postmodern perspective embraces discourse analysis, genealogy, deconstruction, and textuality (Marchand and Parpart 1995, p. 245). It rejects modernity in favor of a broader pluri-cultural range of styles, techniques and voices (Gardner and Lewis 1996, p. xv; Marchand and Parpart 1995, p. 245). It questions Western knowledge systems, the social construction of dominant interpretations, unitary theories of progress, and scientific rationality (Marchand and Parpart 1995, p. 245). It is concerned with forms of resistance and the silencing of voices (Marchand and Parpart 1995, p. 245).

[8] Feminist poststructuralism argues that just as there is no one way of conceptualizing 'development,' there is no one all-encompassing, monolithic feminism, and likewise, no fixed and unitary feminist theory pertaining to 'development.' As such, feminism is fluid, has no fixed definition and is governed by the context, positionality and identity of the knower. Nonetheless, it is inherently political, in that when women and men become feminists, the crucial thing that occurs is not that they have learned any new 'facts' or 'truths' about the world, but that they have come to view it from a different position — from their own gendered positions as knowing subjects. "...this difference in positional perspective does not necessitate a change in what are taken to be facts, although new facts may come into view from the new position, but it does necessitate a political change in perspective since the point of departure, the point from which all things are measured, has changed" (Alcoff 1989, pp. 324-5, cited in Mbilinyi 1992, p. 51).

are various ways of 'doing' feminism within 'development' — including Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Gender and Development (GAD) (Rathgeber 1995, 1990), and Gender and Environment (GED)[9] — the central tenets of feminist poststructuralism offer an alternative that more closely reflects people's lived realities in relation to environmental resources and also reflects a deeper understanding of gender relations.

First and foremost, it is important to define gender itself. Within feminist poststructuralism, and for the purposes of this book, gender refers to the sociocultural construction of roles and relationships between men and women — roles and relationships that change over time and are context-specific (Hovorka 1998, p. 4; Marchand and Parpart 1995, p. 244). This understanding of gender replaces essentialist categories based on biological characteristics (male and female) with an analysis that takes into account the roles and relationships among women and among men — differentiated by axes of difference such as class, race, age, life-cycle positioning, and marital status. (Mackenzie 1995b, p. 100; Leach 1991, p. 22). Within this conceptualization, women's and men's identities or positions are not "reducible to origins, skin colour, or material locations," but are the products of struggles over meanings that represent achieved, not ascribed, traits (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 35).

This conceptualization stands in stark contrast to conventional approaches to soil management that view the 'Third World' farmer as homogenous and undifferentiated (Gardner and Lewis 1996, p. 79), denying history, individuality, and multiple identities[10] (Mbilinyi 1992, pp. 45–46). Conventional 'development' discourses freeze 'Third World' farmers in time and space, and produce knowledge constructed on and ruled by binaries or dualisms that reinforce existing power relations — such as Western (read 'progressive/modern/superior') vs. non-Western (read 'backward/traditional/inferior') (Mohanty 1991a, p. 6).[11]

However, simply being a 'woman,' 'poor,' or a 'rural farmer' is not necessarily sufficient ground for people to assume political self-identify or identity to a common cause or set of interests. (Mohanty 1991a, p. 33). Men and women have multiple positionalities which are a result of various intersecting systematic networks of class, life-cycle positioning, marital status, age, race, sexuality, and nation, that position them and that are experienced differently in different cultural, economic, social, and political contexts (Mohanty 1991a, p. 33). While all women and men share important experiences with those of their own sex as a consequence of gender identity, this identity is not necessarily sufficient to override the social and political barriers of status, class, age, race, and disability (Mohanty 1991a, p. 13).

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[9] *For an in-depth and comprehensive discussion on these different perspectives on 'development,' see Rathgeber (1995, 1990), Parpart and Marchand (1995) and Sylvester (1995).*

[10] *The notion that there are different axes of difference or multiple positionalities in people's everyday lives with complex permutations that interplay and interact with each other leads to an awareness of subjective experiences that are different in each case, especially when the subjective experiences of each person are overlaid with these various positionalities. In other words, women are differentiated along multiple and various axes of difference, and have individual subjectivities and psychologies — they are not a homogenous group. Every woman and man has multiple identities, which change over time and space, sometimes conflicting with one another.*

[11] *Another crucial dualism is 'men/women,' whereby men are represented as the 'universal' — the standard with which to compare and contrast women. Women in this conceptualization become the 'other.' Indeed, within many conventional approaches, farmers are assumed to be male ('the norm') while women are considered as 'female farmers' ('the other') (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 51).*

Power relations vary by both nature and degree, and it is simplistic to assume that all women, or all men for that matter, necessarily identify with each other on that basis alone (Cotterill 1992, p. 595).

What emerges from a feminist political-ecology approach, as opposed to 'women and environments' perspectives that focus on the essentialist category 'woman'[12] (Mackenzie 1995, p. 100; Leach 1991a, pp. 18–19), is a focus on gender as a powerful conceptual framework for understanding and analyzing local realities and environments. Gender becomes an invaluable entry point for gaining insight into the ways in which environmental change is inextricably intertwined with women's and men's livelihood concerns, and the way in which land and soil management are adapted and reconfigure to cope with larger political-economic, demographic, and sociocultural changes (Leach 1991a, p. 17). A focus on gender relations reveals how local resources are controlled, used, and struggled over (both materially and symbolically). Therefore, such a focus is central in understanding local resource management practices and innovations (Leach 1991a, p. 17), as well as women's and men's specific priorities and constraints.

Recognizing the power, knowledge, and human agency of local actors

Gender relations involve ongoing struggles between local actors over meaning and over control of strategic resources and relationships. It is important to bring the complex interrelations of power, knowledge, and agency to bear on the analysis of gender relations and struggles. By doing so, it is possible to explore how these interrelations operate in everyday life and affect natural resource management through the ongoing processes of negotiation and resistance within gender relations.

Within conventional approaches to 'development,' power is often seen as a fixed and rigid block of control that is possessed or not possessed (Villareal 1992; Long 1992b). It is often viewed as vertical in nature — dominating, oppressing and subverting — thereby focusing the analysis on the question of who possesses it and how it is wielded over its 'victims' (Villareal 1992; Long 1992b). Feminist poststructuralist political ecology offers an alternate perspective that views power as a fluid and multi-faceted force that sometimes manifests itself only for flickering moments. This force takes different forms and has different consistencies, "which make it impossible to measure, but conspicuous enough to describe" (Villareal 1992, p. 258).

Power is not a 'zero-sum' game in which possessing power means that others are without it (Long and Villareal 1994; Long 1992b). From this perspective, for example, women are not 'victims,' 'powerless,' and 'subjugated'; they are not utterly 'trapped' in patterns of domination and powerlessness, but are agents involved in negotiation and acts of resistance (Villareal 1992, p. 257; Scoones and Thompson 1993, p. 13). Conversely, the 'powerful' are not in complete control of all aspects of social and political life and are influenced, affected, and sometimes subverted by the 'powerless' (Villareal 1992, p. 257; Scoones and Thompson 1993, p. 13). In short, rather than being something that is possessed, power is constituted in interaction (Verschoor 1992, p. 177). Within everyday social interactions, actors are thinking agents who create space and room to maneuver, manipulating resources and constraints in order to promote their own interests and projects, and to gain an edge or advantage over others in struggles over access to and control over resources.

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[12] *For further discussion on the differences between a 'women and environment' approach as opposed to a feminist political-ecology approach, see Leach 1991.*

Farmers are also actors and thinking agents who strategize and problematize situations. They process knowledge and information and bring together elements necessary to manage their soils, operate their farms (Long and Villareal 1994, p. 48), and sustain their livelihoods. They process social experience and devise coping strategies, even under the most extreme conditions or coercion (Long and Villareal 1994, p. 48).

Moreover, power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined. Knowledge is context-specific, and socially and historically constructed. In this way, it is inherently political in that the determination of "what is excluded and who is qualified to know involves acts of power" (Foucault, cited in Scoones and Thompson 1993). Each society has what Peet and Watts call "regimes of 'truth'" that control the political and economic apparatuses that diffuse 'truth' in the form of discourse (1996, p. 13).

However, 'truths' are not only statements within socially constructed discourses; they are also, simultaneously, facts about reality (Moore and Vaughan 1994). Within this conceptualization, knowledge is considered both a representation (a matter of conversation and social practice) and a fact (Moore and Vaughan 1994). However, there exist multiple interpretations of facts (Moore and Vaughan 1994). There are multiple 'truths' — many complex networks of knowledge — instead of one unitary 'truth' and knowledge system (Long and Villareal 1994; Flax 1992). Feminist poststructuralists incorporate multiple variants about 'truths' and recognize that knowledge processes are embedded in social and cultural processes, which themselves are imbued with aspects of power, authority, and legitimation, often involving social struggle, conflict, and negotiation. Knowledge is shared and negotiated through a multiplicity of actors and networks. Like power, knowledge is not simply possessed, accumulated, or unproblematically imposed on others, nor is it a commodity that can be reduced to single, cohesive structures, stocks, and stores that can be precisely measured in terms of quantity or quality (Long 1992b; Long and Villareal 1994; Scoones and Thompson 1993). Rather, knowledge emerges out of processes of social interaction that are ultimately influenced by acts of power (Long 1992b).

In addition, local knowledge, practices, and discourses do not exist in a vacuum (Scoones et al. 1996; Vaughan and Moore 1994; Ferguson 1999). They are often influenced by the movement of people (such as migrants passing through an area), learned during journeys to other places, or adapted selectively from interventions imposed during colonialism, national action plans or 'development' interventions (Scoones et. al 1996, p. 10). Rather than considering local knowledge and experience as unitary and linear (or frozen in time), the multiplicity, variation, adaptation and improvisation that take place in daily livelihood struggles must be examined (Ferguson 1999; Scoones et al. 1996). In this way, global forces and interventions are not "characterized by simple, Eurocentric uniformity but by coexisting and complex socio-cultural alternatives" (Appurdai 1996, cited in Ferguson 1999, p. 385) based on the dynamic negotiation and mastering of a complex web of variants and range of influences over time (Ferguson 1999, p. 385; Scoones et al. 1996, p. 10). In short, local knowledge is a process of negotiation.

When one examines aspects of knowledge through the prism of gender and apply them to the issues at hand, some very interesting questions emerge: Who can be a 'knower'? What tests, methods and research approaches must be passed in order to be legitimated as agricultural knowledge and knowledge about soils? Do subjective truths count as knowledge? Harding suggests:

> *Feminists argue that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge. They claim that the voice of science is a masculine one, that history is written from only the point of view of men and ... that the subject of a traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man. (Harding, cited in Mbilinyi 1992, p. 32)*

From such critiques, experience emerges as a legitimate source of knowledge, and as a guide to analysis and political action. Hence, the study of women's and men's experiences becomes a central element of gender analysis (Martin 1995, p. 84).

However, gender analysis, which focuses on the everyday experiences of local people, must not succumb to the individualistic and the trivial. The aim is to address inequities and grasp crucial patterns, relationships, and mechanisms that organize and map the social world (Villareal 1992, p. 248). Rather than deterministic macrostructural frameworks of analysis, what is required is conceptual order in a complex and 'chaotic' world. This conceptual order would recognize patterns of gendered power relations and would view 'chaos' as a manifestation of the multiplicity of ways that actors negotiate problems and constraints in their lives (Long 1989, cited in Villareal 1992, p. 248). Participants' perceptions and interpretations of personal and collective experiences need to be scrutinized, and deconstructed (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 52), so that experience as recounted is not taken for granted as unproblematized evidence.

Poststructuralist feminists reject conventional constructions of women as 'passive victims.' They argue that such constructions silence local histories of contestation, struggle, and resistance (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 38). Women's and men's stories, histories, and personal narratives provide crucial accounts of resistance to dominant gender relations (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 41). These accounts are important in understanding local natural resource management, and bring to the surface people's active human agency and role as social actors. However, it is not only what Scott has called "public transcripts" — the rare and open material struggles over access to resources — that are important. "Hidden transcripts," and the strategic struggles over meaning that take place in 'in-between' spaces that are not always evident, are also crucial (Villareal 1992; Scott 1990). Gender relations may sometimes manifest themselves in open struggles, protests, petitions, and revolts, but they do not tell the whole story (Scott 1990). The larger and more complex political spaces that are often beyond direct observation are constituted in "off-stage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict or inflect" the dominant ideologies of gender relations (Scott 1990). Hence, the ideological, symbolic dissent and discursive politics that continually press against the limits of what is permitted or sanctioned (Schroeder 1996; Scott 1990) are central to the analysis of gender relations.

Further, everyday issues, through which negotiation, accommodation, and resistance play out, are important in the everyday lives of actors (Villareal 1992). One needs to look at the small attacks, probings, and flashes of command that peek out behind the scenes — the "guerrilla tactics" inherent in gender relations (Villareal 1992; Mbilinyi 1992; Scott 1990). Mohanty sums up:

> *Resistance clearly accompanies all forms of domination. However, it is not always identifiable through organized movements; resistance inheres in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives. Resistance in encoded in the practices of remembering. ... The very practice of remembering against the grain of 'public' or hegemonic history, of locating the silences and the struggle to assert knowledge which is outside the parameters of the dominant, suggests a rethinking of sociality itself. (1991a, p. 39)*

Knowledge, power, human agency, negotiation, bargaining, and changing gendered social relations in which decisions about land, labour, and surplus play out in the household, are crucial aspects of resource struggles. Therefore, they are central to understanding the dynamics of soil management and agricultural production in local contexts.

The household

A focus on the gendered division of roles, responsibilities, rights, and interests contextualizes changes in resource management and the meanings they are given by different people (Leach 1991a, p. 22). The ideas of "relations of production" and "relations in production" — the former understood as property relations and the latter as labour processes (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 217) — provide important conceptual tools for understanding local resource management issues. Relations of production, such as land and soil, are critical in resource management, because arrangements for resource tenure and access always implicate gender relations (Leach 1991a, 19). For instance, gender analysis has illustrated that people with secure tenure rights invest in land with a long-term view, but their ability to do so can be compromised by lack of access to economic or other resources vital to the maintenance of their livelihoods (Mackenzie 1995; Leach 1991a, p. 18). Within relations of production, gender analysis of availability of labour shows us how tasks are divided and how work is sequenced or segregated between women's and men's crops and space. Gender analysis also shows us the links between division of labour and right to access resources, and how they change in value over time.

While aspects of decision-making reveal a lot about how gender relations impinge on resource management, Leach argues that they also hide a lot. Leach suggests that, in fact, many people are not making decisions that they necessarily like, but are dealing with dilemmas and constraints in a context in which agro-ecological and sociopolitical issues are intertwined (1991a, p. 23). In this way, coping with changes in the political economy, the environment, and new social contexts in response to broader changes means coping with emerging dilemmas and problems (1991a, p. 23). This has implications for gender relations. As much as coping mechanisms and decision-making processes are affected by crop yields and conventional soils issues, they are bound up in context-specific notions about relations between husband and wife; between older and younger people; among co-wives; among members of an extended family; and among neighbours, friends, lovers and patrons (Leach 1991a; Berry 1997, 1989; Crowley 1994).

Gendered access to resources, distribution, and control is commonly, although not exclusively, negotiated at the level of the household (Adamo 1998, p. 2). The household is a site that represents to both women and men a channel of access to productive resources such as land, labour, income (Adamo 1998, p. 2), and soil management inputs such as fertilizers, organic manure, etc. It is also a space where other important social relationships intersect. To understand the gendered options and opportunities available to farmers in terms of resource management, it is important to explore the processes by which household members gain access to and control over resources that are available to the household as a whole, and the forms of negotiation, bargaining, and conflict that occur between household members (Whitehead 1981; Leach 1991a).

Beyond the household as a 'black box'

The feminist poststructuralist political-ecology perspective links broader concepts of power, knowledge, and agency with 'micro' political-economic issues grounded in the everyday lives of women and men at the household level:

> *The central insight of poststructuralist research over the past fifteen years is the need to extend the definition of politics from the electoral politics of the state and/or between classes to one that includes the political arenas of the household and workplace. ... This emphasis brings attention to the crucial role of family authority relations and property relations in structuring the gender division of labour and access to rural resources. ... However, as development interventions, environmental transformations, and markets place new labour demands and value on rural resources, these socially constructed relations of the household labour and property rights often explode with gender conflict. Struggles over labour and resources reveal deeper struggles over meanings in the ways that property rights are defined, negotiated, and contested within the political arenas of the household, workplace and state. (Carney 1996, p. 165)*

When conventional 'development' perspectives and soils or agricultural research and analysis turn their attention on the household, it is often in problematic terms, viewing it as a 'black box' with internal wiring, its complexities reduced to aggregations, and its dynamism suspended (Kabeer 1994; Carney and Watts 1990; Whitehead 1981). This view constructs the household through the lens of neo-classical economics — as an altruistic, democratic, co-operative decision-making unit characterized by a joint utility or joint welfare function that pools resources (such as labour, income, and goods) into a common fund, and which in turn is equally shared by and accessible to all household members (Kabeer 1994; Evans 1991; Roberts 1991; Moore 1988; Whitehead 1981).

This conception of the household does not reflect the reality of households in sub-Saharan Africa. It views the household as a unified production unit, consisting of harmonious social and gender relations (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 41). It conflates units of residence, reproduction, and production — the 'domestic domain' — into a monolithic, bounded and unchanging space, except in its capacity to change 'personnel' (Pittin 1987, cited in Kabeer 1994, p. 113). This view of the household is based on the Western model of the nuclear family made up of a male 'head,' a wife, and children. 'Development' institutions, organizations, and researchers still persist in using this model, even in situations in which there are separate economic activities, and separate incomes and expenditures that challenge

conventional household analysis (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 41). Notions of power, negotiation, accommodation, and bargaining are hidden and obscured, and therefore are rendered virtually meaningless.

The household as a point of departure

Poststructuralist feminists argue that the household is complex and variable and does not exist in isolation from other institutions and relations. Evans points out that "households are often shifting, flexible structures in which boundaries are difficult to discern" (1991, p. 54). Indeed, the sheer cross-cultural diversity of household forms almost defies definition. This diversity extends to various aspects of the household. For instance, family and household composition, and the ways by which social relations are mediated through kinship, marriage, and other social institutions, all create a variety of conjugal and residential arrangements (Evans 1991, p. 54). Heterogeneous household forms can include polygamous households, female-headed households, or clusters of households that are part of larger compounds and/or extended family units. Furthermore, patterns and channels of access to resources cannot always be located or confined to the household. As a way of moving beyond the household as a unit of analysis, Carney and Watts suggest:

> *It is the porosity of the household boundaries, the tensions and competing interests among, and between, enterprises and individuals, the fluidity of internal social processes, and the constitutive role of 'external' political economy that have become the benchmarks of African household studies. (1990, p. 217)*

Berry offers a way out of the conundrum of the household by arguing that it should be treated as a *point of departure* for gender analysis (1984, cited in Carney and Watts 1990, p. 217). The household is a socially constructed concept. Its activities may not have a single locus, and any one locus does not necessarily represent a single unit of labour or resources (Roberts 1991, p. 62). Nonetheless, the household remains a valuable concept for exploring the effects of different gendered interests, options, and social relationships on resource management.

The conjugal contract, defined as the terms by which spouses exchange goods, incomes, and services (including labour), is a useful concept for drawing out these issues. It focuses attention on the changing nature of these terms according to broader changes in the political economy (Whitehead 1981, p. 88). The conjugal contract varies depending on factors such as cultural patterns of inheritance and residence (Evans 1991, p. 54) and on the extent to which resources are joined or pooled, or dealt with as separate holdings. Because of these types of factors, women's and men's access to resources, labour, income, and soil management inputs is determined by their positions in relation to complex webs of responsibilities, obligations, and rights within conjugal contracts, kinship groups, and the wider social and political-economic environments (Evans 1991, p. 57).

Recognizing the fluidity of conjugal contracts makes it possible to focus on the complex interplay of power, knowledge, labour, and resource relations, and to incorporate gendered politics. The strategic and symbolic deference to patriarchal discourses, the marital and non-marital metaphors, the rhetorical struggles, the wars of words, the negotiation of symbolic representations — all these are used to configure and reconfigure gender relations, and to shift responsibilities, obligations, and rights within a changing political economy

(Schroeder 1996). Understanding the complex, overlapping rights and obligations, and the competing interests, tensions and conflicts, relations of domination, and cultural representations that produce and reproduce power relations, is crucial for understanding the politics and points of resistance associated with the control of resources (Carney and Watts 1990).

The household is also a locus for a number of relationships that take place outside the conjugal contract, such as social institutions (including kinship relations, social organizations, social networks, non-sanctioned social relationships, etc.). Women and men increasingly invest in social institutions such as kinship relations as diversification strategies in the face of increasingly unstable economic conditions. They offer a critical opportunity to explore struggles over resources and the way they are controlled, managed, accessed, and made available to different people (Evans 1991; Whitehead 1981). For instance, social organizations, such as women's groups and informal networks, are important socially sanctioned channels for accessing resources. They provide women with autonomy and freedom to pursue their own interests and projects. Also, non-sanctioned social relationships, such as extramarital relations and sex work, are contentious yet important channels for accessing resources for women in difficult circumstances (Jefremovas 1991a, 1991b). By exploring the diverse, multiple, and sometimes 'hidden' social institutions and relationships in which women and men invest as diversification strategies in the face of increasingly stressful circumstances, it is possible to explore how different types of context-specific social institution shape struggles over resources. Rather than considering social institutions as monolithic, static, and rigidly regimented, Berry suggests that it is necessary to think

> *about institutions as processes begin[ning] with movement and interaction. For example, one might conceptualize social institutions, such as household, family, community, etc., not as clearly bounded, consensual entities, but rather as constellations of social interactions, in which people move, acquire and exchange ideas and resources, and negotiate or contest the terms of production, authority and obligation. People interact, within and across various social boundaries, in multiple ways and relations among them are constituted less through uniform application of written or unwritten rules, as through multiple processes of negotiation and contest which may occur simultaneously, or in close succession, but need not be synchronized or even mutually consistent. (1997, p. 1228)*

Membership in conjugal relationships and in a diverse range of social institutions creates a complex web of labour and land rights, claims, and obligations. Far from being stable, consistent, or guaranteed, these are negotiated processes (Berry 1997, p. 1229). Rather than view institutions as fixed structures with rigid rules and guaranteed outcomes, it is more appropriate to shift our analytical focus to negotiations, contestations, and debates (Berry 1997, p. 1229).

Moreover, there are important links between social relationships, social institutions and patriarchy that shape the gender division of labour, property relations (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 218), and roles and responsibilities:

> *Land entitlement may simultaneously carry a right over labour power — land rights designated as 'communal' or 'family' may confer culturally binding expectations regarding labour obligations by affines for example — and it is*

> *this intersection of power, language and property that strikes at the core of domestic social structure. The nexus of social and power relations is typically rooted in traditional practice and customary representations which, while regularly contested and negotiated, retain their status by virtue of being believed in and capable of providing individuals with explanations of a contradictory lived reality. The cultural representations of the domestic order provide an encompassing ideology which naturalizes and sanctions property rights ... built upon the bedrock of social structure, specifically patriarchal family relations and the sexual division of labour. (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 218)*

Patriarchy is pervasive in influencing gender relations and the outcomes of women's struggles over resources — resources that are vital to sustainable natural resource management. However, patriarchy is not fixed, monolithic, timeless, and unchanging. It is, rather, both a dominant ideology that underpins 'cultural' norms, idioms, and practices, and an inequitable social structure that shapes and permeates gender relations (Abwunza 1997, p. 33). Women are not 'powerless' within the structures and ideology of patriarchy. They are actors who resist and manipulate patriarchy to access resources vital to the sustenance of their livelihoods, farms, and soils.

The organization of this book

A large part of this book is dedicated to the case study from Maragoli, Western Kenya, which focuses on the complex gendered dimensions of soil management, farming, and livelihood strategies of differently positioned individuals, and contextualizes farmers' lived experiences within broader political-economic and historical processes. Chapter Two provides a concrete example of how an alternative conceptual framework sensitive to gender issues and the ethical and equitable collaboration of participants can be operationalized in gender-based research practice. The chapter begins by outlining the cross-cultural methodology that was developed for this research in order to put into practice elements reflecting the alternative conceptual framework described in the preceding section. Following this, the research journey — from the pre-fieldwork to the post-fieldwork stages — is described and discussed in order to make transparent both the methods that were used and the various issues that were brought up during the course of the research. The chapter ends with a reflection on the various dilemmas encountered during the fieldwork, its unintended effects, and the lessons learned. The chapter analyzes the dynamics of the field research from the vantage points of the researcher, the participants, and the research assistants, concluding that research is a social and political encounter that influences the findings that result from it and the collaborations that come to fruition from it.

Part II is dedicated to contextualizing Maragoli in terms of geography, broader processes, historical changes, and sociopolitical aspects. It includes Chapter Three, which overviews important aspects of history, political economy, culture, and society, and their relation to state and international development policies, as key factors contributing to an increasingly stressful local environment in Maragoli. The chapter describes key historical interventions and policies that have set into motion significant changes in soil management and farming practices, and have brought about important changes in gender relations, and relations in agricultural production and soil management. Similarly, Maragoli's place within Kenya's political geography and structural adjustment programs, and women's place in Kenyan politics, are important political-economic factors that have created some of the problems

and constraints that farmers increasingly face in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, an ever-changing yet heavily patriarchal culture and society that enforces and regulates gendered rules and obligations in favour of men is also a key factor that defines the parameters of gender relations, farming, and soil management. It is argued that by recognizing the multiple interplay of these broader processes — as both contributing to and exacerbating people's everyday problems, constraints, and lack of access to resources — one is better able to comprehend the complexity of local resource management and understand people's everyday struggles to survive and sustain their environments.

Parts III, IV and V present the research findings and gender analysis of the case study. Throughout these sections, women's and men's personal narratives and photographs are used to illustrate key gender issues, relations of production (control of land and labour), and multiple livelihood strategies that affect the sustainable management of soils and farming. More specifically, Part III presents farmers' narratives and photographs within the context of the gendered terrain of the farm. It includes Chapter Four, which explores the politics of land and its central importance to soil management and farming. It illustrates the diversity of farmers' experiences concerning land, by exploring their struggles, dilemmas, and constraints. It argues that farmers' long-term security in land tenure is critical for sustainable soil management and farming. It contextualizes land issues and their major impacts on gender relations and land tenure arrangements by exploring historical struggles over land in Maragoli from the pre-colonial to the early post-independence period. Following this, it demonstrates that contemporary struggles over land are contingent on gender. Women's security in land tenure is critical to soil management because when women have long-term security in tenure they are more likely to invest in sustaining their soils. However, the reality in Maragoli is that women's security in tenure is increasingly threatened. This is especially the case for certain women and men who, depending on their marital status, gender, and class, are in a particularly vulnerable position in defending their rights to land within local struggles over this important resource. These increasingly intense struggles take place in a context of legal plurality, where women face the added barrier of inequitable access to legal spheres. This chapter also illustrates that women's ownership of land constitutes a major threat to men's authority as 'heads' of household. These struggles over land are the basis for a "bitter war of words" between women and men, and hence the escalation of gender conflict at the household level. The equitable resolution of these conflicts is critical for farmers' livelihoods and for the long-term sustainable management of their soils.

Because much small-scale farming in Kenya depends on the availability of household or casual labour, Part IV closely examines the diversity of farmers' experiences in micropolitics and the gendered division of on-farm labour, once again using the words and photographs of different individuals to focus its argument. Chapters Five and Six explore the gender division of labour, roles, and responsibilities on the farm. More specifically, Chapter Five explores farmers' diversity by focusing on how different positionalities within the household impact on-farm roles, responsibilities, and labour burdens, while Chapter Six explores how labour and responsibility for specific farming and soil management practices are divided between women and men.

Chapter Five begins by addressing how differently positioned individuals on a farm differentially experience and are responsible for farming, soil management and household labour burdens. Women's ability to cope with and manage multiple labour requirements depends on their marital status, class, age, and life-cycle positioning. This chapter argues that women's and men's roles and responsibilities for soil management and in agriculture are continually changing in response to broader historical and political-economic changes. These roles and responsibilities are also continually being contested, transformed, and negotiated through heated discursive politics at the level of the household. Women — especially young and economically poor women — face intense labour burdens on the farm. Patriarchal ideology is pervasive in men's argumentation within gender debates. However, women often maintain a posture of deference to this ideology in order to create room for themselves to maneuver, all the while fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to the extent that they can, in order to demonstrate their positions as 'good' farmers and wives.

Chapter Six brings the household relationships and struggles described in Chapter Five to bear on different farming practices, including planting and cultivating trees and hedges, digging trenches, caring for livestock, clearing land, and growing cash and subsistence crops. This chapter demonstrates that men have disengaged from many soil management and farming practices, except for a select few practices that continue to reinforce their symbolic and material control as owners of property, and their roles as 'commanders' of the household and farm. This shift has, over time, effectively increased women's responsibilities in farming and soil management. However, the case of coffee and tea farming illustrates that, when women have greater returns for their labour inputs and control over the products of that labour, they allocate their labour and energy to these practices as a strategic choice in sustaining their livelihoods and managing their farms. The choice to sustain their soils is effectively wrapped up in these choices.

Part V argues that in order to understand the dynamics of soil management and farming, and the priority that local farmers give to them at the local level, it is important to expand the scope of the analysis. Both Chapters Seven and Eight continue to ground their central arguments in the words and photographs of local women and men.

Chapter Seven focuses on the farmers' changing priorities and, more specifically, on the intense drive towards earning cash to make ends meet. It contextualizes this trend towards income generation by reviewing broader political and economic policies, including World Bank-IMF mandated structural adjustment programs and the impact of the Kenyan government's inequitable distribution of development resources to areas such as Maragoli. Under these conditions, the earning power of women and men has generally decreased, while their cost of living has increased. To sustain their livelihoods, women have taken on increased labour burdens, roles, and responsibilities, including those that were 'traditionally' considered to belong to men. To do this, women diversify their options by engaging in income-generating activities in order to provide cash to meet their everyday needs in an increasingly monetarized environment. This chapter therefore explores multiple and diverse trading and waged labour activities of women and men, and the negotiations and struggles over the proceeds of that labour. It also investigates how people are turning to old ways of surviving, such as barter and exchange, to make their living in an increasingly precarious economic environment.

Chapter Eight continues to expand the scope of the study of soil management and farming by turning attention to the way farmers simultaneously engage in diverse social institutions as important coping strategies and as channels of access to resources for soil management, farming, and broader livelihood needs. This chapter argues that socially sanctioned social institutions, such as kinship relations, social organizations and informal social networks, act as important coping strategies and channels for accessing resources. It also argues that 'hidden' social institutions, such as non-sanctioned relationships including extramarital affairs and sex work — subjects that are rarely examined in the context of natural resource management — are also options for gaining access to resources for farming, soil management, and other livelihood needs in extremely tough situations.

Chapter Nine concludes that local level analysis that focuses on everyday struggles allows for an understanding of how broader 'development' processes and policies are lived and experienced in everyday life. This chapter makes policy and research recommendations for the future. Women's and men's experiences, stories, and accounts can be used as points of departure for other context-specific soil management case studies and 'development' initiatives. They add another dimension to our understanding of the types of priorities, constraints and opportunities that women and men face in their everyday lives in the context of ever-changing, yet inequitable, global power relations, as well as local gender relations embedded in patriarchal ideology.

Gender-based Research Methodology

Chapter Two

Books written by anthropologists, including the present one, are 'always already' ... suspicious. And so they should be, necessarily and immediately; for they are not evoking eternal truth, but localized, situated, partial, special, little, ephemeral realities, which would lose their entire content if deprived of the contexts from which they emerge. If, as usually the case, anthropologists 'speak' through ethnography, all too often they mask the conditions of emergence of their text for the sake of a wishful and fallacious coherence. (Dumont 1992, p. 2)

Placing the complex experiences of women and men at the centre of analysis requires reconceptualizing soils and agricultural issues as gender issues. It entails recognizing that local people are not passive, powerless, unknowledgeable, gender-neutral objects, but actors who can institute change, create and perpetuate knowledge, and play a hand in shaping and transforming the social and physical worlds around them — sometimes in ways 'development' practitioners don't anticipate or even like. Most importantly, it requires an appropriate cross-cultural methodology[13] that *operationalizes* alternative theoretical approaches into gender-sensitive practice, and recognizes research as a dynamic and social encounter, complete with dilemmas, subjective interpretations, multiple meanings and human agency. Within this study, these objectives were achieved primarily through ethnographic accounts that provided a rich medium for exploring the dynamics of local soil management and farming, and investigating the complexity of local women's and men's everyday lives.

An awareness of the attitudes, opinions, priorities, and knowledge of local actors is central to understanding the impacts of broader political-economic and historical processes on local people and their environments. It is through the "elucidation of actors' interpretations and strategies, and how these interlock through processes of negotiation and accommodation" (Long 1992, p. 5) — along with a conscientious commitment to *listening* to the participants themselves and taking seriously what they have to say (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 36) — that perspectives which emphasize people's realities can be achieved. Such perspectives recognize the multiple realities and shifting identities of various actors, including the researcher herself. This entails viewing research and 'development' projects as subjects in themselves — not just as ethnographies *in* 'development', but as ethnographies *of* 'development' (Ferguson 1994; Pottier 1993).

[13] *For the purposes of this study, "methodology" is "a theory and analysis about the kind of methods and general research approach most appropriate for a given body of theory ... Methodological debates may centre around theoretical issues, such as the appropriate concepts to analyze 'the state' and the 'construction of gender relations,' or linking theory with method by challenging the research procedures adopted in empirical investigations" (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 32).*

This chapter highlights the manner in which alternative theoretical conceptualizations were incorporated into my research design. In order to make transparent the manner in which the data and the evidence were obtained and interpreted, this chapter recounts how the research was lived and experienced. It begins by exploring the central themes of cross-cultural gender research, drawing on recent literature within critical feminist, anthropological, and participatory approaches to 'development' that are relevant to this study. The second section recounts the research journey as a series of processes, making transparent the manner and context in which the data were collected. The final section explores various methodological insights, issues, effects, and dilemmas encountered from different vantage points, emphasizing the research as a dynamic political process involving the active collaboration of Logoli women and men.

An appropriate cross-cultural research methodology

In developing an appropriate methodology for exploring the gendered micropolitics of struggles over resources that affect soil management, farming, and livelihood concerns, this research shared a common concern with critical feminist, anthropological, and participatory approaches to 'development'. This concern centred on methods that are sensitive, respectful, and accountable within research relationships, and which call for action research with the transformative potential for improving the lives of participants in a positive and locally determined manner (Martin 1995; Wolf 1995; Kirkby and McKenna 1989). These concerns challenge conventional approaches of 'development' and research that perpetuate an ahistorical, apolitical, and gender-neutral understanding of local realities. In particular, three methodological issues were central to the approach taken in this study: a rejection of generalizations inherent in conventional approaches to soil management and agriculture; an emphasis on difference and the role of human subjectivity in knowledge creation and lived experience; and an active recognition and addressing of power imbalances within research relationships and, in particular, in the writing process.

Researching and writing against generalizations

In seeking technical standardized solutions to the 'technical problem' of soil degradation, conventional soil management and agricultural approaches sometimes ignore the social aspects of the problem, which seem superfluous and unmanageable. In doing so, they miss the complexities and the deeper sociological, political, and gendered realities of local people and spaces. In cases where social aspects are considered, people's everyday lives are stripped of their rich detail, diversity, and complexity, and reduced to generalizations and static, interchangeable 'facts' (Abu-Lughod 1993, pp. 7–8). What emerges in these approaches is a professional and authoritative discourse of detachment and objectivity that produces a homogenized, coherent, self-contained, and different 'other' (Abu-Lughod 1993, pp. 7–8). This results in a language of power in which researchers "seem to stand apart from and outside of what they are describing" (Abu-Lughod 1993, p. 8). Generalizations contribute to a sense of timelessness and homogenization that flattens differences among people and variability across different contexts, smoothing over contradictions, conflicts, changing motivations and historical circumstances (Abu-Lughod 1993, p. 9). This lack of internal differentiation perpetuates the notion of groups of people as discrete, fixed, and bounded entities, and contributes to the creation of a static vision of 'cultures' (Abu-Lughod 1993, pp. 7–8).

Recognizing and incorporating the agency of participants into research design is a way of working against generalizations. It acknowledges the voices of people and recognizes them as differentiated agents who live and experience a host of multiple and simultaneous issues in their everyday lives. Abu-Lughod argues that:

> *[highlighting] the dailiness, by breaking coherence and introducing time, trains our gaze on flux and contradiction; and the particulars suggest that others live as we perceive ourselves living — not as automations programmed according to 'cultural' rules or acting out social rules, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter. It is hard for the language of generalization to convey these sorts of experiences and activities. (1993, p. 27)*

Incorporating agency entails recognizing the individual capacity of people to process social experience and to actively devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion (Long 1992, p. 22). It recognizes that people are social actors who are knowledgeable and are capable of solving problems, negotiating and manipulating social relations, monitoring and observing themselves and others, strategizing, resisting, innovating, and experimenting. Hence, the dimension of power is inseparable from the notion of agency, and highlights the fact that individuals can engage in projects on their own terms. Participants create and re-create structures within research relationships; and, through the pursuit of their own interests and the assertion of their own agency, they influence and interpret its externally determined structure and objectives (Hovorka 1997 p. 39; Huntington 1998, p. 104).

Qualitative methods offer an effective way to challenge generalizations and understand complex gendered realities, as Chambers argues:

> *The recognition of multiple realities and identities of real life means carefully and sensitively collecting qualitative data which seeks to differentiate rather than to homogenize, to focus on diversity rather than universality, on variability rather than averages. (1992, p. 14)*

Such methods focus on people's lived realities by emphasizing their perceptions and experiences, thereby reducing the risk of making false assumptions about life. By embracing complexity and context-specificity, and acknowledging change over time, such methods move away from the tendency to construct inanimate 'facts.' Qualitative methods allow for gendered accounts of everyday life, and enable the emergence of a range of multiple and simultaneous issues, experienced by local actors, that affect soil management and farming.

Personal narratives, in particular, are useful in unsettling generalizations, subverting the process of "othering" (Abu Lughod 1993, p. 13), and raising questions about how people live and experience soil management and farming when viewed through a gendered lens, and what meaning they give to those experiences. Personal narratives challenge essentializing views that are often detached from the complex and multiple realities of participants (Mies 1992, p. 63; Kirkby and McKenna 1989, p. 164). They give local women and men opportunities and spaces to articulate their own knowledge, views, and experiences:

> *In telling their stories the women [and men] reproduce their own images of themselves and their relations with others. This is a type of data often ignored in conventional histories as too individual, too specific and atypical. But it is this very specificity and concreteness which gives it strength as a challenge to long-standing generalizations ... [and] the possibility to examine interactions of class and gender in specific historical situations. (Ngaiza and Koda 1991, cited in Mbilinyi 1992, p. 66)*

Women's and men's subjective accounts have integrity in their own right because they are located within their real and gendered life-worlds (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 65). They provide an opportunity for exploring realities that have been marginalized in the past, and challenge generalizing constructions of realities found in conventional approaches, thereby working against narrative closure and the silencing of multiple voices (Moore and Vaughan 1994, p. xxiv).

Dealing with subjectivity and the politics of difference

The concept of difference was central to this research question and methodology, which counters the problematic assumption of conventional approaches to soil management and agriculture that the farmer is an undifferentiated and gender-neutral actor. Focusing on difference highlights the fact that people are differentiated by gender, age, life-cycle positioning, race, ethnicity, class, marital status, and other axes of difference (Parpart 1995; Mbilinyi 1992). These differences are given meaning in various sociocultural contexts and play a significant role in people's struggles over and differential access to resources, and in the division of labour. They also influence the manner in which people experience constraints and opportunities in their everyday lives. Rather than being uni-dimensional or having fixed positionalities, women and men have multiple identities and realities "over time, and at any time, often conflicting with each other" (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 45). These identities are experienced differently, and are filtered, interpreted, and given meaning by subjective realities.

If knowledge is central to understanding local realities, then what is the role of 'outsiders' in theorizing, analyzing, and researching issues that they have not themselves experienced and lived? Haraway suggests:

> *There is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (or subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class. (1988, p. 586)*

This argument reinforces the feminist poststructuralist notion of multiple identities and the rejection of any one truth. All observations, perceptions, and knowledge vary according to the positionality of the knower, and are subjective in that they are shaped by individual experiences within and across different social and cultural settings, and therefore can only be partial (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 54; Maguire 1987, p. 19). Research and knowledge are contested concepts and sites of struggle. Hence, no account is free of bias or distortion, and there exists no one authoritative body of knowledge (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 54). There exists no unitary speaker about, for, and as 'women,' and there exists no true 'insider' — making the notion of 'like' studying 'like' (the possibility of total identification between the researcher and the researched) a paradox (Mies 1991, p. 61). Women do not necessarily share common experiences by virtue of their gender. Their individual experiences differ considerably in relation to class, age, education, race, sexual orientation, and mobility — a concept that

extends to women studying and researching gender issues in their own societies (Mbilinyi 1992; Cotterill 1992; Mohanty 1991a). Taking this argument one step further, there exists no rigid understanding of an 'outsider.' We assimilate cross-cultural experiences into our own understandings of the world's realities and meanings, and form alliances and political projects as we become closer to and more familiar with participants over time — and vice versa. Hence, rather than focus on an 'insider–outsider' binary, it is more useful to highlight factors such as the duration of contact, the quality of research relations, and the existence of multiple subjectivities (Wolf 1995, p. 17).

Shifting multiple identities: to be or not to be a 'Southerner'?

Mbilinyi argues: "our identities are not given or reducible to our origins, skin colour, or material locations. Identities or positions are the product of struggle and they represent an achieved, not an ascribed trait" (1992, p. 35). The category, 'insider–outsider,' is a constructed one: my own multiple and shifting identities highlighted some of the dilemmas discussed above and produced an interesting situation. My identity simultaneously straddled various axes of difference, including gender (woman), age (young), and ethnicity ('outsider'/*mzungu* and 'insider'/*Asian*),[14] as well as the socially and professionally ascribed positions of engineer-social scientist, researcher-development agent-academic and student-intern. All these differing dimensions of my positionality interacted, opposed, and contradicted each other, and shifted and changed over time in differing circumstances. They affected the way I represented myself and my work, and the meanings I accorded to them. They also influenced the way people perceived me.

I found myself silencing some aspects of my identity in certain interactions and encounters, while emphasizing others — a conscious, and sometimes subconscious, strategy in the politics of representation. For example, during encounters with Kenyan participants, I presented myself as a Canadian '*mzungu*,' and silenced my '*Asian*' identity, and for the most part participants also viewed me as a '*mzungu*.' Representing myself in this way helped to counter feelings of vulnerability associated with being an '*Asian*' in a context in which racial tensions were both constructed and exacerbated within national political discourse (especially during the Kenyan national elections that took place halfway through my research). On the other hand, in encounters with '*Asian*' merchants, I found myself silencing my '*mzungu*' identity and emphasizing my '*Asian*' background in order to form ties with these communities and to decrease feelings of vulnerability.

These seemingly contradictory identities as both an 'outsider' and an 'insider' caused certain conceptual and practical dilemmas. To some extent, I considered myself an 'outsider.' Being educated and socialized in the 'North' placed me in a more powerful position in terms of my status as a researcher. On the other hand, as someone who had '*Asian*' parents and was born, educated and partly socialized in the 'South,' I considered myself, to some extent, an 'insider.' I also realized, however, that having a shared sense of being from the 'South' was not enough to accord me this status. Various axes of difference, power, and positioning in the global system separated my realities from those of the research participants and my Kenyan colleagues.

[14] *In Kenya, being "Asian" refers to being Indian (as there are many people living in Kenya who came from India in order to construct the railway line in East Africa during the colonial period, and settled in the country after independence).*

The topics we study and the methods we employ are inextricably bound up with the politics of practice (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) and informed by our own subjectivities. My professional status as an engineer was moderated by a need to explore and challenge a belief in 'rationality' and the linear and static conceptualizations of 'development.' This not only affected the research and its objectives, but made the research a political and personal process for change. However, despite being an intern and student, my affiliations with international institutions put me in a more powerful position than many of the research participants (who were often years older and wiser than me), and Kenyan colleagues who had similar institutional and funding affiliations.[15] In encounters with research participants, I found myself emphasizing my academic student status and de-emphasizing my professional and institutional status. I had hoped that this would help to prevent my perceived status from influencing their reasons for participating or their responses. I also wanted to avoid raising expectations of access to material and economic resources (which they often anticipated in encounters with 'development' agents). On the other hand, in interviewing government officials and soils experts, I found myself emphasizing my institutional affiliations to increase my chances of gaining access to information and knowledge about local issues and constraints.

Relations of power in moving from 'field' to 'home'

The meaning and significance of these shifting and multiple identities can be better understood within a critical discussion of 'the field.' By moving away from conceptualizations of the "field" as notions of 'here' and 'elsewhere', and as mere feature of geography, it is possible to consider research sites as "sites constructed in fields of unequal power relations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 35). The conventional idea of going to 'the field' is often equated with entering another world with its own discrete and bounded culture, and 'going home' is equated to leaving that other world and re-entering academia (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 35), or the centres of research and 'development.'

Nonetheless, my own fieldwork was marked by a profound sense of separation between places. I felt I was moving between chasms of differences, and I informally referred to this as "planet hopping." "Planet hopping" also referred to the movement from 'the field' (a rural setting) to urban cities (Kisumu, Nairobi) and research stations (Maseno), as well as from the 'field' (Mbale) to 'home' (Ottawa). These feelings were complicated by my own shifting positionality, including shifting feelings of power and powerlessness, in relation to place. In this regard, when I was in Nairobi and Maseno, I was considered an expatriate; when in Mbale, a 'mzungu'; and when in Kisumu, an 'Asian.' In addition, being back 'home' initially exacerbated feelings of distance, because I felt far-removed from the everyday lived realities of the farmers with whom I was working. Despite this initial feeling of distance, a reflexive and critical engagement of the research process provided a means of bridging the space between the everyday lived realities of participants and my "planet-hopping," and of conceptualizing these interfaces as political and social spaces meditated by discourses of knowledge and power.

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[15] *TSBF student-researcher colleagues working in Western Kenya had a fraction of the resources and power to which I had access, despite somewhat similar institutional and funding affiliations with TSBF and IDRC. Nonetheless, these researchers were accorded "development agent" status by participants because of their education, class and institutional affiliations, and linkages.*

Highlighting reflexivity in research relationships

While positivist research encourages the researcher to remain 'outside' the world studied, so as not to lose 'objectivity' and 'bias' the findings (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 53), feminist post-structuralist and critical anthropological approaches emphasize a reflexive approach which highlights the fact that the researcher is integral to the process, and therefore both actor and subject in the study and analysis. The goal is not rampant self-reflexivity as an end in itself, which might be deemed a form of "self-absorbed navel gazing" (Harding 1987, p. 9, cited in Lal 1996, p. 207). Rather, the goal of self-reflexivity is to make the research process transparent, and to counter the notion of 'neutral' research and knowledge production (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 59).

Although research is charged with issues of power, it often displays:

> *contradictory, difficult, and irreconcilable positions for the researcher. Indeed, the power dimension is threaded throughout the fieldwork and post-fieldwork process and has created a major identity crisis for many feminist researchers. (Wolf 1995, p. 1)*

The research encounter is one in which actors with varying positionalities interact and create spaces for negotiation, accommodation, exchange, and transformation (Long 1992, p. 6). Although participants play an active role in the research process, there is a marked power imbalance: they lack control over many aspects of the research itself and the production of knowledge that results from it (Cotterill 1992, p. 604). Unless the research is designed accordingly, participants have no control over how it is written, how it is interpreted, and how it represents their realities. It is the researcher who, in the end, walks away and controls the final interpretation of the data, no matter what form it takes.

Texts are not written in a vacuum. Writing and recounting is itself an activity marked by the positionality (the subjective experiences and personal politics) of the researcher (Mohanty 1991a, p. 33). Hence, it is not just a matter of 'unbiased reporting' of the research findings. The researcher's conception of the 'problem,' choice of methodology, epistemologies, and interpretation of the data invariably colour the research findings, as well as influencing events and the construction of the ethnographic text. To capture this process, I found that continual reflection on the research process was facilitated by the use of a personal journal.[16]

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[16] *A personal journal is an important tool in terms of reflexive research and writing. It provided a means of reflecting on the fieldwork experiences and processes both as they unfolded and in the post-fieldwork stage. In this way, it provided a means of reflecting upon and reviewing the decision-making processes, dilemmas, perceptions, feelings of vulnerability, and reactions to experiences and events that took place in the field. I was able to establish a space, besides the field notes, in which to articulate my own thoughts and in which to record observations and notes from interviews. In the post-fieldwork stage, when the researcher is again 'home' and far from the field 'site,' poring over the journal provides a window to the thought processes that were going on during the field-work stage. It provides an avenue for reflecting on the process of research and the way decisions and choices were made about methods, issues, and dilemmas. In this manner, I also recorded feelings of vulnerability when they arose.*

The research journey

Making the research transparent allows others to understand how the results were obtained, and makes evident power relations, methodological problems, and ethical issues. By writing this section as description of a *research journey* involving diverse social agents, I move beyond the notion of fieldwork as a top–down and unilateral encounter, and present it as a series of mutual and dialogical encounters (DeVries 1992), which involved continuous negotiation between the researcher and the researched. This approach turns a critical eye on conventional conceptualizations of 'the field' as a taken-for-granted space "where an 'other' culture or society lies waiting to be observed or written" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 2).

Although I describe the research journey in terms of the methods used, it consisted of a series of interrelated processes and simultaneous methods with multiple linkages from one process to the other. This made the research journey a complex, interdependent, and ever-changing experience. By recounting the research journey in this way, the intention is to highlight the methods used, and the problems and issues encountered, thereby reflecting on the research findings in an honest, transparent, and in an non-reductionist, and non-positivistic manner.

Pre-fieldwork planning

Pre-fieldwork planning involved formulating the research proposal and establishing institutional links, and was an intense process that began months before the fieldwork. It played an important role in shaping the research and methods. While the research proposal is rarely included in writings about research processes, it is an integral part of the research, setting its parameters, and determining its possibilities. My main concerns focused on establishing institutional affiliation, acquiring funding, ensuring a balance between my own objectives and institutional interests, and anticipating the interest of participants to an external and pre-determined subject of study.

My institutional affiliations with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme (TSBF-UNESCO) played a significant role in defining the research agenda. They also made a profound difference in reducing the level of anxiety and vulnerability associated with cross-cultural research. My research was partly incorporated into an IDRC internship with the People, Land and Water Project Initiative, and the Gender and Sustainable Development Unit. This was based on a mutual interest in exploring local perspectives on gender and soil management issues through a case study that could draw out lessons and entry points for other context-specific research initiatives. I was seconded to TSBF in Kenya, given their interest in supporting gender research and having this work contribute to their ongoing work in Western Kenya. Both these affiliations provided me with an open and constructive space for exploring gender and soils management issues, as well as valuable institutional and logistical support, and many intellectual discussions on the program of work and methodology.

Establishing the research context

Upon arriving in Kenya, I immediately began the process of site selection, which evolved in successive iterations toward a geographic focus. Western Kenya became an obvious location because of TSBF's sustained and long-term research presence in the area. TSBF had formed close associations with various communities, farmers, research assistants (RAs), and local organizations, and with the Maseno Research Station operated by the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) and the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) (which provided me with additional logistical and administrative support and contacts with other researchers).

I became interested in working in Maragoli because a TSBF colleague and researcher considered it a "hotbed" for gender relations. I chose to live and work in Mbale, the central town of Maragoli, because of the advantages of establishing in-depth research relationships by living in the community (Sollis and Moser 1991). Mbale was also a convenient location for the research assistants who lived nearby, and it decreased the need to commute on local *matatus*.[17] I chose the villages of Luduguyiu, Chambiti, Luyaduyia, Kegoye, and Viyalo as research sites, based on their close proximity to Mbale, and because they coincided with the location of the women's groups participating in the research.

As I was unfamiliar with Maragoli language, I required not only an interpreter, but also RAs who could independently transcribe and translate into English tape-recorded interviews. TSBF's longtime presence in the area played a key role in selecting the research team. Through TSBF, Wycliffe (Cliff) Ngoda became my principal field assistant and cultural guide. He assisted me in selecting the rest of the research team. Cliff had extensive research experience and shared invaluable local contacts from his social networks. His extensive knowledge of Maragoli history and culture, coupled with his excellent interpersonal skills, put to rest my misgivings that his gender could adversely affect research relations with women participants. Through Cliff's assistance, Patricia Lugalia became the primary transcriber-interpreter. Leah Mukaya joined the team as my Kiswahili tutor, but later became involved in transcribing and interpreting, along with Janet Ojango and Nicholas Ndolo.[18] In the post-fieldwork stage, when I returned to Maragoli after two-and-a-half years, Leah, Patricia, Janet, along with Eunitor Ngoda, Benson Chunguli, Joan Adenya and Knight Olesia, assisted me with dissemination and feedback sessions.

The fieldwork research

The fieldwork took place over a six-month period beginning in mid-October 1997. It was a dynamic and evolving process, and encompassed various qualitative methods, which were used simultaneously. Sometimes, the same method was used more than once at different stages of the fieldwork, but with different intents and purposes. Wherever possible, the research findings were triangulated against TSBF's research findings and secondary

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[17] *A matatu is a popular, yet precarious, mode of Kenyan public transportation consisting of a minivan. Many of these vans are adaptations of what was once a tourist vehicle used for Safaris in Kenya. I was often told that Kenya had the second-largest death rate from road accidents in the world, and, after several hair-raising experiences with matatus, I fully understood what this meant.*

[18] *All RAs were asked to sign contracts and were employed according to TSBF employment standards. They were offered stipends and bonuses established by TSBF, and were provided with reference letters, which reflected their skills, abilities, and contributions to the research.*

sources of literature in order to corroborate or challenge certain conceptualizations of soil management and farming. The methods used in the research can be grouped into three categories: (i) group methods; (ii) individual methods; and, (iii) methods of disseminating and sharing results. This section begins by illustrating chronologically the use of different methods during different phases of the research (Table 2.1). The discussion that follows describes the methods and the respective issues and dilemmas that came up in their implementation.

Table 2.1 The Fieldwork Process: Phases and Methods.

	Phase (Week Numbers)					
Method	**I (1-2)**	**II (3-8)**	**III (9-15)**	**IV (16-22)**	**V (23)**	**VI (25-28)**
Individual Methods						
Site selection	✓					
Interviews with farmers			✓	✓	✓	
Interviews with officials	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Participant observation			✓		✓	
Personal narratives				✓	✓	
Photo appraisals			✓	✓		
Group Methods						
Group selection	✓					
Group interviews		✓				
Disseminating and Sharing Results						
Group feedback sessions						✓
Photo exhibition					✓	

(i) Methods of collaboration with women's groups

Membership in local women's groups is an important channel for accessing resources and a crucial coping strategy for women (as discussed in Chapter Seven). Women's groups were important to my research in terms of learning about group dynamics, problems, and activities, and about collective understandings of gender, soil management, and farming. Two issues I encountered centred around the selection of women's groups and the group interviews.

Selection of women's groups

Nine women's groups, which varied by class, average age, size, group activities, and raison d'être, collaborated in the research.[19] I engaged in selection methods that ranged from random to purposive. The selection unfolded in a number of ways. Initially, I was introduced to four women's groups through TSBF researchers, but chose to restrict my involvement to one of these groups because of logistical and transportation constraints, and cross-cultural complexities associated with working with non-Logoli participants. Two other groups were then included in the study through Cliff's social networks. As word about my research spread, several groups approached me in the field and expressed their desire to be included. I selected the first one that approached me in this manner, before realizing that such random selection could escalate out of control and lead to the inclusion of a large number of groups. Consequently, I carried out purposive sampling involving a systematic analysis of records of women's groups kept by the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in Vihiga Town. In this way, I selected five additional groups based on their proximity to Mbale (they were clustered around the villages of Chambiti and Viyalo, which also provided opportunities for observing inter-group interaction within the same villages and communities), and their objectives (as stated in their registration forms), which indicated their involvement in agricultural activities. Interestingly, soil management was never indicated as a group objective.

One challenge I faced in selecting the groups was the groups' conviction that the research was a 'development' initiative, complete with monetary and material resources. This idea persisted despite my consistent efforts to dispel this myth. As a consequence of this misunderstanding, various women's groups continued to approach the RAs and myself throughout the research period, asking to be included. In some cases, they accused Cliff of manipulating the selection process, believing that he was somehow preventing them from benefiting from the 'development' resources which they believed were sure to follow.

Group interviews

Group interviews were held in churches or a group member's home, and normally began and ended with prayers, music, singing, and dancing. After rearranging the seating in a non-hierarchical manner,[20] I began the interviews by introducing myself and the RAs, and explaining the objectives, the background, and the role of the women's group in the research. Every group member was encouraged to introduce herself and to share individual details such as year of birth, marital status, and types of crops grown. This information was later useful for individual participant selection. The remainder of the interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding the group's activities, its reasons for forming, and the constraints and opportunities they faced. While I encouraged the participation of all members of the group, hierarchies within the groups manifested themselves through the domination of members who seemed to be 'leaders,' elders, or outspoken individuals.

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[19] *Both the restriction in time and resources, and my commitment to more in-depth and intensive methods involving fewer participants, prompted me to limit the number of groups participating in the research.*

[20] *Group members often arranged a 'head table' for us because they anticipated that we would 'teach' them about soil management and farming, as they had experienced in the past with government officials. In these cases, I explained that I was interested in learning from them rather than 'preaching' to them, and Cliff and I rearranged the seating in a circle to 'diffuse' this sense of hierarchy.*

(ii) Methods involving collaboration with individuals

Since the aim of the study was to understand what soils issues meant for differently positioned women and men in their everyday lives, the bulk of the methods used in my research focused on individuals. These methods included: individual participant selection, survey data collection, photo appraisals, participant observation, open-ended and semi-structured individual interviews and personal narratives by farmers, and interviews with officials and scientists.

Individual participant selection

The following dilemma arose in the selection of individual participants: while I recognized that exerting control over the sampling process would ensure a fuller and more diverse range of views and a more heterogeneous 'sample' (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 61), I also recognized that this approach was non-participatory. I resolved this tension by recognizing that giving control to the women's groups would most likely entail giving control of the participant selection process to the more powerful and vocal members of the groups. By focusing on women whom I thought were the most 'vulnerable' in terms of class, marital status, age, and life-cycle positioning, and listening to their discourse pertaining to access to resources, I engaged in purposive and stratified sampling using individual information gained from group interviews. However, labelling all Logoli farmers as 'marginalized,' I placed the concept of 'marginalization' under a critical lens (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, p. 36). I did so by including a wide range of participants with varied and multiple positionalities, reflecting different axes of difference, including participants whom I viewed as 'vulnerable' and those whom I viewed as 'powerful.'[21] This proved to be useful approach, especially when subsequent research indicated discrepancies in participants' discourses around 'vulnerability'. Tables 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 below outline the different positionalities of the participants selected according to marital status, age, and income. While most participants were selected through the group interview process (making group membership an additional axis of difference), seven participants were selected through other means. They tended to be spouses of participants, individuals introduced to me or encountered in the field, or life historians introduced to me by Cliff.[22]

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[21] *However, selecting individuals on the basis of their positionalities meant that other pertinent factors were missed, such as geographical location within the village. In one instance I selected six individuals (mostly young women as the group had a very young average age), not realizing that all six resided near each other and were neighbours. In fact, I ended up selecting three women in the same household (two sisters and a sister-in-law, married to the brother), and three of their neighbours. All the participants had different last names, and therefore I did not realize their close proximity to each other. As the research unfolded, it became apparent that other members of the group were accusing the participants of benefiting from favouritism and said that perhaps they had made some sort of "deal" with me.*

[22] *The purposive sampling meant that I deliberately selected certain people, in certain cases, selecting individuals who were recognized as being "knowledgeable" in the community through their roles as life historians and who would, for example, be especially able to articulate changes in Maragoli over time. Also, it is important to realize that knowledge is not the same as education credentials — many older women in Maragoli have never had formal education, but have a vast amount of knowledge regarding Avalogoli culture, history, soil management, and agriculture.*

I chose to include seven men in the research in order to better reflect different gendered perspectives and better understand gender relations. Having a research sample that was 15 percent men, rather than 50 percent men was a conscious choice based on the reasoning that such representation better reflected the objectives of the research, which were to focus on farmers and on the 'most' vulnerable in terms of access resources critical to farming and soil management. In this case study the most 'vulnerable' individuals were predominantly women; however, in future research, I would increase the number of men to about a third (but not 50 percent). In many cases in sub-Saharan Africa, men are simply better positioned in terms of local gender power relations, and do not engage in farming and soil management to the extent that women do.

Table 2.2 Marital Status as Reported by Participants.

	Women	Men	Total
Married			
Married	9	3	12
Married with co-wife	3	1	4
Married with spouse out-migrated	3		3
Married with spouse out-migrated and with co-wife	3		3
Widowed			
Widowed	9	2	11
Widowed with co-wife	5		5
Single			
Single dependant (under the age of 30)	2	1	3
Single and unmarried (over the age of 30)	2		2
Divorced			
Divorced and currently single	1		1
Divorced and currently remarried	1		1
Divorced and currently remarried and with co-wife	1		1
Total	**39**	**7**	**46**

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group interviews, and surveys. N = 46 participants.

Table 2.3 Ages of Participants According to Year of Birth as Reported by Participants.

Age in Years	Women	Men	Total
<20 (Under twenty)	1		1
20-29	4		4
30-39	6	1	7
40-49	7		7
50-59	11	1	12
60-69	5	2	7
70-79	2	2	4
80+ (Above eighty)	3	1	4
Total	**39**	**7**	**46**

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group interviews, and surveys. N = 46 participants.

Table 2.4 Average Monthly Income as Reported by Participants.

Average Monthly Income	Women	Men	Total
None	2		2
50-99 Kenyan shillings	3		3
100-499 Kenyan shillings	9	1	10
500-999 Kenyan shillings	4	1	5
1000-4999 Kenyan shillings	8	2	10
5000+ Kenyan shillings	4	3	7
Undeclared	9		9
Total	**39**	**7**	**46**

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group interviews, and surveys. N = 46 participants.

Survey data

The collection of survey data allowed me to establish a personal profile of individual participants. In the initial stages of the interviews, I asked questions pertaining to personal information, such as year of birth, occupation, year of marriage, education, marital status, number and sex of children, income, religion, clan and sub-clan membership, place of birth, income-generating activities, types of crops grown, and livestock owned. While I realized that this method could not capture in detail the subjective realities of participants, the information was useful as an entry point for interviews, and, later, in bringing to surface discrepancies requiring further investigation that sometimes arose when I compared information collected from other methods. For example, a common discrepancy was household income and wealth. In many cases, participants indicated their discomfort by laughing at this question, demonstrating ambivalence, avoiding disclosure of a numerical value, or providing a value that did not coincide with information obtained from other methods.

Photo appraisals

Photo appraisals were used to capture visually, through farmers' eyes, their perceptions of soil management, farming, and gender issues. For the most part, this method was successful and brought to the surface additional insights and issues.[23] Twenty cameras were shared among 43 individuals (36 women and 7 men). Each camera contained 27 exposures.[24] Participants were encouraged to take photographs that reflected their realities — both good and bad — especially as they pertained to soil management, agriculture, and gender issues. In addition, each participant was allocated three photographs for their own personal use, and three to illustrate issues related to the women's group. Every participant was given copies of all their photographs for their own personal use.

Despite the fact that most farmers were unfamiliar with this technology, the majority of the photographs turned out well.[25] The use of disposable cameras required creative and accessible methods of explaining to participants the technical aspects of photography, as well as the photo appraisal method and its purpose. I prepared colour diagrams and a tutorial demonstrating how the camera worked, and an introduction to film and shot composition.

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[23] *This method also accorded an opportunity to follow up on discrepancies and ambiguous responses, especially in terms of the types of crops grown, number of livestock kept, plot size, farming practices, and existence of other individuals in the extended family or living on the family compound.*

[24] *Twenty cameras were shared among 43 participants: 17 cameras were shared by two participants each, and three cameras were shared by three people each. Although I had not planned for cameras to be shared by three people, during one group session in particular, three participants insisted that they be included in the individual interviews and the photo appraisal. They tended to be group officials and more vocal members of the group.*

[25] *Although most photographs turned out well, there were a few 'blunders.' These included incidents in which the camera was used the wrong way around (resulting in extreme and unprintable close-ups of a participant's face) and photographs taken of thumbs and fingers, 'cut-off' heads, and non-centred compositions. In future research, I would use more diagrams to illustrate the functioning and use of the cameras and the composition of photographs (as a few participants mentioned that certain photographs did not capture everything they had intended), and spend more time explaining the method of taking a photograph.*

Once the photographs were developed, I asked the participants to explain the content of the photographs and the meaning they held for them in terms of sustaining their soils, and gender and livelihood issues. The photo appraisals were an interactive process[26] that I eventually refined by including questions pertaining to individual photographs during in-depth interviews, at times using the photographs as an entry point for encouraging discussion on various issues. Carrying out the photo appraisals in conjunction with interviews provided an important avenue for understanding people's interpretations of their own photography. Rather than making assumptions about the objects and subjects of their photography on behalf of participants, I focused on women's and men's own words, perceptions, and observations.

Participant observation

I carried out participant observation with 11 women, often combining it with individual interviews. This method involved engaging and *participating* in everyday farming and household activities in order to understand the energy, labour, and constraints involved. It also proved useful in contextualizing soil management and farming issues in people's broader realities, and in terms of cross-checking findings from other individual methods. Participant observation included assisting farmers in activities such as picking tea and vegetables, bringing tea to the collection centre, weeding, tilling, collecting water, cutting napier grass and wood, feeding livestock, planting, watching children, tending market stalls and stores. It also included visiting relatives to collect school fees and going to the local district hospital for malaria treatment

Carrying out participant observation at various times during the fieldwork was also insightful. As the seasons and time of the year changed, so did the issues being faced, the activities being carried out, and the degree of vulnerability experienced. For example, the time of year influenced women's decisions to withdraw from farming to focus on paying school fees, dealing with health issues and intensifying income-generating activities. Although I was only able to glimpse momentarily the amount of energy, stamina, knowledge, expertise, and dedication that was required to carry out activities that often looked deceivingly simple, I cannot claim to have *lived* first-hand the participants' realities and struggles. I can however say that it enabled me to better understand the difficulties, complexities, and constraints that women and men encountered in their everyday lives to a greater extent than if I had simply observed from the 'sidelines' or engaged in rapid and non-participatory methods.

Open-ended and semi-structured individual interviews with farmers

Open-ended and semi-structured individual interviews provided rich ethnographic accounts. No two interviews were the same and their thrust depended on the participants themselves. The interviews ranged from encounters in which participants were open (which led to a more fluid approach such as a personal narrative) to interviews in which participants were closed and guarded (which led to more spasmodic question-and-answer sessions complete with gaps and silences). Most interviews took place under the shade of a tree or inside a participant's house and drew lots of attention from children, family members, and neighbours.

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[26] *I initially began the second individual interviews with the photo appraisals, but soon realized that when the excitement of seeing the photographs was over, participants seemed less interested in carrying out interviews. I then attempted to carry out the interview beforehand, but eventually combined the photo appraisals with individual interviews.*

I undertook multiple interviews for two reasons. First, I wanted to explore issues in depth, keeping in mind that a shift sometimes occurs from public to private accounts when levels of trust, confidence, and familiarity in the research relationship are established over time (Cotterill 1992, p. 596). My second reason was so that I would have an avenue to follow up on issues, discrepancies, and clarifications requiring explanation from previous interviews (Mbilinyi 1992, p. 61). On average, I carried out two interviews with almost every individual. In some cases, I carried out three to four interviews. The first round of interviews provided an opportunity to gain an initial understanding of the participants' positionalities and the types of issues, problems, and constraints they faced. This was also an opportunity to introduce the cameras and to ensure the informed consent of participants.[27] I started most interviews by asking the participants to talk about themselves, as this gave me an indication of their willingness to be open. At first, I used an interview guide that outlined the main questions, topics, and issues for discussion. Later, I learned to trust my instincts and allowed the participants, and their accounts, to determine the focus and direction of the interviews.

The second round of individual interviews allowed for additional space for the photo appraisals and more in-depth narratives, and was sometimes combined with participant observation. The third and fourth rounds of interviews were intended to provide me with a deeper understanding of issues and topics, and tended to be more narrative in nature, especially in cases where participants took the initiative.

A level of continued commitment was maintained towards participants throughout the study, based on the view that it is problematic to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' participants and to withdraw from 'bad' ones (Cotterill 1992, p. 602). Participants' expectations are inadvertently raised when research is carried out, and negative feelings are bound to be generated if involvement is withdrawn. Most interviews were interpreted in the field by Cliff and later independently interpreted and transcribed onto paper by Patricia, Leah, Janet, or Nicholas. This method also provided an avenue for checking for discrepancies in field interpretations. In the end, sixty 90-minute tapes were recorded and hundreds of pages were transcribed.

Personal narratives

Many participants, including women and men in their 80s and 90s who had clear memories of events in their lifetime and could provide first-hand, personalized accounts of change over time in Maragoli, provided personal narratives. These varied in length and level of

[27] *The informed consent forms were translated into both Maragoli and Kiswahili, and were read and explained to all participants involved in the research on the day of the first round of interviews. This process was undertaken individually and in groups. The informed consent form itself included a description of the research and its objectives, the methods used, the expected duration of the participant's involvement, and the manner in which the results would be used, debriefed, and disseminated. The forms outlined the informed consent procedure itself and the methods and procedures that would be used to ensure participants' rights pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity. The forms included the address and names of individuals at the IDRC and TSBF for participants to contact to follow up on the research or make a complaint. They also outlined the participant's right to refuse answering questions and withdraw from the research. The forms were jointly signed by the participants and by me. In cases where participants were unable to sign the form, informed consent was obtained orally, and through the written signature of a spouse, relative, or friend acting on the participant's behalf. A signed copy was left with each participant in the language of their choice.*

detail. This method provided rich and personalized accounts and perceptions of Maragoli history. It has also allowed me to "bring to life" people's complex struggles to sustain their soils, their farms, and their livelihoods over time.

In carrying out time-consuming methods such as collecting personal narratives and conducting individual interviews, I often felt guilty about the time the research methods were taking from the precious days of the farmers — time that they could have spent on household, farming, or off-farm income generating activities. Another dilemma emerged when farmers insisted on giving me small token gifts such as eggs, bananas, and other farm produce. At first, I did not accept these gifts but later I realized that I was offending participants. I compensated for these gifts by reciprocating with small gifts of salt, tea, sugar, soap, or maize

Interviews with officials and scientists

I undertook seventeen semi-structured and open-ended interviews with extension workers, soil scientists, 'development' agents, and government officials. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of gender and soil issues from an official and technical point of view. I carried out these interviews in offices and in the field. During the interviews I took notes rather than recording discussions, as most individuals spoke English, and because I felt that farmers, words were more central to the objectives of this study.

I brought to the field predetermined notions of what constituted a 'good' fieldworker: my primary goal was to establish in-depth research relationships with local participants (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, pp. 26–27). Although I interviewed field-workers, researchers, 'development' practitioners, and government officials, I remained steadfast to my goals of focusing the fieldwork on local farmers. In retrospect, a more flexible and collaborative approach may have led to more constructive and creative ways of bridging the gap between what I envisioned as the 'correct' way of carrying out fieldwork and what other research organizations working on the issues of soil management and agriculture were practicing (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, pp. 26–27). This might have led to a better and more subtle understanding of the rationales employed and used to justify the practices of 'development' organizations.

(iii) Methods for disseminating and sharing research findings during fieldwork

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I engaged in group feedback sessions and a photo exhibition, as a way of disseminating and sharing the research findings with participants.

Group feedback sessions

The group feedback sessions were the last venue in which information was exchanged between myself and the participants. The sessions were formulated based on the concept of intersubjectivity, which calls for the research to reflect the realities, constraints, and priorities of the participants. It is a dialectical relationship that allows the researcher to share and compare work and experiences with the subjects, who then add their own opinions and perceptions (Klein 1983, cited in Wolf 1996, p. 5). The main purpose of these interactive sessions was to elicit feedback, input, and insights from the participants on the research findings and the methods used, as well as suggestions for improving future initiatives, and comments on future research and policy direction.

I met with most groups individually. The group feedback sessions were well-attended, and began in a manner similar to the group interviews. I proceeded by explaining the purpose of the exercise and encouraged participants to share their perceptions and feelings regarding

the research. The dynamics of the sessions, the level of sincerity and openness, and the quantity and quality of the feedback varied from group to group. In some sessions, participants were open and provided valuable and constructive criticism, while in others, participants seemed reluctant to share critiques of the research. Nonetheless, the sessions were invaluable in showing what was often hidden from view in terms of group dynamics (as discussed later in this chapter), and in providing feedback about the effects of, and feelings regarding, the methods used, the research, and the research findings.

The photo exhibition

I considered various mechanisms and forums for addressing the power imbalance within the research encounter in order to give ownership of the research findings to the participants. Jefremovas suggested to me that a photo exhibition could give individuals and groups the opportunity to display their work to the public, the community, and other women's groups. The idea was received well by the women's groups. Participants especially expressed interest in making contacts with 'development' agents whom they hoped might visit the exhibition. The women's groups took charge of making their own displays with materials I provided.[28]

The photo exhibition took place on April 6, 1998 at a rented Salvation Army church hall. Each group was given a section of the hall that included a table, benches, and a back wall on which to display their posters and photographs. Participants showed a great deal of creativity and brought farm produce and livestock (including pigs, chickens, vegetables, seeds, fruits, and other crops), and samples of non-farm-related products, which were offered for sale. Some groups set up ad-hoc food stalls, selling bottled sodas, local sweets, and food dishes. The atmosphere was lively. Some groups had active choirs and gave demonstrations of their singing and dancing abilities. Researchers, officials (such as those from the Ministry of Culture and Social Services), extension workers, and other members of the community visited the exhibition. While attendance and participation from group members was excellent, participation from 'development' officials was less than anticipated and I sensed the women's disappointment in not having adequate exposure and opportunities for access to the potential resources that outsiders often brought. I felt I had let down the women's groups, and decided to ensure that this dimension was better planned for similar initiatives in the future.

The post-fieldwork process

The post-fieldwork process included the analysis and synthesis, and the writing and dissemination of the research findings.

Analysis and synthesis: distilling the research findings

The analysis and synthesis of the research findings was carried out in light of key secondary literature and TSBF's research findings. It was a time-consuming activity, given the amount of data collected (which included recorded tapes, transcripts, photographs, field notes, and journal entries). I reviewed and kept track of ethnographic data by taking notes along thematic lines and by formulating extensive computer spreadsheets as tools to keep track of topics discussed in each interview.

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[28] *Display-making sessions were organized beforehand and gave each group an opportunity to display photographs taken by its individual members (which were on loan from these members). The groups were given materials to make their colourful and creative displays.*

Writing and disseminating the research findings

Sharing a textual account of the research provides an opportunity for academics, researchers, government officials, 'development' agents, women's groups and the participants of the research to access current research on gender, farming, and soil management issues. My MA thesis, which represented the first written body of work to emerge from the research, is available at the NPSIA resource centre, the Carleton University library, the IDRC resource centre in Ottawa, and the IDRC and TSBF offices in Nairobi (Verma 1999). It was also shared with the research team in Maragoli.

By the time this book is published, the findings will be shared with the women's groups in an abbreviated and accessible newsletter and summary report, which will be translated and made available in Kiswahili and Maragoli. Summary reports will be disseminated to Kenyan government offices and Ministries, NGOs, international organizations, and other interested organizations working in Kenya. This book was adapted and rewritten from the thesis, and will be disseminated to various organizations working in Kenya and East Africa.

Oral and visual methods of dissemination have included a seminar presentation given to PLAW team members for their feedback and review. A formal presentation given more broadly to the IDRC is planned at the time of writing. In Kenya, the findings will be presented to TSBF and ICRAF, and will be shared in person with the women's groups in Maragoli through additional feedback sessions. This will give me a rare opportunity to share research findings after extensive analysis and synthesis, and will demonstrate a commitment to local participants.[29]

Reflections on research as a dynamic political process

Although I anticipated numerous methodological dilemmas in carrying out research in an honest, sensitive, and ethical manner, I recognized that the lived research experience could potentially confound, challenge, and scramble my neat, preconceptualized categories. As Cotterill suggests, some events, experiences, feelings, and effects are unpredictable at the research planning stage and only emerge as the fieldwork progresses and is lived and experienced (1992, p. 602). Reflecting critically on the research has allowed to me to view it as an inherently political and social process — an meeting of active enrolment and collaboration, and a dialogical rather than a unilateral process (de Vries 1992). An encounter in which various actors acted and lived out their agency in a host of strategic ways in addressing their interests and agendas and articulating their knowledge. When understood this way, researchers are not authoritative, neutral agents who stand detached from what they are describing; participants are not passive 'Third World' objects waiting to be 'discovered'; and research assistants are not invisible actors who carry out work unnoticed 'behind the scenes.' All actors are part and parcel of the process — they engage in the research, within which relationships of power and agendas for change play out, whether intended or not.

[29] *Jefremovas found that participants in Rwanda were surprised to encounter her again. They thought that this reflected a greater level of commitment on the part of researchers to follow up (Jefremovas 1998, personal communication).*

The unintended effects and dilemmas of research encounters

As Ferguson has shown, despite the best meanings and intentions, 'development' projects often have unintended effects (Ferguson 1994). I would argue that the same premise applies to research projects. Acknowledging the unintended effects of research encounters entails looking critically and reflexively at our own assumptions, knowledge and identities in relation to, and in light of, participants' own understandings, representations, and interests. The unintended effects and unexpected dilemmas that arose within this study revolved around issues of language and the introduction of a new technology.

Bridging the cross-cultural divide of language

The language divide, caused by the fact that I did not know Maragoli, gave rise to some unintended effects that were most pronounced during the interviews. These encounters highlighted cross-cultural differences and individual interpretations pertaining to language, including English itself. For example, participants referred to women who engaged in extramarital affairs as "roaming." Similarly, when participants mentioned their desire to gain access to "sugar," "tea," "soap," "clothes," and "soda," they were actuality talking about gaining access to money or material resources. Understanding subtleties in local and cultural interpretations of language was crucial in avoiding misinterpretations. This issue often came to light, both in the field and when analyzing discrepancies in interviews.

The majority of interviews were carried out in Maragoli and interpreted in the field by Cliff and, sometimes, Patricia. Interpreted interviews prolonged the process, but were nonetheless crucial in enabling a meaningful discussion in which follow-up and pertinent questions could be formulated on the spot. I supplemented interview transcripts with my own field notes, especially when the tape recorder was switched off. And as already discussed, I also kept a daily journal.

The introduction of technology in research

The introduction of a prized technology, the disposable cameras, brought about unintended effects that were initially hidden from view. The effects poignantly came to surface during group feedback sessions, when it became apparent that purposive selection of participants from the women's group had caused some degree of discussion and debate among and within groups, creating and exacerbating pre-existing tensions, alliances and factions within the group's political structures and hierarchies. Giving space to actively and conscientiously acknowledge these unintended effects enabled participants to articulate and share useful critiques and ideas for future participant selection. For instance, participants suggested that sharing the selection criteria with women's groups in advance might reduce group politics and friction in the future, especially when a limited, yet coveted technology is introduced. By giving the space and the time for the unintended effects of the research to surface, I was able to agree to a mechanism that redressed these tensions, namely, the distribution of group photographs to every group member who did not participate in the photo appraisals.

Several unexpected issues arose from the introduction of cameras. The first was the participants' initial feeling mistrust and uncertainty with regard to using an instrument that resembled a 'toy.' (These feelings were often transformed to self-congratulation and pride when the photographs were developed.) A second issue was the appropriation of cameras by non-participant men (husbands, brothers-in-law, grandsons, and sons), and women

(daughters-in-law and neighbours).[30] This issue became evident when participants, in reviewing photographs, seemed at a loss in explaining them. A third issue was reflected in the wide range of quality of photographs that were developed, as it became apparent that problems such as poor eyesight affected some participants' ability to compose photographs.[31]

A fourth concern was that participants took personal photographs of things unrelated to soil management. When explaining these photographs, participants claimed they were testing the cameras, or said that they were taking photographs for future posterity or to show people in Canada how they lived. They also added that they took these photographs in order to see for themselves how they, or certain things, looked. In certain cases, I believe participants simply wanted to reinforce, through photography, what they owned and emphasize their work contributions to the household and shamba. Participants also took numerous photographs of neighbours, relatives, group members, and friends, indicating the importance of social and kinship ties, and the social obligation and desire to share resources. Participants were highly creative in combining personal photographs with those allocated to soil management and farming issues — an activity that strategically and creatively increased the number of personal photographs agreed upon. For instance, photographs illustrated friends or relatives holding up a certain kind of weed or crop, or showed neighbours and friends carrying out farm activities.

Photographs illustrating issues other than soil management were highly significant, because they indicated the extent to which these other issues, such as access to water, health issues, school fees, and social relationships, were important to participants. They further demonstrated that the conventional definition of the 'problem' of soil management needs expanding, and that farmers deal with a multitude of other issues that often take precedence as higher priorities, but which are critically interrelated with soil management and farming.

Identity and the politics of representation

By distinguishing research as a political process, it is possible to recognize elements of power, knowledge, and identity as *negotiated* processes in the politics of representation. In other words, research is an encounter of knowledges and identities, located within relations of power that are constructed and set into place by discourses of 'development' (Vander Zaag 1998, p. 12) and differentially positioned individuals. Hence, agency, power, and the

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30 *I was concerned, in the pre-field work stage, that cameras might be appropriated by men in the household. As expected, this occurred in a few cases, but it was not as widespread or straightforward as I had anticipated. For instance, during personal interviews involving the photo appraisals, a participant was very vague and evasive in explaining the photographs. After a while, I started to suspect that she had not taken the pictures herself and that her son might have appropriated the camera. In other cases, participants admitted to the fact that they had not taken the pictures themselves. For example, grandsons, brothers-in-law, husbands, and neighbours appropriated cameras for their own personal use, or to engage in the appraisals themselves. Women also appropriated cameras, as in the case of one daughter-in-law.*

31 *A factor that affected the use of cameras was poor eyesight. I believe that many participants did not want to admit to this at the outset, for fear of being passed over for the photo appraisals. In some interview situations, participants needed assistance in determining the contents of the photographs, as they could not see what the picture was illustrating However the factor of poor eyesight, as it turned out, provided an important insight into soil management and farming practices, as Chapter Seven will discuss.*

construction and articulation of knowledge, manifest themselves in different ways for differently positioned actors, including the researcher, the RAs, and the participants. Highlighting agency and power in the production and reproduction of identities suggests that actors strategize and perpetuate their own representation. It also illustrates that power is experienced in multiple ways. This counters the prevailing notions of verticality of power in research relationships.

The vulnerability of the researcher: acknowledging subjectivity, countering notions of power verticality

Research is a fluid encounter characterized throughout by shifting power balances (Cotterill 1992, p. 593). Power is not simply concentrated in either the researcher or the 'researched,' or in their straightforward vertical interaction. It is, rather, a dynamic, multifaceted, and moving force that is exercised in all directions (Martin 1995, p. 89). Although it is influenced by structural factors and wider discourses of knowledge, it is also a negotiated process that is affected by personalities and ideologies, thereby creating spaces for domination and resistance (Martin 1995, p. 91). Although researchers have more power in terms of their positionality, there are times when the researcher is also vulnerable. This highlights the way that individuals can experience domination in one situation, while dominating in others (Martin 1995, p. 91).

As a researcher, I experienced vulnerability and feelings of powerlessness during interview situations in which participants withheld information and refused to answer questions during interviews and photo appraisals (Cotterill 1992, p. 599). Feelings of powerlessness also arose as a result of constant interruptions during interviews — interruptions involving flying chickens; sudden and threatening movements from cows; the boisterous noise of children; visiting friends, neighbours, and relatives; and, sometimes, the meandering through of drunken men. Some interview situations were bleak, as the economic situation of some participants was acute. The fact that they had no money for food or medicines for themselves and their families made them anxious, depressed, and unwell. For instance, when carrying out interviews in the presence of children suffering from malaria, I experienced feelings of helplessness and questioned the raison d'être of the research in light of these more immediate and pressing needs. Although I empathized with participants, I recognized that establishing friendships based on inequitable relations and power imbalance highlights a dilemma inherent in the practice of obtaining ethnographic accounts. As Cotterill points out, "close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear" (1992, p. 599). Nor did I consider it my role to be a counsellor because of ethical issues inherent in setting up interviews which encourage painful disclosures (1992, p. 598). This issue was highlighted during one interview in which a younger participant was visibly and openly upset while recounting her difficult personal circumstances. During this interview, I took the role of a sympathetic listener. While some feminists argue that the researcher can be only a sympathetic listener (Cotterill 1992), I would argue that by listening, empathizing, and writing the experiences of women and men as lived — by placing the participants' voices and experiences at the centre of research — it is possible to make visible what was invisible before. This is an important starting point in the political process for change, beyond sympathetic listening.

I also had other feelings of vulnerability, which arose as a result of participants' understanding and construction of 'development' identities. The participants, despite my best efforts to clear up the misunderstanding, viewed me as a 'development agent' outside the

norms of the community. When dealing with feelings of alienation caused by this construction, I found myself falling back on the 'comfort' of doing work and research. This restored my sense of control. Inadvertently, being perceived as a 'development agent' meant that the expectations of participants were raised. While I continuously emphasized my role as a student with little access to 'development' resources, I was nonetheless continuously asked for resources, advice, and money, as participants tended to regard me as being a 'wealthy and knowledgeable expert.'

The power of interpretation: making research assistants visible

One area of the research process that is mostly left invisible is the involvement of the research assistants (RAs) in the production of knowledge and in influencing the research findings through their own perceptions, experiences, and views. Although the RAs were key in setting the parameters of what was possible within the research, they also influenced the research in other ways. Their interpretations and their representations of identities in the fieldwork reflected their gender, age, class, experience, status, and education. For example, the RAs represented themselves to participants as being attached to a 'development' project, and participants ascribed meaning to this. In reviewing transcripts, it became apparent that, on several occasions, when participants felt 'stuck' while answering a question, they looked to the RAs to assist them in answering 'correctly.' This indicates not only the importance placed on getting the answer 'right,' but also the high status accorded to the RAs.

RAs' opinions, views, perceptions, and biases also affected their interpretations of participants' responses. Their interpretive acts varied from leaving information out, to asking leading questions and inserting personal views.[32] Undoubtedly, the effect was in part offset by the fact that RAs drew on their kinship ties and social networks to place their relationships with participants in the context of common 'acquaintanceship.' This increased the potential for a familiar atmosphere, helping participants to feel more at ease.

My relationship with the RAs influenced the research in the sense that we had different cross-cultural understandings of what constituted work and work relations. For example, my rigid Western sense of punctuality often conflicted with a more relaxed sense of Avalogoli time. In retrospect, I believe the ambitious research schedule adversely affected the quality of interpretations, especially when the RAs became tired and influenced participants to curtail their responses.

My methodological training had not prepared me to deal with issues related to managing a team of RAs in a cross-cultural context, either in terms of the issues mentioned above, or in terms of other issues such as the amount of time and energy required to build and enhance the RAs' capacity to apply specific qualitative methods. However, working with RAs highlighted the need to be sensitive to the cross-cultural implications of work, and to accord RAs the same sensitivity and ethical consideration as was given to the participants themselves.

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[32] *I believe that the positionality of RAs in terms of their gender impacted the types of meanings they ascribed to participants' responses or narration. For example, RAs sometimes toned down or left out responses that showed men in a bad light or ones that were sexist in nature. Further, they sometimes assisted men in answering questions to improve the 'intelligence' of the answer by 'spoon-feeding' or 'nudging' responses in a certain direction.*

Participants and the construction and interpretation of 'development' identities

One of the most profound and unexpected dilemmas I encountered throughout the research process was the difference between the way in which I perceived (and expected participants to perceive) 'development' knowledge and identities, and the often contradictory and changing ways in which participants actually perceived them. Vander Zaag's articulate account of this dilemma during his research in Haiti is pertinent here:

> *Local identities and knowledges were certainly not how I identified myself and understood my research intervention. I viewed my identity, particularly when I had my field notebook in my hands, as largely that of a researcher, an identity undoubtedly largely constructed within discourses of academia, the university and postdevelopmentalism. Yet this identity had little hold in rural Haitian's imagination, and local people largely interpreted or constructed my identity within the discourse of development. ... [L]ocal people certainly couldn't really understand my presence as not related to some potential development project. Thus the research process was largely interpreted and conducted within the dynamics of power relations established by the discourses of development. People's response to me was so strongly conditioned by these discourses that the research could not escape these relations. (1998, p. 10)*

The powerful discourse that pervades 'development' knowledge and identities in Haiti also holds in the imaginations of Avalogoli women and men in Western Kenya. Throughout the research, no matter how I presented and represented myself, it became evident that local people regarded all 'development' agents as conduits through which much-needed resources emanating from the outside were channeled. They had therefore learned to become agents within this system of 'development', manoeuvring, representing and positioning themselves as best they could (1998, p. 9; Sikana 1995, p. 3). Based on a long history of externally driven intervention in Kenya, women and men have learned to develop a pragmatic and strategic knowledge concerning 'development' and research projects. They have learned to exploit, divert, and comply with research project intentions according to their own short-term and long-term interests (Vander Zaag 1998, p. 9). Hence, the primary concern of participants was *how to access resources*, rather than *how to be involved* in the execution of research projects (Sikana 1995, p. 3).

On two occasions during the fieldwork, I arrived for interviews in a TSBF vehicle with bright red UN license plates. Despite my consistent efforts to define myself as a student-intern-researcher with limited power in mobilizing resources, arriving in this manner seemed to confirm to the participants what they had suspected all along — that, no matter how researchers or 'development' agents represent themselves, their identity is bound to be linked to much needed material and monetary resources. The UN symbolized resources associated with 'development,' and further verified assumptions about my position as a wealthy, educated, and well-connected 'development' agent. This affected the manner in which participants in this study area perceived and acted towards me afterwards.

Participants also illustrated their desire to be viewed as 'good' by engaging in strategic representations that attempted to obscure and hide aspects of their lives that might be viewed as 'bad.' This representation came to light during a set of group feedback sessions in which participants adhered to a collective strategy of refraining from giving critical

feedback — a conscious strategy to avoid displaying conflict, presenting criticisms, 'contradicting' me, and airing 'dirty laundry' about the internal dynamics and politics of the group. In effect, constructive criticisms were silenced and the sessions proceeded with a great deal of acquiescence and nodding heads. Although this was frustrating and disappointing, it indicated the extent to which it was important for participants to show they were 'good' groups, worthy of any future potential resources. It also indicated the extent to which they would try to hide from view the internal politics and conflicts inherent in the group. It was a strategy of self-representation that was tied to the powerful discourse of 'development' and its relation to access to resources.

The politics of representation went beyond discursive elements and varied according to individual positionalities and subjectivities. Symbolic representations, such as attire, tended to vary by class.[33] For example, one middle-income farmer consistently wore ripped clothing to interviews. Despite the fact that she was envied by her economically poorer neighbours, she strategically engaged in a politics of representation that put forward the idea that she was economically poor and disadvantaged, and in need of 'development.'

The politics of representation manifested themselves more outwardly in the type of language employed by participants for strategic purposes. They often represented themselves in changing, contradictory, inconsistent, and seemingly incongruent ways. In many instances, participants described themselves as being 'poor,' 'powerless,' 'suffering,' 'persevering,' 'unknowledgeable,' and 'illiterate.' These representations were often followed by outright petitions and appeals for money or material benefits. The discourse of being 'powerless' and 'backwards' resonated with hegemonic discourses of 'development' that construct the 'Third World' and Africa as 'less developed' (Ferguson 1994; Mudimbe 1991). However, in other cases, participants spoke of themselves as knowledgeable, empowered, resourceful, clever, and capable.

The politics of representation were more pronounced during my trip two-and-a-half years after the completion of the main fieldwork. As mentioned earlier, the feedback and dissemination sessions were even more marked by frequent and outright petitions for resources and money. At first, this took me by surprise; I was asking myself "what could have changed during two-and-a-half years to exacerbate the 'development' identities discussed above?" There are several explanations. Farmers are not used to having researchers return after fieldwork is completed. They therefore assume when a student has returned, that she has completed her studies and is in a better position in terms of material resources and contacts. My declaration that I was still a student, resulted in less petitions, but they never completely stopped. My returning to the community, raised the expectations. These rising expectations must be contextualized within broader changes in the political-economy, namely the continued erosion of earnings for most farmers, the continued increase in costs in almost all spheres of life, and worsening unemployment. All of this is taking place in a context of continued cut-backs in 'development' spending, and not surprisingly, increased inter-group conflicts over issues of money (further discussed in Chapter Eight). Another factor that created a pronounced sense of expectation was the fact that certain researchers operating in the area had carried out research with local farmers in exchange for money and resources. This has created greater expectations in regard to research projects and has

[33] *Economically wealthy participants tended to wear clothes or group uniforms tailored in 'modern' styles and fabrics, while economically poorer participants tended to wear 'traditional' clothing.*

led farmers to emphasize 'development' identities that perpetuate the idea of a "poor and preserving" farmer. For example, one of the women's groups in the original study went into a dormant status, but a small group of young women formed their own new unregistered group, calling the new group "the Disability Women's Group". This name is telling, as it represents to the outside world their collective identity as struggling, economically poor and in dire need of 'development'. All these factors created fertile ground for more pronounced politics of representation than before.

Given the myriad of dynamic and contradictory representations of various actors, a central challenge in the research was to disentangle the complex, coexistent web of interpretations. Rather than search for the correct or truthful interpretation, I was aware of the need to be suspicious of all claims about truth and to remember the limited capacity of representations to mirror an absolute reality (as all ethnographic texts are partial truths):

> *A story is always situated, it has both a teller and an audience. Representation itself is a strategic project and must be placed under a critical lens. Its perspective is partial ... and its telling is motivated. (Abu Lughod 1993, p. 15)*

In analyzing the representations and practices of various actors, I decided that their accounts were both factual and, at the same time, constructed (Moore and Vaughan 1994, p. xxiii), and that multiple strategic projects co-existed simultaneously.

Research as political action

Producing and accumulating "knowledge for knowledge sake or some indefinite future application is an exploitative, unaffordable luxury" (Maguire 1987, p. 100). In order to question the purpose of research beyond its purely 'academic' role, and bring it into the realm of the political, the vibrancy, dynamism, and agency of actors must be recognized. Research is a site for strategic intervention — a political process that is not just for sharing knowledge, but for forging links between *different* knowledges based on different positionalities and subjectivities, and tracing the lines of possible alliances and common purposes between them (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 39). Sylvester suggests that difference is not an ascribed trait, but a matter of politics, and argues for methods:

> *of speaking in, through and across differences ... methods by which different identity feminisms and geospatial locations within them become mobile in ways that juggle and cross borderlands without leaving us with baseball caps affixed with tourist decals ... (1995, p. 945)*

In this sense, research is less a 'field' site for the collection of data, but more a site for strategic intervention and positive transformation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, p. 39).

The creation of knowledge through research can be strategic and political, if this creation is based on the active acknowledgement and incorporation of the personal and political contexts that underlie investigation, accountability for the process of that investigation, and acting with the knowledge that is created (Kirkby and McKenna 1989, p. 167). Qualitative methods and personal narratives emphasize the process of remembering, recounting, and writing, and therefore have the potential for political consciousness (Mohanty 1991a, p. 34) of local people's issues. However, structures do not change simply

because 'conscientization' takes place (Mies 1991, p. 68). On the other hand, if conscientization does not take place, its potential to create alternative institutions and centres of opposition from conscientization-raising processes and research will be lost, leading to a continuation of old power structures (Mies 1991, p. 68). We can move beyond this impasse by recognizing the relationship between power and knowledge — the ability of discourse to structure relationships of dominance, and the potential of counter-narratives to subvert and resist hegemonic constructions. Research can transform information — about the lived experiences of local women and men — into action. One of the most significant reasons for carrying out research is to highlight new information as a correction to the gaps and erasures of hegemonic conceptualizations of conventional approaches, to make visible those people who have been kept invisible, and to debunk the myths and dissolve the misconceptions about people's lives (Mohanty 1991, p. 34; Kirkby and McKenna 1989, p. 164).

However, in transforming 'information' into action, it is necessary to recognize that it is not appropriate to advocate changes to local structures or call for alternative institutions or organizations from the 'outside.' These measures must be locally determined, approved, and sanctioned by the participants themselves. To this end, it is the responsibility of the researcher to engage in research that involves mutual collaboration. Such a project must focus on placing the voices and complex experiences of participants at the centre of the analysis, and in writing and sharing processes for change. The onus is also on the researcher to seek and incorporate feedback from the participants to ensure that the findings and textual accounts reflect their realities and their needs, constraints, and problems.

This potential positive transformation can also be wasted if no conscientious effort is made to "get the information out there" to those who can benefit most from the research and those who can effect change. Therefore, sharing and disseminating knowledge is of utmost importance. Information should not only be aimed, in an accessible manner, at local participants at the grassroots level; it should also be aimed at those researchers, scholars, and 'development' practitioners who are willing to work toward similar change and greater awareness of local realities, as this is often the aim of the participants themselves. Research must have practical applications and should benefit those who have given up so much of their time in participating and sharing their experiences, words, and lives (Kirkby and McKenna 1989; Mies 1991).

Conclusions

Research becomes political when it recognizes the gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives — when it actively engages in the process of remembering and writing against the grain of hegemony by bringing to the surface the everyday practices and struggles of local people (Mohanty 1991, p. 39). The pages that follow are written and grounded in this commitment to writing against generalizations, and working against narrative closure and the silencing of multiple voices. This book seeks to channel intellectual and scholarly energies towards social and political transformation (Lughod 1993; Moore and Vaughan 1994; Ferguson 1994), in a way that is consistent with diversity, complexity, and variability, and with the everyday experiences of Logoli women and men.

PART II

The Context

Emphasizing gendered perceptions of landscape and resources... stresses that resource utilization and provisioning responsibilities are not rooted in some male and female "essence", but are grounded in social relations and men's and women's historical relationship to the landscape... Appreciating that men and women relate to their landscape and it resources differently does not lead to "ecofeminism" where women are posited as having an inherently intimate connection with nature. We need to explore the particular "class-gender effects" of the relationship between people and resources shaped through history, culture and social relations of production (Moore, D. 1993, p. 396).

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Maragoli in Context

Chapter Three

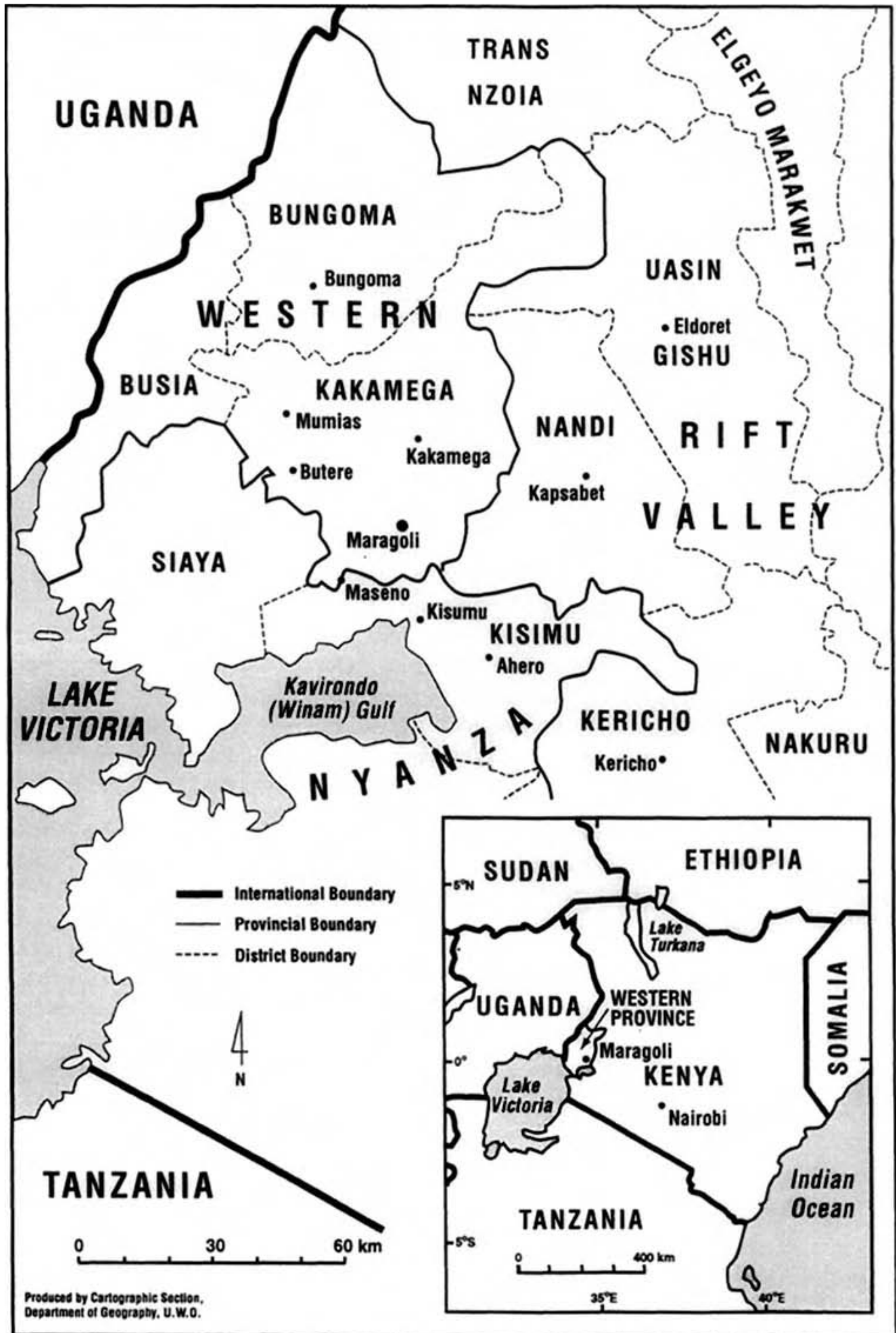
Theories of agrarian change in Africa normally treat agricultural intensification as a linear unidirectional process which gradually engulfs entire agrarian systems as human population increases ... Farmers' soil fertility practices have changed in response to migration, social differentiation and economic change, and to the interplay between changing social and ecological conditions. Despite rapid population growth, Luhya farmers manage their soils both more or less intensively in response to this interplay, and create a heterogeneous pattern of management in space and time. (Carter and Crowley 2000, p. i)

Maragoli covers an area of 198 square kilometres immediately north of the equator and on the eastern fringes of the Rift Valley's Lake Basin. The landscape is made up of intensely farmed smallholdings nestled among undulating hills and valleys, and a vast network of brooks and streams. The prevailing topographical features are the Maragoli hills, which rise to a height of over 1950 metres above sea level. The soils from the volcanic rock are richly red, and moderate to fertile — except in zones bordering the hills, where sandy soils and large rocks dominate the topography (Abwunza 1998, p. 11). Both the climate (with temperatures ranging from 14 to 32 degrees Celsius), and the well-distributed annual rainfall (1800–2200 millimetres), provide a favorable environment for sedentary agriculture and mixed farming, which support a wide variety of crops (such as tea, coffee, French beans, tomatoes, maize, napier grass, green collards, etc.) and different types of livestock. The most common crops are bananas, followed by maize, beans, sweet potatoes, napier grass, leafy green vegetables, and cassava, in descending order (Crowley and Carter 2000).

Maragoli is the home of the Avalogoli people, who were originally known to the colonial government as part of the larger cultural linguistic Bantu group, and more specifically as the Bantu Kavirondo Tribe (Abwunza 1998, p. 16). Today, the Kenyan government considers them a "sub-tribe" of the "main tribe" of the Luhya nation (Abwunza 1998, p. 17). Originally considered part of Kakamega District until 1991, Maragoli today is a Division of Vihiga District, Western Province, Kenya. With a reported 1085 people per square kilometre in 1996, Maragoli has a high rural population density (Republic of Kenya 1997). Approximately half the farms in Maragoli are less than one hectare in size, and fewer than 10 percent are larger than three hectares with all plots combined (Crowley and Carter 2000).[34]

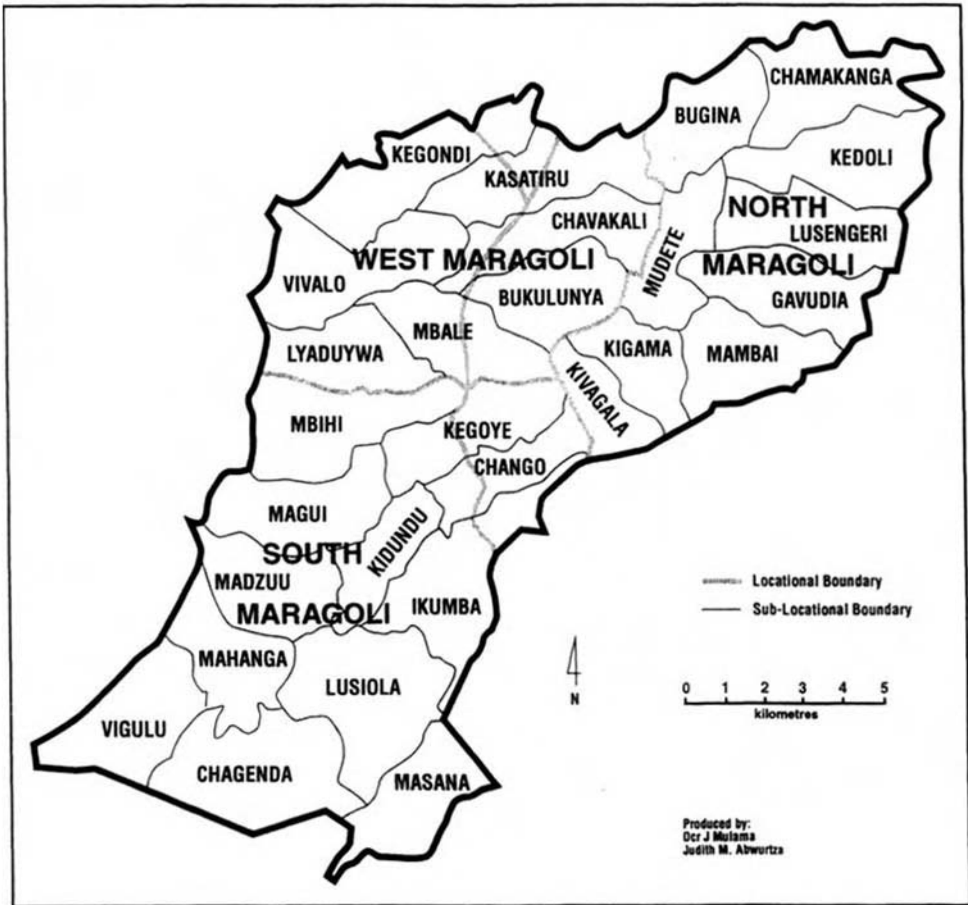
[34] *This information is based on Crowley and Carter's survey of 105 households in 1995 (Crowley and Carter 1995, p. 1) and is further substantiated by farmers' narratives in this study.*

Figure 3.1 Western Province and Kenya, East Africa.



Source: Abwunza (1995).

Figure 3.2 Maragoli, Western Kenya.



Source: Abwunza (1995).

Maragoli benefits from its close proximity to two cities: Kissumu, the third-largest city in Kenya (located on Lake Victoria), and Kakamega, the administrative capital for Western Kenya. This proximity to two urban centres provides access to a wide variety of agricultural and income-generating activities. Logoli women and men were originally cattle-keeping agriculturalists, but today they engage in diverse and multiple income-generating activities.

These activities range from the production of food and cash crops and the trade of agricultural produce and livestock, to the sale of used clothing, consumables, and pottery, to other formal and informal trading practices. Mbale, the largest market town in Maragoli and the new administrative headquarters for Vihiga District, is favourably located on the tarmac road that runs from Kissumu to Kakamega. This serves as a major transportation link and provides good potential access to urban centres and towns. All of these factors combined provide an environment in which Logoli women and men can simultaneously engage in agriculture, soil management, and income-generating activities as important livelihood strategies.

This geographically varied, agriculturally diverse, and economically dynamic area constitutes the setting in which Logoli women and men live and carry out diverse farming, soil management, income-generating, and livelihood strategies. Recognizing various context-specific factors is critical in understanding the local environment in which the research for this book was carried out. In this spirit, this chapter describes the context in which the research was done.

Moore argues that the state is internally differentiated and is itself a site of struggle over resources, land, and power among various actors (1993, p. 389). Insight can therefore be gained by looking at resource struggles, including those between local farmers and the state, within a historical, political-economic, and cultural context. This chapter describes the impact of history, political economy, and culture on local women's and men's decision-making in terms of natural resource management and other priorities that demand their limited time, energy, and resources. The chapter begins by reviewing aspects of Kenya's history that have affected gendered resource struggles. In particular, it provides an overview of the changing nature and importance of soil management and farming over time, and looks at the impacts of male out-migration and the introduction of the cash-based economy on people's capacity to manage their natural resources in Maragoli. It then highlights aspects of Kenya's political economy, reviewing the effects on Kenyan livelihoods of structural adjustment programs mandated by the World Bank and the IMF, investigating Maragoli's place in the Kenyan political economy, and examining Logoli women's status within local and national women's movements and their access to state and development resources. Before describing important aspects of Logoli culture and elements pertaining to natural resource management in detail, the chapter examines conceptualizations of culture more generally. These explorations are intended to provide a broad understanding of the multiple factors that impact sustainable soil management, farming, and livelihoods. This understanding is an essential prerequisite for exploring the complex set of constraints, opportunities, and dilemmas that men and women face in their everyday lives in their struggle to survive and sustain their local environments.

History

Initially, Kenya was the headquarters for the Imperial British East Africa Company, and was a hub for all the colonial economic and strategic activities in East Africa. Kenya's importance continued in the post-independence era, and it has often been described by Western governments and development institutions as one of Africa's most progressive, politically stable, and prosperous nations (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995, p. 34) — a model state. The post-independence period also coincided with the cold-war era, during which Kenya was considered pro-Western and therefore strategically positioned in terms of receiving development assistance, especially in contrast to its more socialist-oriented neighbours. Today, Kenya remains a focal point for development and Western intervention. There are many development institutions, organizations, and agencies in Kenya, including a major United Nations complex in Nairobi. Until recently, Kenya was regarded as a model country open to the ways of 'modernization.' Its loss of model status is based on what is considered its failure to embrace and comply fully with reforms supported by the IMF and the World Bank, and, further, its 'propensity' towards over-population, corruption, ethnic rift, and environmental degradation.

Population density and land scarcity in particular are often blamed as the sole factors leading to soil degradation and unsustainable farming practices in Maragoli. However, there are other important historical, political-economic, and cultural factors that contribute to people's decisions to compromise their roles as farmers and sustainers of the soil. Two historical factors that contextualize these dynamics are: changes in soil management and farming practices; and male out-migration and the drive towards a cash-based economy.

Changes in soil management and farming practices

Farming and soil management have always been an integral part of Avalogoli society. In Maragoli, women have always been predominantly the farmers, and there have been distinct norms, idioms, and taboos regarding gendered roles and responsibilities on the farm. These norms have placed much of the responsibility for agricultural production on the shoulders of women, without necessarily giving them the power to make decisions. Keeping this in mind, historical changes in soil management and farming practices from the pre-colonial to the post-independence period are described below.

Pre-colonial Maragoli

Despite the substantial degree of spatial variability in the topography, key factors such as the high to moderate soil fertility, well-distributed annual rainfall, and excellent agricultural potential influenced the settlement of the area currently known as Maragoli in the seventeenth century (Wagner 1970, cited in Carter et al. 1998, p. 5). During pre-colonial times, Logoli farmers practiced labour-intensive and mixed farming practices including keeping cattle, cultivating a wide variety of crops (grains, bananas, tubers, and vegetables), and varying soil conservation and management practices (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 8; Abwunza 1997, p. 18). Agricultural work was undertaken by communal work parties differentiated by gender. Women were responsible for most agricultural activities, while men were responsible for specific agricultural activities such as land clearing. Livestock was tended communally (sometimes by women), and women milked the cows.

Three techniques were utilized for soil management. The first principal means of restoring soil fertility was through rotating bush fallowing. This was carried out after a number of years of cultivation that involved crop rotation and on-farm inputs of organic fertilizer (usually livestock manure, household refuse and waste-water). (Carter et al. 1998, p. 7; Crowley and Carter 1996, p. 5–7). Rotational bush fallowing was mainly brought into use at the turn of the century. That was when shifting cultivation was transformed, and, instead, stationary residences and new plots, mainly for grain crops, were cleared and burned, then cultivated for several years before being left to fallow for three to four years (Crowley and Carter 2000). The second technique was crop rotation, which involved planting crops in sequence to take advantage of varying degrees of soil fertility. In the first year, the rotation generally consisted of finger millet and maize, intercropped during the long rains, followed by pulses, beans, lablab, and bambara nuts, grown during the short rains. In the second year, the plot was planted with sourghum and maize intercrop, followed by sourghum ratoon during the short rains. In the third year, either millet was planted again, or the soil was allowed to rest, or it was planted with sweet potatoes, followed by finger millet. During the following three or four years, the plot was left as pasture for cattle and sheep (Crowley and Carter 2000, pp. 6–7). The third technique, the use of on-farm inputs, involved organic fertilizers that were used mainly for fixed crops grown close to

the homestead, such as vegetables and bananas. The on-farm inputs consisted of household refuse, chicken droppings, manure from nearby livestock enclosures, and waste and rainwater from the house (Crowley and Carter 2000, p. 6).

The colonial period

In the colonial era, the Kenyan economy depended heavily on agricultural production (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 418). In Kenya, the colonial conceptualization of African agricultural and social practices as 'backward' and 'inefficient,' and Western-based knowledge as 'modern' and 'efficient,' led to interventions and policies of land alienation and soil conservation that have had dramatic effects on the way in which people do farming, where they do farming, and their livelihood strategies (Mackenzie 1998, 1995b). When combined with high incidence of male out-migration, these changes further entrenched patriarchal ideology and brought about drastic changes in the division of labour between men and women, with women shouldering increasing labour burdens in terms of farming and soil management. Colonial policies sanctioned men's control over women's labour and its product, while colonial land reforms placed title deeds under men's names. These changes had major consequences in terms entrenching men's authority over women.

A major change in farming practice that occurred during the colonial period in Maragoli was the introduction of the iron hoe, which displaced the wooden digging stick (Carter et al. 1998, p. 10).[35] Soil fertility declined as farmers fallowed land less frequently and grew more maize (a heavy soil feeder) in response to the growing market for the crop (Carter et al. 1998, p. 11). Colonial officials took an increasing interest in soil management and conservation in response to the negative environmental consequences of the increase in both intensity of cultivation and area cultivated (as more marginal land was brought into production) (Carter et al. 1998. p. 11; Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 9). These environmental changes alarmed colonial officials, who, in the 1930s, enacted soil conservation campaigns to encourage the use of boma manure, green manure, and compost pits. In addition, people were conscripted to reforest areas that were considered deteriorated and to dig erosion protection works (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 9). The extensive terracing campaigns were met with considerable resistance in Maragoli and other areas of Kenya (Mackenzie 1998, 1991). These policies were subsequently relaxed during World War II due to the lack of availability of male labour (Carter et al. 1998, p. 11).

In the late 1940s and 1950s, efforts were renewed, although unsuccessfully, to influence soil management practices through more campaigns. These included the push to 'modernize' techniques by constructing terraces, incorporating grass filter strips, afforesting, and growing more food crops (in light of the reduced incomes of households at the end of the war) (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 45).

The post-independence period

In the post-independence period, development plans in Kenya gave priority to the agricultural production of export and cash crops. Consequently, there was a dramatic increase in farming activities focussing on the production of cash crops grown primarily or entirely for the market or for export (Carter et al. 1998, p. 15). While women's labour input into farming, including the cultivation of cash crops, was essential to this strategy, men controlled

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[35] *While the mouldboard plow was introduced in other areas of Kenya, the topography of Maragoli proved to be too steep and varied, and land holdings too small, to permit its use (Carter et al. 1998, p. 10).*

the marketing of these crops and, hence, controlled the cash received from their sale. In addition, while women shouldered major labour burdens for food and cash production, they did not benefit from male-targeted technological advancements, government subsidies, or extension services.

Farmers who could gain access to or afford to purchase inorganic fertilizers (through their participation in the cultivation of cash crops such as tea) began to include them in the management of their soils. Farmers began to purchase exotic dairy cattle sold in large numbers by European farmers after independence. To feed the cattle, farmers begun to grow napier grass.

Because of the continued emphasis placed on the cash-based economy after independence, men continued to migrate to urban centres in search of waged employment.

Male out-migration and the cash economy

The Hut (1901) and Poll (1910) taxes imposed by the colonial government, which all Kenyan households were forced to pay, created the need for cash. This need for income generation, forced male out-migration in search of waged labour, and played a role in exacerbating a process of socioeconomic differentiation in Maragoli (Carter et al. 1998, p. 8; Crowley and Carter 2000).[36] Through access to education and cash, men gained seniority within the lineage, accumulating property, status, prestige, and power (Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). Increased social differentiation became rooted in individual success in the market economy through the accumulation of monetary wealth and land, and the ability to hire other people's labour (Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). As in the case of Central Province, described by Mackenzie, a class of wealthier peasants emerged, consisting of chiefs, sub-chiefs, members of the Local Native Council, those with close ties to the colonial state, and those with substantial off-farm income (1995, p. 18). This new status provided them opportunities to access to land, labour, and soil management and farming inputs.

The extensive out-migration of adult men had a significant impact on gender relations within the household. One of the major consequences was the expansion of women's economic and social roles and responsibilities. But, although women acquired men's roles, they often did not acquire the authority and power that previously went along with these roles. The out-migration of men also resulted in the emergence of women-headed households. In particular, it impacted the availability of men's labour for agricultural production and soil management, and, hence, the gendered division of labour on farms in Maragoli. As described in Chapter Five, the out-migration of men increased women's labour burdens on the farm, in the household, and in other aspects of life. However, men continued to control the marketing of cash crops, even from a distance, and therefore the increase in women's labour did not necessarily result in women's control over the products of that labour. In situations where women were not receiving cash remittances from their out-mitigated spouses, they felt intense pressure to earn cash.

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[36] *Male out-migration took place in search of waged labour in colonial railway and road works (1896-1913), sisal and tea estates (1920-1930), gold mines and coffee estates (1930s), as well as in military employment, and construction, domestic, tourist, professional and government work (since the turn of the century). Male out-migration has continued to increase in importance (Crowley and Carter 2000).*

Another major change that occurred over time involved the growing importance of cash in an increasingly market-based economy, as one Logoli farmer describes:

> *The greatest change in Maragoli [over time] is the colonial government coming in. For instance, the idea of going to work in the morning is a foreign idea — the idea of earning a salary is a foreign idea... the change you see is the Western economy ... people have to find money, trade, and take produce to the market. They used to take porridge to the market those days, but that was on market days and they exchanged things: that was barter. But now there is the money economy. It's doing some good and a lot of harm. I am not one of those people who pretend that all of us are taking in that system, that this country will be any better. In fact it will be worse. I am very cautious. But people are being changed because if you don't have money, you are poor. (L043)*

Hence, cash-based transactions began to play an increasingly significant role in people's lives; in particular, affecting their ability to access resources and mobilize labour for sustaining their soil and their farms.

Political-economy

Contextualizing local constraints and problems within broader political-economic processes, and in terms of the way they affect access to local and state resources and services, is critical to understanding the complex set of circumstances facing women and men in their farming, soil management, and livelihood strategies. In this section, some general aspects are reviewed before focusing attention on specific factors that have contributed to Maragoli's problems — in particular, Maragoli's place in Kenya's political geography, the role of structural adjustment programs, and Logoli women's place in Kenyan politics.

The top three foreign exchange earners in Kenya are tourism, coffee, and tea (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 425). Agricultural production has always been central to Kenya's economy and constitutes about one-third of the gross domestic product (GDP) and nearly three-fourths of its export earnings (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 425). In Maragoli, agriculture and livestock are the main sources of income in the formal sector (Republic of Kenya 1997, p. 30). In addition, the informal and non-formal sectors play an important role in economic life and provide an important avenue for generating income in such activities as carpentry, petty trading, brickmaking, etc. However, farmers are working harder and getting less in return for their labour. In addition, there are other political-economic factors that have contributed to the problems that women and man face in their everyday lives. According to Thomas-Slayter et al.:

> *Certain problems have arisen from fundamental contradictions and dilemmas in Kenya's political and economic life. These problems can be observed in class and ethnic competition for national resources, a middle class under increasing economic pressures, an overweening bureaucracy, declining terms of trade, increasing international debt, and a political and economic vulnerability to outside forces. In addition, there is growing concern about Kenya's increasingly unbalanced power structure. (1995, p.38)*

Because of these factors, farmers in Maragoli lack equitable access to local and state resources for sustainable soil management, farming, and livelihood sustenance.

Maragoli's place in Kenya's political landscape

Kenya's ethnoregional balance of power and the inequitable distribution of resources among its diverse ethnoregional groups have played a significant role in the political-economic structures that have supported rural development in Western Kenya, and in other parts of the country. These factors have also contributed to the problems facing women and men in Maragoli in their everyday lives.

During colonial rule in Kenya, all indigenous ethnic groups suffered inequities such as alienation from land, conscripted labour, the establishment of native reserves, and laws against African cash crop production and trade (Abwunza 1997, p. 17). However, colonial requirements for labour were driven by a division of labour influenced by the construction of ethnic 'identities.' Ethnic and local boundaries institutionalized under colonial rule defined new areas for competition over state resources such as employment, development programs, and missionary education, and encouraged the rhetoric of 'tribal' categories (Haugerud 1993, p. 124). For instance, one Logoli farmer described a situation in which the Kikuyu were considered good civil servants, the Kalenjin were considered good police and soldiers, Asian people were considered good engineers, builders, business people, and bankers, and the Logoli were considered good domestic workers and nannies (L048). This division of labour left a legacy of bias in terms of the preferential employment of certain ethnic groups in essentialized roles, according to 'ethnic' identity.

In the post-independence period, Kenyatta's government favoured the Kikuyu peoples in terms of political-economic resources and power, from the time of independence to 1978 (Haugerud 1993, p. 39). During the 1980s, the investment in public infrastructure, rural health, and extension services in Western Province was greater than ever before. Although investments generally favoured the Large Rift Valley Province, they also, to a lesser extent, benefited Western Province (Haugerud 1993, p. 39). Today, popular perceptions support the notion that Moi's agricultural policies favour the interests of his own grain-growing constituency, and that other ethnoregional groups are losing out. These other groups are disadvantaged in terms of access to state resources, financial and legal protections, finance capital, public positions, land, and education. (Haugerud 1993, p. 40).

Despite the fact that the Luhya are the second-largest ethnoregional group in Kenya (the Kikuyu are the largest, and the Luo are the third-largest), popular perceptions regarding ethnoregional distribution suggest that there is an inherent bias in Kenya's national politics and economic policies — a bias that limits the Logoli people's access to state resources and services. For instance, one elder Logoli farmer describes the present situation pertaining to access to employment as compared to the colonial situation in Maragoli:

> *the government doesn't seem to have a plan for us, but you can't allow people to just grow up together and be jobless ... you see, when there is nothing to do, there is nothing to motivate them to work ... In our time, every student had to choose a career: railway, post office, medical, civil service — and they chose and they were all absolved, or they went to technical schools ... but now, I don't know what you can do. (L043)*

The bias in the state's allocation of its resources within Kenya's political geography is felt by many farmers. The inequitable distribution of resources among different ethnoregional groups does not support sustainable agricultural production and soil management, or ensure livelihood sustenance in Maragoli.

Furthermore, there is growing dissatisfaction that only a small minority of Kenyans — including owners of large-scale lands outside of Maragoli, as well as the elite, and businesspeople, all of whom have access to Kenya's political machinery — are in a position to access some of the benefits from global economic linkages. There is a striking gap between the economically rich and poor in Kenya. The economically poorest 40 percent of the Kenyan population earn less than 10 percent of GDP, while the economically richest 20 percent earn more than 22 times the income of the poorest (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995, p. 38). People with positions in government or with close access to government ministries have been able to accumulate a great deal of wealth (Nzomo and Staudt 1995, p. 418).

There is also an uneven distribution of land among and within various ethnoregional groups. This uneven distribution emanates from past colonial policies that did two things. They established huge farms and ranches in the White Highlands, allocating these properties to a mere two percent of the population (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 418). They also established "native reserves," in which population density was acute (in Maragoli, the North Kavirondo reserve):

> *Kenya's dualistic land tenure pattern emerged during the colonial period which gave rise to two distinct form of property, namely large-scale or estate farms and small-holder farms (Ikiara et al. 1993, p. 88). Today large-scale farms comprise mixed farms, plantations and ranches that were formally owned by Europeans. Although there was a major sub-division and transfer of large-scale farms in the 1960s, these sub-division and resettlement schemes only affected about a quarter of the best land, only 3 per cent of total agricultural land and only 20 per cent of Kenya' total population (Ikiara et al. 1993, p. 89). Further, the schemes favoured certain ethnoregional groups over others. Ownership of the large-scale property was passed onto the elite strata of the population after independence made up of businesspeople, high-ranking politicians and civil servants (Ikiara et al. 1993, p. 88). Currently, large-scale and estate farms in the former White Highlands produce a large proportion of food production for internal markets. (Ikiara et al. 1993, p. 88).*

In the period leading to independence in 1963 and shortly thereafter, land was redistributed to those deemed "progressive farmers" and legal title was given to men. With the departure of the colonial settlers from the White Highlands, the new government-initiated resettlement plans were once again aimed at men. Today, 80 percent of the Kenyan population lives in rural areas, with most farmers cultivating plots averaging two hectares each. At the same time, more than 40 percent of agricultural land constitutes large farms averaging 1000 hectares, and supporting less than one percent of total farming households (Ikiara et al. 1993, p. 88). These types of large farms are not found in Maragoli. Moreover, Logoli farmers believe there is an ethnoregional bias in terms of the distribution of extension services.

These types of bias, inherent in Kenya's political geography, give those in Maragoli inequitable access to state resources and global linkages. The situation is further exacerbated by structural adjustment programs, and by women's inequitable access to state political structures and resources.

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

'Austerity' measures, known as structural adjustment programs (SAPs), negotiated between the Kenyan state and the World Bank and IMF, have brought about drastic changes. These changes can only be described as externally constructed economic shocks designed to 'adjust' the Kenyan economy in order to meet the needs of international debtors (Gitobu and Kamau 1994, p. 58). After a decade of good economic performance following independence, SAPs were formulated to improve balance of payments, in order to allow Kenya to service international debt accrued during an economic crisis. This crisis was brought on by externally driven economic factors such as an increase in oil prices during 1973–74 and 1979–80, deteriorating terms of trade for primary commodity exports, and rising interest rates (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 428). These factors were exacerbated by inflation, droughts, and declining exports (Bigsten and Ngung'u 1992; Ngugi 1994). These crises forced Kenya to turn to the IMF and the World Bank to finance its balance of payments deficits. As a result, Kenya had to accept the economic policy conditions imposed by these institutions (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 429). Instituted loosely in the 1970s, and more firmly in the early to mid-1980s, the primary objectives of structural adjustment programs were to rekindle economic growth and production, control inflation, increase international competitiveness, and increase foreign exchange earnings to repay debt (Ongile 1994; Kinoti 1994). These objectives were pursued through a broad range of monetary, fiscal, trade, and institutional policies and reforms. These policies and reforms included cuts in government expenditure, public sector employment and real wages; decontrol of price structures, including food and agricultural input subsidies; export promotion, and an increase in agriculture prices; introduction of user fees for public services such as education and health; currency devaluation; credit reform through an increase in interest rates; and privatization of parastatal institutions (Kinoti 1994; Mackenzie 1993).

While, at a macroeconomic level of analysis, economic indicators may suggest positive improvement in the performance of the Kenyan economy by the standards set by the World Bank and the IMF, the implementation of SAPs has had major impacts and gender-related consequences on both rural and urban households. It has exacerbated environmental degradation and stress in people's everyday lives (Kenyinga and Ibutu 1994). In particular, the costs of SAPs are disproportionately borne by women, who find themselves with intense labour burdens and an increased reliance on cash to make ends meet. The need for cash has been heightened because of the increased cost of food and consumables, the spiraling costs associated with education and health services, the elimination of subsidies for agricultural inputs, and an erosion of real earnings and real wages. Three aspects of SAPs are especially significant to agricultural production and soil management: the devaluation of the Kenyan shilling; the changes in agricultural input and output prices; and the shifting of the costs of social services to local people.

Devaluation of the Kenyan shilling

The devaluation of Kenyan currency has drastically lowered the purchasing power of individuals, particularly in terms of imported goods. Money no longer buys the quantity of goods and services it used to in the past (Gitobu and Kamau 1994). Devaluation not only erodes the real incomes of farmers, but, as a consequence, encourages male out-migration to urban centres to seek waged employment (Hegedus 1994, p. 75). If employment is found, this does not necessarily enable men to subsist on their wages. This leads to situations in which a woman has to subsidize the wage earner. Consequently, women's labour burdens are increased (Meena 1991, p. 170).

Agricultural input and output prices

The architects of SAPs assume that, as agriculture becomes profitable for farmers through increased producer prices for export crops, they will be more interested in investing in soil management (Mearns 1991, cited in Mackenzie 1993; Gladwin 1991). However, other SAP policies have undermined this assumption by increasing the cost of, and decreasing financial subsidies for, agricultural inputs (Hegedus 1994, p. 73; Ongile 1994, p. 28; Mackenzie 1993, p. 77). Furthermore, these policies favour large-scale estate farms and put smaller farms at a disadvantage — especially those with insufficient land (Mackenzie 1993, p. 77; Ikiara et al. 1993, p. 88). In Maragoli, most farming households cannot meet livelihood needs entirely through farming and must rely on off-farm income to purchase food. Farmers who are able to grow export crops are in a precarious situation as increased prices for export crops are undercut by the increased cost of goods such as food and agricultural inputs. SAPs have also removed subsidies for agricultural and soil management inputs. At the same time, the devaluation of the Kenyan shilling, has increased the price of inputs such as chemical fertilizers, seeds, and implements.

Women's roles as farmers have also been ignored in the agricultural components of SAPs, in three key ways. First, agricultural incentives have focused on export crop producers and ignored subsistence and local cash crops, which all women grow to a greater or lesser extent (Ongile 1994, p. 28). Second, although women carry out primarily agricultural production, they do not necessarily control the proceeds of their labour and use it to purchase inputs, implements, land, and labour. SAP policies call for increased credit to help farmers obtain the inputs for soil management. This excludes the majority of women because they do not own title deeds to land, which are a prerequisite for access to credit. Third, although Kenya has not extracted an excessive amount of hidden tax from farmers through artificially low agricultural prices, the government controls agricultural marketing through parastatal agencies of mixed efficiency, and through officially recognized cooperative societies (Nzomo and Stuadt 1994, p. 425). According to Nzomo and Staudt:

Male control of these institutions undermines women's ability to profit from the fruits of their labour by extending men's control to incomes as well. Thus the multiplication of parastatal agencies is in part a multiplication of male patronage positions and control opportunities. (Nzomo and Stuadt 1994, p. 425)

Shifting the costs of social services

In the past, despite inherent male bias, Kenya prided itself as having one of the most successful education systems in Africa and heavily invested in education (Hegedus 1994; Gitobu and Kamau 1994; Bigsten and Ndung'u 1992). However, SAPs have defined these education expenditures as 'unsustainable' and instituted cost-sharing measures. This means that while the government continues to pay teachers' salaries and fund basic facilities, local women and men now pay for furniture and buildings as well as student uniforms, transportation, and supplies (Gitobu and Kamau 1994; Hegedus 1994; Bigsten, and Ndung'u 1992). In effect, this has increased the school fees that local people pay in real terms. Combined with people's decreased purchasing power, these increased school expenses have made education unaffordable, especially for economically poor farmers. Despite these increased costs and uncertainty about whether formal schooling will lead to employment or regular-waged income, education remains a top priority for Logoli women and men, as Chapter Seven discusses.

The negotiation of SAPs by Kenyan policymakers and international finance institutions aims to change the framework of the economy and decentralize the state significantly. This process has major gender consequences in local contexts. It has placed tremendous burdens on the shoulders of women by shifting the cost of social services. Despite this major impact, women in Kenya have virtually no voice in the negotiation of SAPs or in subsequent policy reform (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 416). This is a strange paradox, since women in Maragoli, for instance, are predominately the farmers in this agriculture-based economy, are increasingly the providers for their families, and are actively engaged in diverse economic activities in order to make ends meet, as further chapters will demonstrate.

Logoli women's place in Kenya's politics

Although women contribute most of the labour for agricultural production, the management of their natural resources (including their soils), and the work and responsibility for the viability of their households, they are not equitably represented in decision-making bodies within Kenya's political machinery. Nzomo and Staudt contend that "men control Kenya's formal political machinery more thoroughly then elsewhere in Africa" (1994, p. 416) and, therefore, women are nearly invisible in state policymaking. This is substantiated by the fact that women in Maragoli do not see themselves or their interests equitably represented in state politics. It is also consistent with the beliefs of women in other parts of Kenya.

Logoli women see themselves as excluded from local and regional politics, economic opportunities, and the benefits of global linkages. They do not recognize that their votes in elections count for something, and that the government counts on their approval during elections (in exchange for promises that are not often fulfilled), regardless of their class or status. Indeed, there is a long historical legacy of exclusion from state politics and resources. Colonial policies, state rhetoric, and development discourse have, in the past, viewed women as a peripheral social stratum and as a population base that did not require formal political or economical policies to address their needs and rights (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 419). Under colonial rule, politics were considered men's domain, and the colonial state sanctioned men as owners of property and controllers of women's labour (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 417). Later, gender-neutral development and state policies assumed that the economic success of rural households would be shared among husbands and wives. This assumption ignored the fact that almost one-third of rural smallholdings in Kenya are headed by women, and income is not necessarily pooled among spouses. Also, in a situation in which polygamy is practised, a husband's resources and loyalties are distributed among his wives (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 417), a group that sometimes includes both official and "unofficial" wives.

As in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the promotion of women's groups within Kenya's national development plans grew out of WID programs following the 1975 United Nations declaration of the International Decade of Women (1975–1985). It was further reinforced by Kenyatta's ideology of *harambee* — community self-help efforts in which people contribute resources (such as money and labour) to build schools, clinics, and other institutions. It prompted the establishment of the Women's Bureau, located within Kenya's Ministry of Culture and Social Services — a strategy to improve the situation of economically poor rural women (Abwunza 1997; Nzomo and Staudt 1994).

Although women's programs accounted for only 0.1 percent of total government expenditures between 1978 and 1982 (Nzomo and Staudt 1994, p. 421), the establishment of the Women's Bureau has had a powerful impact in changing the perception of local women's groups through state and international endorsement. The successful mobilization of thousands of women around locally organized groups has also given local women some degree of visibility in political structures normally dominated by men. The importance of women's groups and women in managing their natural resources is slowly but surely gaining recognition by international donors and research organizations that previously channeled resources solely to men. However, while the formation of thousands of women's groups across the country under the umbrella of the Women's Bureau has increased the visibility of women's struggles, the Women's Bureau has not been able to gain leverage to influence state policies, because it has lacked authority and power within Kenya's political machinery.

In Maragoli, women see their involvement in women's groups as a "good" thing. They draw upon the customary ideology of solidarity and the norms of gender-based work groups to justify their involvement in women's groups. In addition, they draw upon the state sanctioning and international endorsement of women's groups to defend their engagement in group activities. However, there are several obstacles that limit women's participation in these groups. These include women's inability to afford group membership fees, and lack of information regarding the predetermined structural rules governing their involvement (such as formal registration; registration fees; and the need to nominate people for positions such as chairperson, secretary, and treasurer). As Chapter Eight illustrates, it is often economically poor, young and socially stigmatized women who do not have access to membership in women's groups.

Culture and society

Local culture is an important factor in the local dynamics of natural resource management. Scholars working in sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated that struggles over resources are simultaneously struggles over cultural meanings (Moore 1996, 1993; Carney 1996; Carney and Watts 1990; Schroeder 1996; Berry 1997, 1989). Struggles over resources occur through cultural processes:

> *These processes may, in turn, effect structural change or material [and environmental] transformation. On the one hand, ideology does social work insofar as meanings mobilize action, shape social identities, and condition understandings of collective interests. Cultural meanings are* constitutive *forces in historically specific relations of production and are not simply a reflection of a material base. Productive inequalities become naturalized through cultural understandings of social hierarchy that encourage popular consent. On the other hand, struggles over symbolic processes are themselves conflicts over material relations of production, the distribution of resources in society, and ultimately power. Meanings may sustain prevailing productive inequalities. ... But ... dominant meanings are always contested, never totalizing, and always unstable, even when they encourage degrees of subordinate people's 'consent' to particular forms of oppression. (Moore 1993, p. 383)*

Rather than conceptualizing 'culture' as the "exotic trappings to the nuts and bolts of 'underlying' structures" (Moore 1996, p. 126), and as something that is fixed and rigid, it is better to look at it as a social and historical construction that is dynamic and fluid.

Culture is continually and actively being created and recreated, and interpreted and re-interpreted by women and men (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, p. 14). Local people actively and strategically construct their own gendered identities within natural resources management. However, these identities are simultaneously constructed in relation to global processes that are involved in the production of 'local' identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, p. 14), and 'development' discourse.

'Culture' is a site of common understandings of sharing and commonality as well as a site of difference and contestation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b). It is open to multiple, subjective, and gendered understandings. When viewing 'culture' through a gendered lens, it becomes possible to ask how the societal and gendered 'rules of the game' were made, by whom, and for whom (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b p. 4), while recognizing that they are constructed in the midst of inequitable power relations and hierarchies. Power is central to the conceptualization of culture, and is inseparable from the dominant construction of gender relations.

Women and men invest differentially and strategically in various 'cultural' meanings, and struggles over meaning are as much part of resource relations, as are struggles over surplus or the labour process and property relations (Berry 1988, p. 66, cited in Moore 1993, p. 383). As discussed in Chapter 1, relations of production and relations in production — the former understood as property relations; the latter as labour processes (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 217) — are central to understanding natural resource management issues. In this vein, throughout this case study, specific aspects of culture and society pertaining to land, labour, income generation, and social institutions will be examined. Before proceeding, it is useful to consider one underlying element of Avalogoli culture that permeates gender relations in Maragoli — namely, patriarchy.

Patriarchy

Cultural discourse cannot be viewed in isolation from gender relations, or from patriarchy. Patriarchy is a dominant ideology in Logoli culture and society. However, patriarchy in Maragoli is not mere ideology; it is observable and operative in action, in ideas, and within the gender politics of conjugal relations (Schroeder 1996; Moore 1978). It not only has very real effects on social behaviour and gender relations, but also places very real limits on what is negotiable and what is not. Hence, the ideologies and structures of patriarchy are inextricably linked.

Within this patriarchal "order," Logoli women reproduce patriarchal discourse around gender relations, seemingly reinforcing existing power relations. But, as Moore has suggested, the more entrenched, pervasive and 'rational' organizing cultural concepts appear, the more incongruities — as manifested in negotiation and resistance — can be found behind everything "that seems apparent, and what in turn is hidden behind that" (1978, p. 38). Indeed, in Maragoli, within seemingly rigid rules of conduct, there exists room to maneuver, and space for interpretation and transformation. Patriarchy is not monolithic. And one cannot ignore women's power, agency, and struggles in making room to maneuver within inequitable gender power relations.

Women are expected to show deference to patriarchal authority or suffer the consequences, namely 'punishment' through violence (Abwunza 1997, p. 22), and the weighty sanctioning of being labeled "bad" Logoli women. Women do indeed strike a posture of

deference to patriarchy in public, upholding men's roles as "commanders." By doing so, they create room to maneuver so they can pursue their own interests, and push boundaries. Knowing the difference between what Scott calls public transcripts and hidden transcripts (1990) is useful in understanding the gender division of labour. This distinction offers a way of exploring the spaces and gaps between norms and practice — as spaces that involve continuous struggles over meanings between the patriarchal "order" (manifested in norms regarding gender relations) and the counter-narratives, incongruities, negotiations, and contestations. Considering the complexities that thrive in the politically charged context of the household "scrambles" ideas about a monolithic patriarchal cultural "order," as well as romanticized ideas about overt resistance without considering its very real consequences.

Hence, instead of engaging in an outright contestation and overt resistance to relations of domination, women reproduce patriarchal ideology in a strategy that allows them to pursue their own projects, without the intense scrutinization and social sanctioning that often results from outright contestation. Abwunza contends that "theirs is a form of political agency not really accessible via conceptual approaches previously applied in many East African gender analyses" (1995, p. 34). Through "back-door" decisions (Abwunza 1995), women influence local processes and exert their power in a sophisticated strategy that allows them some degree of freedom of movement, but which nonetheless continues to reproduce the structures of patriarchy that dominate their lives.

Conclusions

By contextualizing broader structural factors and processes — focusing on aspects of history, political economy, and culture and society, and their relation to state and international development policies — it is possible to move beyond simplistic interpretations about soil degradation and unsustainable farming. This contextualization makes it possible to better understand the interplay of factors that shape the complex, gendered micropolitics of land, labour and soils, how they are shaped by these broader processes, and, ultimately, how they contribute to an increasingly stressful local environment in Maragoli. For instance, this chapter has illustrated that key historical interventions and policies, which have set into motion significant changes in soil management and farming practices, have also brought about significant changes in gender relations and livelihood strategies. Similarly, Maragoli's place in Kenya' political-geography, structural adjustment programs, and women's place in Kenyan politics are important political-economic factors that have created some of the problems and constraints that farmers increasingly face in their everyday lives. An ever-changing, yet heavily patriarchal, culture and society enforce and regulate gendered rules and obligations in favour of men, and are key factors that define the parameters of gender relations, and farming and soil management practices. Recognizing the multiple interplay of these broader processes — in both contributing to and exacerbating people's everyday problems, constraints, and lack of access to resources — makes it possible to begin to comprehend the complexity of local resource management and understand people's everyday struggles to survive and to sustain their environments. Based on these broader contexts, the chapters that follow draw on ethnography and photographs as rich mediums for exploring the complexity of farmers' everyday lives and the gendered dynamics of the micropolitics of resource struggles. In doing so, they animate and give meaning to local soil management and farming practices, and ultimately bring into focus what is normally hidden and silenced in conventional approaches.

PART III

The Gendered Terrain of the Farm

The introduction of a new production regime has converted rural Madinka society into a contested social terrain; the primary struggle is a contest over gender and the conjugal contract in which property, or more accurately constellations of property rights, is at stake. By seeing economic life as, among other things, a realm of representations ... the struggles over meaning and the manufacture of symbolic and material dissent in central Gambia — a proliferation of intra-household conflicts, juridical battles over divorce in the local courts, renegotiations of the conjugal contract — are the idioms of ... production politics. (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 207)

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Gender and the Micropolitics of Land

Chapter Four

Property, it has long been observed, is not a relation between people and things. It is a relation between people, concerning things. And if property is always a social relation, one can state as a corollary that property is always structured — always, everywhere, property is structured. (Ferguson 1994, p. 142)

Land is a very important resource in Maragoli. First and foremost, it is critical for soil management and farming. Obviously, there can be no farming or soil management without land. Land is also a critical factor underlying relations of production between people. When farmers lack secure rights to land, they are less likely to invest in sustainable soil management and farming practices. Therefore, to understand the dynamics and linkages between local soil management and farming practices and the micropolitics of land, it is important to investigate farmers' security as well as their insecurity in land tenure. But as Leach argues, arrangements for land tenure and access always implicate gender relations (1991a, p. 19). Hence, at the heart of gendered property relations, as well as the sustainability of soil management and farming, is the issue of security in tenure.

To better understand the complex and dynamic relationship between land and people in terms of everyday lived experience, it is necessary to avoid perpetuating the problems inherent in simplistic neo-Malthusian explanations of soil degradation and conflicts over land as direct outcomes of population pressure and land scarcity (Williams 1995; Tiffen et al. 1994; Moore 1993). Instead, it is important to broaden the scope to include farmers' diverse struggles over land; how these struggles are contextualized within broader social, political-economic, and historical processes; and what these mean indigenously to local women and men (Moore 1993, p. 383).

The first step could be to consider land as a material resource. Land is a critical resource for sustaining livelihoods. As such, it is the focus of intense struggles between and among women and men. However, struggles over land are experienced differently by women and men, depending upon the complex interactions of gender, class, age, marital status, and life-cycle positioning. Women and men negotiate, access, and maintain control over land as a productive and material resource differently and inequitably within local relations of power.

Intense struggles over land highlight the importance of women's ability as farmers to secure long-term rights to and control over the land. This, in addition to insufficient land and other competing priorities, determines the extent to which women as farmers are willing to invest in labour-intensive strategies to sustain the soils. Put another way, farmers' ability to sustain the soils and their farms is compromised by lack of access to economic or other resources that affect their security in tenure (Mackenzie 1995; Leach 1991a). The co-existence of customary and statutory laws — a situation of legal plurality — provides an overlapping set of legal institutions, each characterized by its own sets of rules, principles, and accepted procedures. This plurality of legal structures results in a complex web of options, opportunities, and political spaces for women and men to maneuver, negotiate rights to

land, and contest threats to security in tenure, but within real limits set by patriarchal ideology. Land is also an important symbolic resource. A focus on women's and men's struggles over land must also consider the symbolic and discursive contestations that constitute those struggles (Moore 1993; Schroeder 1996):

> *Attention to the complexities of resource politics in particular localities ... requires close examination of the myriad struggles over the cultural categories through which access to critical environmental resources are contested. An analysis of peasant politics needs to take peasant culture seriously, not simply as a quaint epiphenomenon of structural features of society, but as integral to resource conflicts themselves. (Moore 1993, p. 382)*

As a symbolic resource, land holds important meanings within Avalogoli cultural discourse, defining gender relations and women's and men's rights to access and use land. These multiple meanings are constantly being contested and transformed within a situation of legal plurality. These, in addition to the multiple meanings and the dual importance of land as both a material and symbolic resource, illustrate the diverse ways in which women and men struggle over long-term access to and security of land, as rights to land are gendered. In Maragoli, there is a critical connection between key gendered aspects of security in tenure and sustainable soil management and farming.

Relations regarding land are complex issues that are influenced by the circumstances of individual farmers, including their positioning, identity, and reputation. These must be included in research and analysis. While the following two chapters illustrate that many patriarchal norms and idioms regarding gender relations have undergone transformation, this chapter demonstrates that the ones that continue to remain entrenched and pervasive centre on men's control over property and land, and, ultimately, power.

This chapter begins by situating contemporary struggles over land through a review of the historical and political processes that have shaped property rights and relations. It briefly reviews the history of politics over land from the pre-colonial to the early post-independence period in Maragoli. Drawing on women's and men's personal narratives and photographs, the rest of the chapter explores contemporary relationships between cultural idioms, norms, and meanings regarding land, and the way these are negotiated and contested at the household level through discursive politics and legal processes. First, gendered aspects of land inheritance and usufruct rights to land are examined. In particular, the links between soil fertility and the long-term access to and control over special micro-niches within the farm, such as banana plots and vegetable gardens, are explored. Following this, two situations in which women's and men's security in tenure is threatened are overviewed: when a woman becomes a widow, and when a son is born out of wedlock. Last, this chapter argues that women's ownership of land is fiercely contested in Maragoli. There are two situations that illustrate this fact: when a woman inherits land as an unmarried daughter, and when a woman attempt to purchase land under her own title deed.

Historical struggles over land

Land tenure in Maragoli is an evolving and dynamic process that has been affected and transformed by broader historical and political-economic changes over time, as well as being mediated by ever-evolving cultural norms. An analysis of these broader processes reveals important transformations in the social relations of agricultural production, as well as fundamental transformations in women's and men's relationships to their environment (Moore 1993, p. 383). What follows is a brief summary of these historical transformations and changes regarding land and property relations from the pre-colonial situation to the post-independence period in Maragoli.

Pre-colonial Maragoli

Before the imposition of British colonial rule, both communal and individual lands in Maragoli were an integral part of the landscape, spatially and socially.

Communal lands consisted of forests, grazing land, salt-licks, watering places, pathways, and reserves for building materials. Collective rights to these lands were important in people's livelihoods, as they held a diversity of material and productive resources that were critical to people's survival (Crowley and Carter 2000). Communal lands were used for grazing livestock and were important sites for cultural ceremonies and rites of passage, such as male circumcision. Access to natural resources from these lands was mediated by customary law and controlled by clan elders who allocated land, adjudicated conflicts over it, and regulated its use (Carter et al. 1998, p. 7).

On an individual basis, land was passed trans-generationally through patrilineal segmentary lineages of descent, succession, and inheritance in the late 19th century (Crowley and Carter 2000). A Logoli farmer in her 70s explains the pre-colonial situation in her own words:

> *No one owned their own plot. Land was free for everyone. Land allocation started recently. ... Most of it used to lie fallow. Wherever you marked your land was enough for you. (L041)* [37]

Based on information gathered from farmers' personal narratives, land scarcity did not appear to be a major issue in the pre-colonial period. Land allocation and local disputes were overseen by clan elders. Marriage was the main channel by which men and women gained access to individual land for farming and residence. However, access was differentiated by gender: men were allocated land by their fathers, which corresponded to the section of the *shamba* their mothers worked (which affected allocation decisions, given the existence of multiple wives); women, on the other hand, gained access to use rights to their husband's family land upon marriage and upon bearing a certain number of children. Women did not 'inherit' land outright, except at the discretion of their fathers and in exceptional circumstances where a daughter was either unable to marry or was divorced.

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[37] *This and other accounts in this book are verbatim, unless otherwise specified. The account is represented in the participant's own words, based on responses to interview questions, discussions around photo appraisals, and more detailed accounts shared through personal narratives with the research assistant as part of this process. The account has been translated word for word from Maragoli into English. The coding "(L001)" is a system of coding designed to identify different participants while ensuring their anonymity.*

The colonial period

British colonial rule in Kenya brought about drastic changes in land tenure through a series of acts, policies, and plans that were legislated, from 1894 onward, for the purpose of gaining political and economic control over land. These led to the formation of "native reserves" and the alienation and privatization of land, which threatened security of tenure for Kenyan farmers.[38] In Western Kenya, this meant the establishment of the North Kavirondo Native Reserve, which restricted the population and altered historical, political, and social patterns of migration (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 7).

Fundamental changes to communal lands, the customary laws that regulated them, and the role that clan elders played in administering them took place during this time. After 1926, the political and social functions of the clans as the primary official administrative, political, and judicial authority were superseded by the establishment of headman and Native Tribunals, and were thereafter gradually abolished (Wagner 1970, p.74, cited in Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). This led not only to the decline of the clan's sole authority in socio-economic and agricultural activities but also to the decline of their custodianship of the land (Wagner 1970, p.74, cited in Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). Restrictions on Kenyan settlement imposed by the colonial administration, in combination with continual division of the land through inheritance, created new land constraints in Maragoli. This contributed to the diminishment of available communal lands, which acted as a reserve of undistributed lands set aside for the needs of future generations (Wagner 1970, p.74, cited in Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). These changes further diminished collective rights and entrenched individual rights. Male out-migration played a significant role in exacerbating the process of socioeconomic differentiation, which in turn became rooted in the ability of individuals to accumulate wealth in terms of money and land. A local class of wealthier peasants emerged, with substantial off-farm income and the ability to purchase land.

The Swynnerton Plan (1954) had far-reaching effects on land tenure by advocating for the abandonment of traditional land practices as defined by customary laws and encouraging Kenyan farmers to consolidate holdings under individual title deed (Okoth-Ogendo 1991, pp. 69-74; Davison 1988, p. 164). Based on 'trickle-down' policy, it was formulated on the assumption that "energetic or rich Africans will be able to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landed and a landless class" (Swynnerton 1954, p. 10, cited in Wangari et al. 1996, p. 133). In Maragoli, the Plan caused a large number of households to resettle in areas such as Kabras (Carter et al. 1998, p. 15; Crowley and Carter 2000). The drive towards private ownership entrenched land tenure policies that legitimized differential access to land and exacerbated social differentiation by class and gender (Abwunza 1997; Wangari et al. 1996; Davison 1988). It did not, however, lead to the abandonment of customary law. What emerged instead was the co-existence of legal structures and the entrenchment of patriarchal ideology.

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[38] *More specifically, in 1894, the British Land Acquisition Act allowed for 'empty' land from the coast to the interior to be acquired for the construction of a railway (Davison 1988, p. 164). In 1897, the Crown Land Acts brought millions of acres of the most arable land under the British Protectorate. This was reinforced a number of times during the 20th century (Davison 1988, p. 164). Those whose land had been acquired were confined to native reserves or became laborers on the plantation of foreign settlers. In 1915, the Crown Lands Ordinance, which was subsequently altered and modified over the next 25 years, further formalized the establishment of native reserves to suit the needs of European settlers (Okoth-Ogendo 1991).*

While customary laws were based on a complex set of overlapping, reciprocal and elastic rights to land, in which position in kinship relations, gender, age, and life-cycle position were defining principles, colonial land policies were formulated on a Eurocentric ideology of outright or allodial male ownership, privatization, and exclusive rights (Abwunza 1997, p. 30; Wangari et al. 1996, pp. 130–131; Davison 1988, p. 163). The new form of land tenure recognized the 'head' of the household as male and, therefore, as the sole owner and bearer of the title deed and the means of production (Abwunza 1997, p. 30). This bias failed to recognize the complex, gendered, and reciprocal rights to land, responsibilities, and obligations under customary law, thereby exaggerating male authority and power, as well as privileging allocative rights over use rights. Women's rights to land became invisible within this Western-based legal order. Customary land tenure was transformed and men's power within the household was further entrenched.

The early post-Independence period

Since Kenyan independence in 1963, land tenure policies have continued to exacerbate social differentiation and reinforce patriarchal ideology. Economically wealthier farmers were able to expand their landholdings by purchasing land from those people partaking in government resettlement schemes in the former White Highlands (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 11). Gender bias continued in the practice of land tenure policies such as the Registered Land Act of Kenya (enacted in 1977) and the Law of Succession Act, Chapter 160 (enacted in 1972 and operationalized in 1981). In principle, both acts gave widows and their daughters equal footing with male relatives in property succession at the policy level (Otieno 1998, p. 161; Abwunza 1997, p. 95). In practice, however, they followed the precedents set by colonial statutory laws for the individualization of land through freehold title normally allocated to the male 'head' of the household (Wangari et al. 1996, p. 131; Davison 1988, p. 165). Wangari et al. argue that, while the new legal order did not exclude women from land ownership, it continued to issue title deeds to male 'heads of households,' a reality reflected in the fact that only five percent of Kenyan women were 'officially' landowners in 1995 (1996, p. 131). However, a simple correlation between number of women with title deeds and male bias inherent in the practice of statutory laws cannot be assumed, as this ignores the complex situation of legal plurality inherent in the post-independence period. Mackenzie shows for Central Province a situation of legal plurality similar to Maragoli, where the new system of freehold tenure did not, and has not, preempted other rights to land. Instead, a complex and highly fluid legal plurality emerged. Women were not excluded from either legal order but had different access to *both* statutory and customary law vis-à-vis men — a difference that was further affected by class (Mackenzie 1995a, pp. 17–18), age, life-cycle positioning, and marital status.

Hence, historical changes over time led to a complex situation in terms of land tenure in Maragoli. As the bulk of this chapter will later show, however, there is an intensity inherent in contemporary struggles over land that suggests that land has a significance and meaning not entirely captured by examining legal processes and struggles over land at the household level. Therefore, in order to deepen understandings of contemporary struggles over land — and of their significance for soil management and farming — it is useful to explore the multiple meanings of land in the context of contemporary Maragoli before focusing on people's everyday struggles over this important resource.

"Without land you are nobody": contemporary meanings of land

As in the case described by Moore in Zimbabwe, contemporary struggles over land in Maragoli are often symbolic, constituted within the realm of cultural idioms, norms, and meanings embedded in ideas about morality and patriarchy, which in turn shape struggles over material resources like land (1993, p. 383). Understood this way, land has multiple meanings beyond its significance as a material resource that sustains farming and soil management. Land is an important symbolic resource that is bound up in patriarchal ideology and influenced by social and cultural factors. Symbolic meanings of land are socially constructed and manifest themselves as cultural norms, idioms, and stigmas meant to perpetuate Avalogoli identity and inequitable gender relations. These cultural meanings are constitutive forces that have a real influence in 'ordering' and structuring life, including gendered property relations and gendered struggles over land.

First and foremost, land is understood as "home." As one male farmer explains, "land is for habitation ... for a house and to keep some cows" (L042). Land meets day-to-day needs by providing a place for shelter, livestock, and agricultural production. But as Abwunza explains, the Avalogoli are "known for their attachment to 'home,' where birth gives them membership in a social group and their resting place in death" (1997, p. 14). Hence, land not only has an important significance in life, but also a strong meaning in death. These two meanings, as well as the significance of land as men's "property," are the context for the gendered dynamics relating to land and explain the intensity around gendered struggles over land.

Land as "home"

The Avalogoli "attachment to home" (Abwunza 1997) is reflected in the fact that, despite high levels of out-migration, especially among men, Logoli women and men continue to retain strong links to "home." An economically wealthy widow aged 52 explains:

> *As I can see, I am staying here. I have a banana [plot] here, am planting vegetables, am getting some little maize; I have a cow and get some milk. ... I don't pay rent. ... [People who out-migrate] know one day they'll retire. After retiring from their jobs they will go back to their* shamba. *That is why in Kenya, we have houses and homes. You know in Nairobi you have a house, and in Maragoli you have home. (L001)*

There is an important distinction worth noting between what is considered as a "home" and what is considered a "house." Although men may spend decades away from Maragoli, their claims to land remain intact as long as they do not establish a permanent "home" in the place they are employed, even if it serves as their "house." Even from a distance, they continue to remain Avalogoli and are bound to social and cultural obligations such as funerals, weddings, and kin relationships and duties, as well as sometimes "providing" for their family's education, housing, farming, and bride-wealth needs in their rural homes (Crowley and Carter 2000). They always return to their homes when they retire, and are always buried on their *shambas* (Crowley and Carter 2000).

Another important meaning of "home" is based on the belief that long-term personal security is derived from owning or having access to land. As different political and economic policies have come and gone over time, one thing that has always remained steadfast in Maragoli is the knowledge and security that one can turn to the land as "home." This remains true as long as one remains within the constructs and norms of the changing yet pervasive patriarchal ideology. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, deviating from these norms entails strong social stigmas and a strong sense of insecurity and alienation, both in the personal sense as well in terms of rights to land. A farmer, a 48-year-old woman, explains the importance of gaining access to a "home":

> *Each and every person needs a place to take care of herself ... to belong somewhere. And if you don't get [a home], you usually feel lonely and you will ask yourself what happened and won't stay happy in your life. (L026)*

The significance of land in relation to death

A 76-year-old Logoli farmer and retired electrician articulately and succinctly explains the importance of land in life and in death:

> *Without land, you are nobody. And if you die, you need some piece of land to be buried on your own plot. (L042)*

Photo 1: A 64-year-old farmer describes her photograph: "I was there, near the grave of my husband. This picture is for the future generation to see where their grandfather is buried" [in the front yard of her compound]. (L023)

Logoli women and men are buried in front of their houses. While married men are buried on their ancestoral *shambas*, married women are buried on their husband's *shambas*. Unmarried women are an 'exception' or an 'anomaly' within patriarchal norms. In the words of a Logoli farmer, "traditionally you will always be referred to as a girl until you get married." An unmarried woman is buried as a "girl" on her parents' land, and certain ceremonies that normally would have been performed had she been married are not performed at her funeral. The same applies to unmarried men, although social stigmas in life and death are not as fierce.

Having a "proper" funeral is centrally important in people's lives and has both immediate and long-term implications for soil management and agriculture. A funeral consists of a burial and a commemoration ceremony that takes place some time after a person's death, when enough money has been raised for it. Without a proper funeral, it is believed, the deceased do not rest peacefully and create difficulties for the living (Abwunza 1997, p. 115). Funerals are normally attended by everyone in the extended family and the village.

In the immediate term, having a proper Avalogoli funeral means that all agricultural and soil management work must be halted. Farmers believe that continuing to "dig,"[39] will result in a curse on the living, and that the land worked on will not produce (Abwunza 1997, p. 53). Indeed, during the course of this research, agricultural, soil management, and research activities frequently came to a halt for these reasons.

In the long term, a commemoration ceremony is significant because it is here that a person's life history is told. How one is to be remembered in death is a crucial and powerful factor in people's lives. Women spoke about how they anticipated they would be remembered at their funerals and in death. Most women who "persevered" through the hardships of their lives explained that they looked forward to being remembered as "good" Logoli women — as examples for others. However, women who "deviated" from social norms such as marriage felt apprehensive that they would be remembered merely as "girls" in death. For instance, the feelings that were projected during interviews with adult unmarried women were those of immense fear and anxiety, as well as heavy all-encompassing sadness and regret.

[39] *"Digging" refers to the labour-intensive work of clearing, breaking the soil, planting, and weeding.*

Photo 2: "This picture was taken when mzee [my father-in-law] died ... These people had a table and were collecting money that would enable people to pay contributions [towards funeral expenses]." (L029)

Land as men's "property"

Land is also a patriarchal social construction. Along with women, children, and livestock, land is considered men's "property" in Maragoli. One married Logoli woman explains, "We [women and children] are his property. That's what they say, men's property!" (L014). This patriarchal ideology is sustained and perpetuated through the language of custom, based on men's roles as "commanders" (Abwunza 1997). This situation was also reinforced during colonialism by the adoption of western concepts of men as outright 'owners' of land and property (Kitching 1980, p. 285). While the "Avalogoli way" is discursively upheld by both women and men, men have the upper hand in the re-creation and perpetuation of elements of custom, as they are able to invoke cultural norms and reproduce western legal concepts that perpetuate gender relations and power in their favour (Mackenzie 1990, p. 635). Although women recognize these inequities, many believe that it is "a matter of persevering." Women often assume a posture of deference to patriarchal ideology, making room to maneuver by making "back-door" decisions (Abwunza 1997) and engaging in covert acts of resistance, rather than contesting patriarchal property relations outright.[40] Nonetheless, the fact that most "property" is owned by men significantly affects the way struggles over resources play out and the types of options and opportunities that are available to women, especially in situations in which they are vulnerable to threats to security of tenure.

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[40] *As discussed later in this chapter, when women engage in overt acts of resistance, they do so knowing that such acts entail severe consequences in terms of foregoing rights and claims to "property" and status.*

By exploring the multiple meanings of land — as a "home"; in relation to death; and as men's "property" — it is possible to gain new understandings of land as more than just a material resource. By investigating the symbolic meanings of land, it is possible to better understand the intense and complex struggles that take place over it. Land is not only crucial to people's very livelihoods; it is inextricably tied to their sense of status and Logoli identity.

The contemporary micropolitics of land

In Maragoli, land tenure in the 1990s is characterized by three forms of access to and control over land: land inheritance, usufruct rights to land, and the management of special microniches within the farm. The different forms of access to and control over land play an important role in determining the nature and scale of gendered struggles over land and their impact on soil management and farming.

Before investigating the dynamics and struggles over land tenure, it is useful to contextualize two factors that affect access to and control over land: land size and the co-existence of two legal spheres.

Access, control, and struggles over land take place in a situation in which landholdings are both intensively farmed and often insufficient for livelihood requirements. As discussed earlier, Maragoli is predominantly made up of smallholdings varying between "a point" (less than one hectare) and three hectares. Increasing land pressure — caused by land alienation, social differentiation, continual subdivision of land through patrilineal descent, and, to some extent, population growth (which must be contextualized within the broader politics of land distribution and division at the national level, and further offset by the impact of permanent out-migration and the effects of AIDS-related deaths on the local population) — has meant that, in some extreme cases, *shambas* have been reduced to a small garden plot. This situation is best described in the words and photographs of the two Logoli farmers below.

A 66-year-old farmer who recently divided his less than two-acre shamba among seven sons, describes the situation on his land:

> *It is bad ... because of the congestion. I mean the cow is here with me. I can't take it anywhere else because the space does not allow me to move it anywhere else ... because of the small sizes of the plots. For example, I am here alone and I've given birth to seven boys, meaning seven houses are to be constructed on the same plot. ... The plot has been subdivided into small pieces and the owners want to till them. So grass can't be grown in the home, and this is how scarcity comes by. (L019)*

The following photograph illustrates this situation.

Photo 3: This photograph was taken by the same farmer. He describes it in his own words: "This photograph shows how tiny the compound I live on is. I live with my cow, and my sons' houses are on the same compound too." (L019)

Photo 4: This photograph, taken by another farmer who is 27 years old, also illustrates the situation on some compounds. She explains: "I took this picture of these two houses squeezed together — meaning that the plot is so small that the houses have to be joined so that everyone gets a place to construct. It affects farming. The houses have been built where we were supposed to farm, so we end up with very tiny plots because the houses have covered most of the plot." (L019)

These photographs and accounts illustrate that when already small landholdings are subdivided for the purposes of passing land trans-generationally, there is sometimes limited space remaining for extensive farming or soil management. In these situations, longstanding practices such as fallowing, growing thatch grass, and grazing cows may no longer be an option. Despite diminished plot sizes, however, and the fact that fewer *shambas* produce enough food or income for sustaining livelihoods, land continues to be of central importance in people's lives (for the reasons described in the previous section) and is often the crux of legal struggles and heated gender politics.

There has been an intensification of struggles over land and a correlating escalation of gender politics. However, this intensification must be contextualized within the broader historical and political-economic processes discussed in Chapter Three, including the inequitable distribution of land among various ethnoregional groups in Kenya, as well as the colonial imposition of land policies and acts, which entrenched men's authority and power in term of rights to and control over land and property relations.

Furthermore, struggles over land play out within and across two overlapping legal spheres: statutory laws and customary laws. Statutory laws have not preempted, replaced, or overridden customary laws; instead, there is a certain degree of fluidity in the use of land rights mediated by the two legal spheres. As Mackenzie notes in relation to Central Province, Kenya:

> *Customary law and statutory law are not two isolated and essential legal orders. Rather, they provide spaces within which people, differentiated ... by class and gender, contest rights to land. (1995a, p. 18)*

The stipulations of both customary and statutory laws cannot be separated from patriarchal norms, or from the ideological and symbolic processes associated with them, which consolidate control over material property in favour of men. Women negotiate control over land by navigating both between and within the two legal spheres. In some cases, women draw upon customary law as a strategy to retain control when, paradoxically, their rights are threatened by men's manipulation of custom. Furthermore, women's rights to land may also be threatened by more powerful women in the household compound. In these situations, they may also choose to draw upon certain elements of customary law to argue their rights to use and access their share of land. In other cases, women use statutory laws — when they are able to access the judicial system to defend their rights, and when this same system is not being used against them by men.

Each legal sphere has different mechanisms for dispute resolution, sets of rules, decision-making bodies, hierarchical structures, and degrees of accessibility. People use one or the other to access and retain control over rights to land, depending on the costs and benefits associated with either system. Recognizing the existence of these two legal spheres is important in order to better understand the local dynamics of land tenure, as well as struggles over land resulting from threats to security of tenure and women's ownership.

The following discussion illustrates that, in Maragoli, land tenure in the 1990s is distinguished between rights of ownership and rights of use and access. In particular, the issue of access to and control over special micro-niches on the shamba is a distinct case that directly affects soil management and farming, and therefore warrants individual attention.

Land inheritance

Customary law, although modified over time, continues to take precedence in Maragoli in terms of land inheritance. While marriage remains the central channel by which the rights of individual access to land, and ownership and use of land, are distributed, these rights are mediated by gender. Men gain rights to land inheritance through trans-generational patrilineal segmentary lineages of succession. Men are allocated land by their fathers upon marriage, whereupon the construction of a permanent dwelling and banana plot signify the establishment of their residence.[41] However, as landholdings become increasingly smaller, scarcer, and unaffordable (the current price being 50,000 shillings for half an acre), land allocation does not always occur according to the proper "Avalogoli way." Logoli fathers do not always immediately allocate all portions of the *shamba* to their sons and daughters-in-law upon their marriage. In a situation of highly charged gender politics, as well as high instances of male out-migration and widowhood, sometimes the decision to allocate land is ultimately made by women, as will be shown later in this chapter.

Struggles over land have become intense, especially among economically poorer households. These struggles occur in a context where there is a great deal of spatial variability within landholdings in terms of crops grown and soil fertility. For instance, certain parts of the *shamba* may have better soil fertility or be planted with more economically valuable crops such as tea or French beans. Hence, the formal allocation of these lucrative parts of the *shamba* becomes a strategic decision. Farmers sometimes opt to hold off allocating these sections in order to continue generating income as long as they can. This decision varies among farmers and depends on plot size, cash crops grown, number of sons, number of migrant sons, and the intensity of struggles over land among sons for these sections of the *shamba*. While farmers may not immediately allocate all land to their sons upon marriage, many nonetheless do so while they are still alive to avoid conflicts that may arise after their death. An 80-year-old widow explains:

> *My son and the village elder [divided the land] ... I just decided it as early as this when I'm still alive to avoid [my sons from] attacking each other. ... There are many quarrels. And people would say it is their parents' mistakes. "Why didn't they divide the land when he was still alive?" Because usually [when] the land is already divided and boundary markers are in place, nobody will ever think of going beyond the boundaries. (L001)*

Another woman in her 70s similarly explains:

> *If you have children, it is a must you divide the piece of land and give one portion to one and another portion to the other. ... Nowadays, it is the children who bring about all this noise. He says I want to dig here, and he says I want to dig here, this is how the noise is coming along. Then the difference comes. And long ago there wasn't difference. ... Children never refused. Those ones used to understand their father ... (L039)*

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[41] *A man's father designates the area where the house is to be built by placing the four posts of the house in the ground (Abwunza 1997, p. 196). Women are not allowed to build houses. Although they may help out in constructing parts of the dwelling, they are restricted from putting up the main frame or laying the foundation.*

Because farmers sense an increased potential, after their deaths, for conflicts over land among sons and daughters-in-law, they prefer to ensure that land is divided and allocated while they are alive. However, many delay allocating the most lucrative parts as long as they can, in order to ensure their access to income as well as their survival.

Farmers' accounts indicate that struggles over land have intensified over time. However, these struggles must be placed within historical, political-economic, and environmental contexts rather than assuming a simplistic causal link between population growth, land pressure, and increased conflicts over land. In Maragoli, state policies, over time, have meant a drive towards a cash-based economy, which in turn has exacerbated struggles over the most economically lucrative sections of the *shamba*. The size and section of the *shamba* a person inherits has implications for that person's ability to continue to generate income, and to play a role in determining the intensity of struggles over land in terms of inheritance, as well as access and use rights. Moreover, as discussed earlier, state politics since independence have directly defined the way land has been inequitably distributed among different ethnoregional groups in Kenya. In other words, the high "congestion" in Maragoli is also a result of the way land has been distributed among different ethnoregional groups over time. It is, therefore, also a factor worth considering when investigating the intensification of struggles over land. But it must not be considered in isolation from the rising number of deaths from AIDS and other diseases, as well as the trend towards permanent out-migration, which also counteracts the trend in increased population.

Usufruct rights to land

While individual sections of land are land is allocated from father to son, access to land is contingent upon marriage. Women play a critical role in allowing land inheritance through the patrilineal line to take place. Women are normally allocated land for use by their fathers-in-law upon or soon after marriage. In cases where fathers-in-law are absent, male elders may be called to do so by mothers-in-law who are considered the heads of their household. Women's rights to land through marriage are further solidified through the birth of children. A Logoli woman in her 80s explains:

> *When you first move to a new home, when you become a wife, you first stay until you give birth to three or sometimes even four children. Then they realize you need a place to till your own food for your own children. If your father in-law is there, he will allocate the plot. If he is dead, then your mother-in-law gets some men to allocate for you. If the mother-in-law cannot allocate the land, you have to go and get a brother [cousin] to your husband. That is how it is done in Maragoli. (L041)*

Without the birth of children, including at least one son, these rights can be contested and the woman may be "chased" away, no matter who in the marriage may be responsible for the infertility. The case of Rachel, outlined in Chapter Eight, illustrates such a situation.

In the case of polygamous marriages, in which each wife must be allocated her own house and *shamba*, the arrangement is slightly altered. The following account of a 44-year-old woman whose husband married a second wife after four years of marriage illustrates this situation:

> *When I came here we used to work hand in hand with my mother-in-law. ... I started working on my plot when my mother-in-law said she was growing weak and she didn't have the strength to work on the shamba anymore. So she asked us to work on. ... Then the day came when my co-wife was to join the family, and because both of us could not share everything with our mother-in-law when we belong to one man, our husband decided to buy another plot down here [pointing in a certain direction]. So I was supposed to start cooking in my house and the same [applies] to my co-wife. So she cooks her own meals and farms. And she's been shown where to farm. ... I am the one who has remained on this plot and I till on this one. This is my home and my co-wife is the one who is supposed to move where she tills. (L027)*

As the above account demonstrates, a husband must provide both wives with separate plots and houses. When a husband does not have enough land to do so, the onus is on him to acquire another plot, usually through purchase, to ensure that both wives are allocated their own plots to farm, and in order that their respective sons may inherit the land they farmed.[42]

While fathers-in-law and male elders are recognized as being in charge of allocating land, mothers-in-law may also play a role in the allocation of land insofar as they are able to negotiate the timing of allocation and control of productive land that generates income. Elizabeth, for example, awaits being allocated the most lucrative sections of the land to farm by her mother-in-law.[43]

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[42] *A hierarchy in the allocation of land to co-wives is followed, as the senior wife normally remains in the ancestral home while the junior wife is allocated a purchased or secondary plot. This seniority is maintained because when a man dies, he must be buried on the senior wife's shamba. As one woman explains, "According to Avalogoli tradition ... junior co-wives are regarded as daughters of the senior wife" (L032). This cultural norm is invoked by senior wives to defend their use rights to land, especially when faced with threats of land division, which would affect their livelihoods in the immediate term and reduce the amount of land inherited by their sons in the future. Moreover, in the past, when landholdings were larger, economically wealthy men married multiple wives, as this was an indicator of status and wealth, as well as a means of accessing labour. Today, men sometimes engage in extramarital affairs or have co-wives in town to whom they divert their resources, sometimes allocating land to "out-grown" sons borne from these relationships. In such circumstances, resources such as land become the focus of intra-household conflict among co-wives, husbands, and "out-grown" sons. Co-wives living at "home" complain bitterly about husbands who out-migrate and take other wives, effectively "forgetting" about them. In many instances, they receive no monetary remittances and assistance from their husbands, and are sometimes left caring for "out-grown" children in addition to their own. Men who cannot provide separate houses and shambas for their wives face heavy criticism from their wives, sons, and the community.*

[43] *This account of Elizabeth's experiences as a farmer and young wife is presented here in my own words, based on our interviews. They are in the third person, as they are transcribed from my personal field notes.*

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a twenty-four year old newly wed woman who has been living in her marital home for two years. Her father-in-law is deceased and her husband is the only son in the family. He is living and working in Nairobi and she sees him rarely. He has not been allocated a plot and therefore cannot build a house (Elizabeth lives in the back room of the kitchen with her two children.) While her mother-in-law continues to control and farm the family tea plot, Elizabeth has been given use rights to a very small plot where she grows cabbage, sugar cane and bananas. The ultimate decision to allocate land to build a house and to control the tea plot lies in the hands of her mother-in-law, who finds the revenue from the tea plantation too lucrative to give it up. (L006)

In an increasingly stressful economic environment, mothers-in-law often find ways to delay the transfer of land to their daughters-in-law. They draw on elements of custom that call for the birth of three to four children, or call upon the patriarchal ideology itself to dictate that a daughter-in-law prove herself as a "good" Logoli wife through the provision of household and farm labour (a subject that will be developed in Chapter Five as Elizabeth's narrative is elaborated further). Older women draw on elements of custom to maintain control and power over a daughter-in-law's access and rights to use land in the short term. This situation emphasizes struggles over resources that take place *between women* in different positions in relation to power, authority, and life cycle. In the long term, the ability of older women and men to negotiate access to resources from their sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren depends on the types of personal relationships they have maintained with them. A focus on inter-generational relationships highlights the importance of age and changing life-cycle circumstances, and, hence, power relations, within the household in terms of land tenure. As discussed below, these relationships are especially pertinent in relation to land tenure pertaining to special micro-niches on the *shamba*.

The micropolitics of banana: long-term access and control over special micro-niches

Despite the eventual allocation of family land to sons and daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law continue to have long-term access to, control over, and use of land upon which their houses are constructed, as well as the banana and vegetable garden plots behind these houses. These plots in particular constitute an interesting and special micro-niche on the *shamba* in terms of cultural significances, as well as land tenure and soil management, which warrants special consideration and analysis.

Banana plots are both a physical and a symbolic representation of the establishment of a new household on the family compound. They also carry other multiple meanings and significance, as they provide food, storage areas for cattle fodder, a place for fermenting sorghum, and secluded sites for child bearing, love trysts, ritual cleansing, and oath-taking ceremonies (Crowley and Carter 2000). It has further been argued that the banana and vegetable garden plot constitutes a special micro-niche on the farm, which by virtue of its proximity to the household and location in the lowest lying section of the land, receives more nutrients from household and on-farm refuse, as well as inputs such as chicken droppings, manure from nearby livestock enclosures, and waste and rainwater from the house. For these reasons, it is also higher in soil fertility and organic matter than any other part of the *shamba* (Carter et al. 1998, p. 26; Crowley and Carter 2000).

Photo 5: "This where I used to work when I was still strong ... I've [now] run short of strength. ... But I still use [the bananas and other products from the plot] when they are ready." (L032)

However, evidence gathered in Maragoli suggests that the special attention the banana and vegetable garden plot receives in terms of soil fertility and labour inputs is due not only to its proximity to the household as a "convenient place to dump refuse" (Carter et al. 1998, p. 26; Crowley and Carter 2000). *It is also an important long-term strategy that has to do with women's security of tenure.* Older women often continue to work on and control banana and vegetable garden plots, even in situations in which the rest of the *shamba* has been allocated among their sons and daughters-in-law. Therefore, the fact that this micro-niche receives such special attention is not only a mere function of geography. It is also a conscious and strategic decision that is a function of the relationship between land tenure, gender, age, and life-cycle position. Put another way, given women's long-term tenure of banana and vegetable garden plots, and their access to and control over products such as bananas, intercropped vegetables, and green manure, these plots constitute a special micro-niche of high soil fertility because *it is in their livelihood interests* to ensure that these plots receive ample amounts of organic matter and nutrients in order to maintain their long-term sustainability and productivity. The importance of these special micro-niches also influences women's decisions in terms of their labour inputs and priorities.

Photo 6: "This picture is showing something good. It is showing my banana plantation, tomatoes, pepper, vegetables, and many other things. It helps me. ... I can just go and sell it in order to buy a tin of maize for food. ... Without the things in the picture, I would be helpless. This trench, I dug it — I don't want moles that are there to enter it so that it can be good. If you leave it just like that, it will all fall down. The trench also prevents the water to not go to the bananas, because if it enters it, it will all fall down." (L030)

Understanding the importance given to these micro-niches is critical to understanding the local dynamics and variability of soil management practices, and is a key factor when considering and planning future soil management and agricultural initiatives.

The strategic decisions that women make within their *shambas* illustrate that long-term security of land is central to their livelihoods. These strategic decisions affect the manner in which women allocate their time and energies on the farm, and, in particular, determine the extent to which they invest in sustainable soil management and farming practices. When farmers have security of tenure, they also feel secure that their land will be inherited by their sons, and further feel that this security reflects their reputation and efforts as a "good" Logoli woman. Given this importance, women will engage in fierce material and symbolic struggles to defend their land rights when they are threatened, using both customary and statutory law as strategic 'weapons' of defence in varying circumstances.

Photo 7: "Because of their goodness, bananas are just seen good. The soil is good because of the manure. I use cow manure. I usually put all the rubbish from my compound, especially when I sweep my compound yard. The bananas give me sugar, I can sell them and buy sugar and also I can boil it at noon for grandchildren to eat as lunch after school." (L001)

Contemporary struggles over land and meaning

The types of priorities, constraints, and motivations that farmers experience in terms of their long-term security of land are intertwined with sustainable soil management and farming. Put another way, the amount of energy, time, and labour that people are willing to invest in soil management depends on their ability to maintain long-term security of tenure, which in turn is shaped by their ability to succeed in struggles over land within the limits constructed and perpetuated by patriarchal ideology and within multiple legal institutions. Since long-term security in tenure is critical to sustainable farming and soil management, it is important to investigate and understand the struggles that play out over land, the context in which they take place, their many gendered dimensions and manifestations, and the consequences and implications for sustainable soil management and farming.

Threats to security in tenure

The likelihood that farmers will invest in sustainable soil management and farming practices depends on their ability to maintain long-term security in tenure. While women and men gain rights to access and use land through customary law, these rights, in practice, are not beyond "attack" and can be contested. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the conditions under which farmers' security of tenure may come under threat. This not only helps to better understand the circumstances and dynamics that lead to this situation, but also places development practitioners in a better position to plan policies and initiatives in collaboration with local farmers who are vulnerable under these circumstances. In short, the goal is to

understand local conditions, constraints, and problems pertaining to land tenure so that locally based solutions can be formulated for farmers to continue to farm and to sustain their soils and livelihoods.

In particular, there are two situations in which people's security in tenure and symbolic and material struggles over land have become especially acute in Maragoli. The first pertains to different circumstances under which widows' rights to tenure are threatened by their husbands' families through the custom of "widow-inheritance." The second pertains to sons who are "out-grown" (i.e. born out-of-wedlock), and whose rights to land inheritance are made vulnerable or denied by their fathers and stepmothers. These two situations also emphasize that access to resources is a negotiated process, even within a plural legal structure involving written legal codes.

The many experiences of "widow-inheritance"

There are many widows in Maragoli, and many are heads of household. In this study, 14 women out of 39 were widows, and two out of seven men were widowers. However, losing a husband can put women in a particularly precarious situation in more ways than one. It is common for widows to have their security in tenure called into question or threatened outright, and in some cases they may be "chased" from their *shambas* and homes. In fact, many women recognize that attempts at "chasing" one from one's land upon a husband's death are common. Married women who have economically productive *shambas* especially anticipate and worry about this threat in advance. These situations can be brought about by a long-standing yet evolving Logoli custom called "widow-inheritance."

In the past, through the custom of widow-inheritance, a brother-in-law inherited all the "property" of his deceased brother, including the widow herself, her children, land, and any livestock present or owed through bridewealth payments. This not only ensured that land, wealth, and "property" were kept within the family and the sub-clan's control, but also secured the widow's long-term security in tenure, her status within the clan, and her sons' eventual inheritance of the *shamba* she had farmed. For example, an 80-year-old widow who was inherited by her brother-in-law after her husband's death explains both the custom of widow-inheritance and her own experiences:

> *It was a good thing. ... It depended on how you agreed with someone. ... During then, when someone inherited you, you respected him as your husband. ... [But] it was difficult because of the sorrow, the head of the household had left me young. My brother-in-law inherited me and we stayed together nicely. He never mistreated me. ... I continued to grow crops there [on my land]. Then when my elder son grew up, he went to construct his house there [he inherited the land]. (L003)*

This account illustrates that widow inheritance was a potentially beneficial experience, depending upon a woman's personal relationship with her brother-in-law. It provided women with an avenue to maintain access to and control over land until it was allocated to her son(s) and daughter(s)-in-law.

Today, widow-inheritance has taken on a different form and meaning. In a highly changed environment — where access to land is increasingly limited, costs of bringing up children are high (involving escalating costs of school fees, uniforms, etc. and the provision of land to all sons, including those "inherited" through the custom of widow-inheritance), and where AIDS is a very real health threat (especially where the cause of a husband's death is "unknown")[44] — men invoke selective aspects of the custom of "widow-inheritance" that focuses on inheriting land. This practice silences other aspects of the custom that involve "inheriting" the widow and her children, as these aspects would entail taking on additional financial burdens and obligations. When invoked in this manner, "widow-inheritance" involves men "chasing" their deceased brother's widow from her *shamba*, a situation that may be facilitated if her reputation as a "bad" Logoli wife can be demonstrated. Widows who were new in their marital circumstances, or who have young children, are particularly vulnerable to being "chased," whereas those with adult sons are in a stronger position to defend their rights to the land. However, older widows are at a greater risk of having their land forcefully divided and appropriated by their brothers-in-law.

The reinterpretation of the custom of widow-inheritance by men has become a very real threat to women's long-term rights to land. Women have responded to this threat by invoking statutory laws in some cases and customary laws in others, depending on their individual situations and circumstances. Understanding the dynamics of this situation, the circumstances under which women's rights to land are threatened, and the resources necessary to defend these rights, is critical for soil management. This is especially pertinent because long-term security of tenure is a major motivating factor for sustaining the soils. Furthermore, maintaining the continuity of extensive agricultural knowledge is critical in a context in which there is a high degree of spatial variability. The following three personal narratives of Desi, Rebeka, and Jane describe the varied yet creative ways that women engage in fierce and complex struggles over land in response to the threat of widow-inheritance, despite the limited resources available to them.

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[44] *In Maragoli, there is a stigmatization associated with deaths resulting from AIDS, which affects people not only when they are diagnosed, but also in death, when their histories are remembered. Because of this, farmers will often cite "malaria" or "unknown" as cause of death.*

Desi

Desi is a widow in her mid-50s. After her husband passed away in 1969, her brother-in-law attempted to "chase" her from her shamba*:*

> *My brother-in-law and I, both of us scrambled for the land. Him, he wanted to chase me away so he could occupy my soil. Then I went to the local elders because the shamba had already been subdivided and everybody had his own piece. ... He wanted to grab mine. So I reported to the sub-chief and they summoned him and asked why he is disturbing [me]. They asked him, "This woman, did you try to inherit her and she refused?" He said, "No, I just want her to go. Mother is there, she will take care of the children." Then they asked him, "How long will your mother be alive to take care of the children? And will you give this woman the food she cooks for her children which you will take to your mother to cook for them? And expense matters in helping the children?" Then he was defeated. ... It hurts a lot when your husband dies, leaves you a plot for you and someone else tries to claim it. He had no right, he was just a nuisance. He was just out to disturb me.*

Desi explains that she appealed to customary law to adjudicate the dispute as a first line of defense because "you just know that home affairs have to go through elders first. If they are defeated, then you can proceed to court." Desi defended her rights to her land by invoking a particular element of "widow-inheritance" that her brother-in-law attempted to ignore, namely all the responsibilities for "providing" resources. Knowing that her brother-in-law was not prepared to "inherit" her, customary law became the best avenue for her to defend her rights. Of course, all of this depended on her reputation as a "good" Logoli woman at the time of her widowhood, indicating the importance of reputation as a critical aspect of land tenure.

Interestingly, Desi's situation changed after she defended her rights to land and had four children out-of-wedlock with a man outside her sub-clan:

> *He was just a friend. And I had my home. I couldn't move from here, the reason being that my son wouldn't have got his share of land. My brother [in-law] wanted me to go. So I had to stick here and wait for my share. ... When there is a case like that, they [the clan] have to complain, "Where does this man come from? Messing our homesteads." Women are never interested in such things. The clansmen are the ones who get involved. But women and children, no. They know someone can have a friend.*

Desi did not marry this "friend," because to do so would have entailed losing her status as a first wife, as well as foregoing all claims to her shamba *for a smaller piece of land and making her sons' rights to inherit insecure. While women in her sub-clan were more understanding and supportive of her circumstances, she was harassed by clansmen who were concerned about defending clan land from the claim of "outsiders," and also controlling her behaviour within the norms of the Avalogoli patriarchy:*

> *Widows face very unsettled lives. ... You find that people fear interfering with your home affairs when a husband is around. If not, they keep on disturbing you. There is gossip and trespasses on my* shamba*. ... You may have neighbours, can you see this is the boundary fence? You have to keep disagreeing, like maybe "your cow has eaten my maize, or my beans." The owner may make a lot of noise or even report you to the elders. "Your child cut a maize from my* shamba*" and it becomes a case that has to be settled. Or you quarrel between yourselves. So like her, there must be some lack of respect because that's a compound headed by one person. ... Because they know you are a woman and being alone there is nothing you can do ... (L024)*

Photo 8: The "culprits" who trespassed on her neighbour's land are tied to a tree.

Desi's account illustrates three important points regarding gender property relations and land tenure.[45] First, customary law is used by women to retain control over land when their rights are threatened.[46] Economically poorer widows are more likely to go to elders first to resolve disputes, using "widow-inheritance" itself as a weapon of defence, because cultural norms require that a brother-in-law who "inherits" his brother's wife must also "provide" for that wife and her children. This norm has become difficult to fulfill in today's stressful economic environment, and therefore women use it to defend their rights to land.

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[45] *This narrative, consisting of Desi's experiences as a farmer and co-wife, is based on transcriptions of recordings of her personal narrative. The double-indented, single-spaced passages in this account are direct quotations of Desi's own words as expressed in this recording and as translated by research assistants from Maragoli. The passages that begin at the far left margin include other details conveyed during recorded interviews and personal narratives, but are best expressed in my words. This format applies to all subsequent narratives, unless otherwise specified.*

[46] *While at the turn of the century, patrilineal elders played a central role in arbitrating land disputes and presiding over land allocation and demarcation, as well as the distribution of uncleared land, today, clan elders are sometimes still brought in to mediate household succession, as well as territorial land disputes pertaining to individual holdings.*

The second point illustrated by Desi's case is that clan and sub-clan solidarity, kin ideology, and territoriality are strong forces in the manipulation of custom to control women's behaviour and therefore maintain local gender power relations. Customs of marriage and inheritance are invoked by clansmen to keep widows from remarrying, for fear of losing clan land to "outsiders." As Jefremovas has illustrated in the case of Rwanda, acting as a "virtuous" widow is powerfully sanctioned by the clan (1991, p. 229b), in order to control women's behaviour. Women with reputations as "virtuous" widows face less harassment and are less likely to be "chased," whereas those who act "bold" are more likely to have their rights threatened and are socially penalized through harassment. Moreover, a focus on these dynamics highlights that everyday conflicts involving boundaries and "trespasses" are not caused simply by land pressure. Rather, they are also culturally specific and related to a person's identity and reputation.

The third point illustrated by this case is that Desi could not defend her rights to land using the Law of Succession Act, Chapter 160 (operationalized in 1981), as it was not in effect in 1969 when she was struggling to retain rights to her land. Although the Act is operational today, it is difficult to invoke. As the following narratives illustrate, not only are there monetary costs associated with engaging and accessing the codes and institutions of statutory law, these laws cannot be separated from the wider practices of patriarchal ideology and men's control over "property," making them difficult for women to use effectively or equitably.

The destruction of a house on one of Rebeka's plots acted as a strong physical deterrent against her nephew taking up residence on the *shamba*. It was also a powerful symbolic gesture that halted her nephew from taking up residence and laying claim to the land — an overt act of resistance that spoke volumes about her determination to retain her rights to her land.

Photo 9: Rebeka stands outside her house. She took the photograph "to see how I looked in my own compound." (L003)

Rebeka's narrative illustrates how women may engage in material as well as symbolic struggles to protect their land rights, drawing on both statutory law and custom. However, women's ability to engage in these choices requires access to resources and is influenced by their class, as gaining title deeds requires money and influence. Further, a radical and overt act of resistance, such as destroying a house, can only be carried out if a woman has an alternative residence, an option that is not viable or desirable for an economically poor woman. It also illustrates women's disadvantaged political position in the practice of statutory law, as men's claims as 'heads' of household take powerful precedence (now matter how problematic) in the operationalization of legal structures that regulate land tenure.

Rebeka

Rebeka, aged 52, is an elite and economically wealthy woman whose husband died eight years ago, leaving her three separate plots of land. Even though she changed all the title deeds to her name, her brother-in-law "grabbed" and sold one of her plots without her consent or knowledge:

> *My husband had three brothers ... we used to stay well with them. But after his death, the brother whom my husband follows started saying that there was a plot that he bought with my late husband. But me, I denied. I asked him to bring what shows they bought [land] together [the title deed]. But he didn't produce anything. ... I had changed the title deeds in my name. I thought they [in-laws] might steal or do something on them. He had started [to try] but when I told him "me, I didn't see you buying this plot," he just kept quiet and that is when he went and sold that one in Kitale. ... And me without knowing ... he had gone and started selling. I just heard [from] someone telling me. From there is when I really knew the plot had already been sold.*

Rebeka believed that statutory law would defend her rights to land. Her brother-in-law, however, was able to subvert statutory law in his favour by gaining access to information about her title deed, thereby gaining control of her plot. She explains the situation:

> *Nowadays, people are funny. Someone can know your title deed. Maybe he has gone to land office at Kakamega, asking, "just let me know someone's title deed number, or the number of this plot." And they cannot hide [from] him, [the title deed information] to see, and from there someone can do something without you knowing.*

Subsequently, there was another attempt at "grabbing" her land, which she managed to avert by taking drastic measures:

> *[It was] the original home of my husband, so he had put up a house there before we came here. And that house used to just stay there. But it was one day I heard a son of my sister-in-law [nephew] ... saying he wants to go and stay in that house. So that made me destroy the house. ... Such a house you can't destroy by yourself, but my [other] brother-in-law with other men destroyed it. ... I am just digging the land. It's where I plant maize and beans. (L003)*

Jane

Jane is a 44-year-old middle-income woman whose husband passed away 11 years ago. After her husband's death, she heard of plans by her parents-in-law to appropriate part of her shamba. *She "sued and took them to court":*

> *Now this plot, my parents in-law wanted to give it to their eldest grandson. They wanted to divide my plot. They had given each son his own share. Then my father-in-law asked my mother-in-law, "Can't you give a piece to your grandchild? He must get a share." That was after the burial of my husband. When I heard this I went to Kakamega to collect forms. I came and told my nephew to help me fill them. He refused. His father told him not to help me. I went back with the forms to Kakamega. Fortunately, I met the late chief. He is the one who told me how to go about it and he told me to take them to Vihiga. At Vihiga, they told me to be accompanied by my father-in-law. They gave me the date for the land board meeting. When I told my father in-law, he refused. Instead, he sent his eldest son to represent him, but the board turned him away. When I went home, I tricked the old man. This was a lie actually: [I told him] that "the board members said if you fail to turn up in the second meeting then you should pay 5000 shillings as a fine." That is when he attended it. They told him, "We've found this woman a job and when she goes, you remain with the rest of her family." That is when he said, "No, I will give her a* shamba." *But they had refused completely. It was very difficult; I had to bribe the board [laughs]. Don't joke, it wasn't easy!*

After attending the district land board meetings, Jane had to attend court hearings at the land registration office in Kakamega, the provincial capital.

> *We continued like that until we went to court. The old man never showed up at Kakamega when we went. I asked someone to represent him [as a proxy] and the person said he was the brother to my late husband, and said, "Father is so sick he can't make it to court. But we've agreed with the Vihiga board to allocate her a plot." That is when they gave it to me. They wrote his identity card details and he swore that he was saying the truth, otherwise they had refused. (L004)*

Through creative "back-door" maneuvering, she discreetly initiated a process towards protecting her land rights:

> *I didn't tell anyone. ... I would leave early in the morning [and be gone until] evening. No one would know. This went on until I was finished æ until I succeeded. No one helped me. ... Was I to tell anyone? When you are looking for something, you are not supposed to tell anyone. ... Some people will mock you, others will talk ill of you until you even can't succeed.*

Jane was able to use the judicial system set up through statutory law to protect her land rights because her economic status allowed her to afford the associated costs of "influencing" officials, acquiring title deeds, and traveling to Kakamega. She did this on her own, however, without telling anyone of her plans, fearing that doing so might alert her in-laws and jeopardize the outcome. By keeping her plans as "back-door" decisions, she was able to manipulate the system and spring her defence on her in-laws without their foreknowledge. Jane's account demonstrates that widows may invoke statutory law to defend their rights to land when they are threatened. However, drawing on statutory law is not always straightforward, as it requires knowledge of its existence and access to its machinery and processes. Moreover, accessing it requires a great deal of creativity, as well as energy, time, money, and tenacity. Making these laws work in favour of women sometimes involves manipulation, "tricks," and bribes to influence officials. As Jane's account

illustrates, statutory law can also be manipulated by men to control land, even if they do not have title deed — a situation that would not exist if land officials did not side with patriarchal norms to begin with, and if bribery was not an accepted fact of survival. A Logoli woman puts the situation into perspective:

> *Nowadays you have to bribe. They will keep telling you, go and come back tomorrow, yet you traveled all the way from up country and you are putting up in a relative's house so you become a burden. ... You go to court and you are told your file is missing so you have to bribe in order for it to be traced ... (L044)*

The preceding three narratives illustrate the diverse yet great lengths to which women go in defending their long-term security in tenure against the threat of "widow-inheritance." Being "chased" has grave implications for their livelihoods. These accounts also illustrate that women react to being "chased" in different ways, drawing sometimes on statutory law, and sometimes on customary law and cultural norms, to legitimate and retain their rights to land. In this light, customary and statutory law are not two isolated legal orders, but provide women space (Mackenzie 1995, p. 18) within which to defend rights to land in the face of threats to their long-term security of tenure. The ability of a woman to access either of these orders depends on her economic status, her social positioning, and her reputation as defined by patriarchal ideology.

Inevitably, the selective re-interpretation and invoking of "widow-inheritance" by men has important long-term consequences for sustainable soil management. Given that there is a great deal of spatial variability in terms of environment, land, soil fertility, and crops grown, women as farmers accumulate a great deal of valuable knowledge and expertise over time regarding the context-specific conditions and microenvironments of their *shambas*. Hence, when a widow is "chased" from her *shamba*, the wealth of her accumulated knowledge and expertise are lost. Because the sustainability of the land and soils depends on whether women can successfully pass along valuable agricultural and soils knowledge of particular micro-niches to one another, a break in this chain of knowledge has serious implications for sustaining the soils.

Research and 'development' initiatives must consider land tenure as an issue that is critical to sustainable soil management and farming. This is essential. Furthermore, the problems and constraints that women face in defending their rights to land are an important issue for women themselves — an issue that affects their very livelihoods. This is, therefore, an area where future policy and initiatives should focus attention and make efforts to collaborate with women who are vulnerable in terms of their security of tenure.

The case of "out-grown" sons

In certain situations, men's rights to land through inheritance as mediated through customary law can be rendered vulnerable, and even denied. One situation in particular involves men who are born out-of-wedlock (or "out-grown") and whose fathers refuse to recognize them formally as their sons. The role of women in this situation is also central, as the recognition of the biological linkage to a father rests upon the paternal grandmother, who performs certain rituals that confirm membership to the family and all the rights that go with it. It also depends on stepmothers, who influence the way stepsons are treated within the family, and the extent to which their rights to land are denied or recognized.

Benjamin

Benjamin is 32 years old. He was born out-of-wedlock and his mother married "elsewhere." He was brought up in his grandmother's home and, later, his father's home, where he suffered mistreatment from his stepmother and siblings:

> *Now, my childhood was like this: when I was born, both my parents were alive, my mother was alive and my father was alive, but I grew up like someone who had no parents ... like an orphan. The reason was that I was an out-of-wedlock child ... I grew up in problems, I started hiring [out my] labour when I was still a very little boy, at an age you wouldn't believe. ... My father refused to educate me. I was an out-of-wedlock child, this made him not like me. ... I stayed with my stepmom in problems ... And what made it worse was that I wondered, if I was a son to my father, why should they discriminate [against] me, can't they treat me like the rest?*

Despite the fact that Benjamin was recognized as a member of his father's family, his status as "out-grown" placed him in a vulnerable position in terms of inheriting land:

> *The [family] plot is small and what makes me think I won't get a share is that my stepmother hates me, so even when you asked me about marriage, it's because up to now I haven't constructed a house. This is one of the reasons I haven't married, because if I did, where would I stay with my wife? I feel like I am homeless. If I make some money I will go to my home and ask for a place to put up my own house. ... Though the problem, it's my stepmother who is against it. Because like now, why I say I want to get money and ask for a place to construct a house alone is because, you see, the elders of the family are getting finished. This month we buried our last-born uncle. (L020)*

Benjamin's account demonstrates several points important to understanding the dynamics of gender relations pertaining to security of tenure. First, it illustrates that men born out-of-wedlock can also be vulnerable in terms of land tenure. However, their insecurity in tenure is rendered vulnerable via-à-vis their relationships with their mothers and stepmothers. The fracturing of a son's rights to land is a major factor in explaining why so much emphasis is placed by women on "persevering" within marriage: it acts as a conduit for women to access land and ensures that sons inherit land, which, in turn, effectively ensures women's own security and livelihood in their old age. The need to maintain inter-generational rights to land is a key factor in explaining why women continue to "persevere" in the harshest circumstances rather than withdraw labour from their husband's *shambas*, even when there are no immediate, short-term returns. This point will be further expanded in the next chapter. As Benjamin's narrative illustrates, sons often face difficult livelihood circumstances when such a withdrawal of labour and status within marriage takes place, or when the birth of a son is illegitimate — outside the norms of marriage.

Stepmothers, on the other hand, wield a great deal of power as they influence the equitable distribution of land among sons and stepsons. In Benjamin's case, his stepmother regards her husband's children differentially, and fiercely defends her own sons' rights over further division of the small parcel of land by her stepson. The extent to which his mother-in-law was able to hold off the formal allocation of land to Benjamin while his father was alive has further rendered his security in tenure vulnerable, making his chances of inheriting a plot, and therefore of marrying, difficult.

The normal recourse when the father is deceased is to turn to the paternal uncles to ensure inheritance according to customary law. Since all of Benjamin's uncles have passed away, he has only one option left: calling upon the elders in the sub-clan to adjudicate his land claims. However, initiating these formal and ceremonial processes involves monetary costs, and is often an unaffordable option for economically poor farmers like Benjamin. Although men in general are in a more powerful position in terms of interpreting and drawing upon elements of customary law, this depends on their class and status — and in particular on their ability to incur the monetary costs associated with negotiating claims under customary law.

Without land, Benjamin is unable to marry and establish a home. Without land, he will not be recognized as an adult, and therefore cannot be buried as one. What this account demonstrates is that men can also be vulnerable in terms of security of tenure in certain circumstances. This is an important finding to consider when formulating research policy and initiatives. And, although women's role in land inheritance is not overt, it is nonetheless central in terms of influencing land inheritance. Women's roles as mothers, stepmothers, and grandmothers are important in influencing how, when, and to whom land is allocated among sons, daughters-in-law, and "out-grown" sons.

Women's ownership of land: deeply contested terrain

Except in the case of "out-grown" sons, men almost always inherit and hold title deed to land. The same cannot be said for women in Maragoli. Of the 40 women in this study, none held title deeds in their own names unless they were economically wealthy widows, such as Rebeka. This situation is similarly reflected in Abwunza's (1997) study of Maragoli from 1987 to 1988 in which only two of the 410 women she interviewed held title deeds in their own names. Women's ownership of land is deeply contested and is viewed as an overt and explicit threat to men's authority and power within the household and, more broadly, within the Logoli patriarchal "order." There are two situations in which women's struggles for land become a fierce battleground of gender politics: when an unmarried daughter remains in her parents' home and/or inherits land; and when a married woman attempts to own land with a title deed in her name.

The case of unmarried daughters

According to customary law, daughters are not entitled to inherit family land unless they "fail" to marry. A young woman, aged 22, explains:

> *Your share is not there. ... In Maragoli, girls are not supposed to get land, and even if they give you [land], you won't feel okay. ... People in the society won't respect you. ... Because even if you stay at your home, it won't be good because many people will start laughing at you. Because mostly people in Maragoli prefer girls to move from home and join their husbands, and if you stay at home without getting married, they bury you badly when you die. (L005)*

Logoli cultural norms dictate that women are expected to marry and move to their husband's homes, gaining usufruct rights to land in this manner. There are, however, exceptions. A father may decide to allocate land to his daughter in cases when she is unable to marry or if her marriage fails and it is proven that she was not at "fault." Mackenzie has argued in the case of Murang'a District, Central Province, that the allocation of land to a daughter

depends on several factors, including the size of the *shamba* to be divided, on her brothers' willingness to accept allocation of land to an unmarried sister, and their ideological stance regarding women's ownership of land (1990, p. 635). While the last two points can be negotiated and are subjective, the majority of landholdings in Maragoli are small, leaving little possibility of brothers' or their wives' willingness to further divide already small *shambas*. However, a woman's ownership of family land is not always contested on the basis of land availability; it involves, rather, the harnessing and rigid interpretation of cultural idioms regarding unmarried women. In addition, strong social stigmas and taboos are invoked to legitimate men's control over family land. As the following three personal narratives of Melissa, Beatrice, and Rina demonstrate, regardless of their situation, women who remain in their parents' homes are in an extremely volatile and vulnerable position in terms of their status and reputation in society, and in terms of their rights to land in a situation in which land availability is becoming increasingly limited.

Melissa

Melissa is a 30-year-old unmarried woman who lives in her widowed mother's home, along with her sister-in-law and nephews. Her brother has out-migrated to Nairobi. She describes a situation in which the social pressure for her to leave, as well as the social stigmas associated with her remaining, have intensified over time:

> *When I was young, life was good because my mother helped me ... clothing me, feeding me ... paying my school fees, and so on. But now life is difficult ... because now I am fully grown up and should depend on myself for my needs. ... That's why I dig and pick tea [on other people's shambas] in order to get money. ... I want to get someone to marry. If I leave this year, it will be good, but if I stay in the coming years, it will be difficult. ... This side in Maragoli, it is a problem because it is a burden being fed by your parents and other members of the family don't like it ... even my brother tells me to leave before I start cursing his children.*

Melissa finds it difficult to negotiate the returns from her labour inputs on her mother's shamba, and frequently has to hire out her own labour on other people's shambas. She believes, however, that it is best for a girl to leave her parents' home and find her own home and shamba to farm:

> *Girls should leave because it's Maragoli culture. It's good for a girl to take a shamba if there are no boys, but if there are, then it can't happen. ... Girls stay at their homes, but with difficulties — like their brothers don't want them. If they have children, for them to grow is difficult. If she gets children outside of marriage and she passes away and the husband doesn't bury her, she's buried in her father's home. ... You can never be constructed a house. If you have children it is very difficult to feed them and you cannot get a share of the plot. (L009)*

The possibility of her gaining rights to land is bleak because she has a brother and her sister-in-law has been allocated a plot on the shamba. She considers this the "Avalogoli way." However, life has become increasingly difficult as she has grown older and is expected to find her own home and shamba. If she does not leave in the near future, the social stigmas will become increasingly fierce, to the point where it will be unbearable for her to remain. Her only hope of gaining access to land is through marriage. If she is unable to marry, she will have few livelihood options open to her and she will be forced to find an alternative means of survival.

As Melissa suggests, and Beatrice's account demonstrates below, this situation is made worse for unmarried daughters who remain in their parents' homes with children born out-of-wedlock.

Beatrice

Beatrice is a 39-year-old single mother who lives with her widowed mother and sister. When she was young, she became pregnant, and, as she puts it, the biological father of her children "turned against me and said he cannot marry me." She later had several "friendships" with men and had two more children out-of-wedlock. Since her brothers are deceased, there are no sons to inherit the three-acre family farm, which is controlled by her mother. She describes her situation and explains that having four children out-of-wedlock makes issues of gaining income to meet monetary needs particularly difficult:

> *My problem is how to bring up the children, yet I don't have a husband. ... It's hard to feed the children, hard to clothe them and take them to school. And that preoccupies my mind so much. That's what gets me down.*

The situation is made acutely worse by the extremely strong cultural taboos and stigmas that exist around single daughters with children out-of-wedlock who continue to remain in their parents' homes:

> *When you give birth in your home it is difficult. Your dignity is lowered, they mock you, they don't respect you at all. You also lose respect for yourself. ... Here in Maragoli, there is a lot of taunting. ... Most of the words come from women, men just understand and know it's actually a problem. ... Neighbours sometimes look down upon me. They tell me that I have refused to get married, that I have stuck in my home, that I should have tasted marriage. ... The thought of marriage has faded away because whenever you find one and tell him about marriage they don't accept ...*
>
> *When you stay in your home you are referred to as a girl since you are not married. ... You are supposed to leave and make your own life. ... You can stay, but it really is a big problem. ... The* shamba *is there alright, but if you have no help for using the* shamba, *what use does it have for you?*

While Beatrice never brought up the subject in interviews, members of her group confirmed that she engages in informal sex work to make economic ends meet. This may also go a long way in explaining the particularly fierce social stigmas that she faces in her everyday life, especially from other women. Similar to Melissa, Beatrice feels that "girls" should leave their parents' homes. Even though her brothers are deceased, she feels no particular advantage in the knowledge that she may inherit a piece of the family's shamba.

Despite the fact that married women often have no material advantage in residing with husbands who do not provide labour, income, and other important resources, according to Beatrice they are in a far better situation than those who are unmarried and live at home. She strongly believes that married women have better lives:

> *You cannot compare the life of a woman who is at her [parent's] home [with] one who is married. The married woman has her own house, her own home. Even that married one doesn't have a lot of problems. ... The one who is in her home can discuss issues with her children and husband. ... So the woman who lives in her parent's home is really a burden. It is difficult ... there are no advantages, you just persevere. (L018)*

This contradiction between the reality most married women face and the way unmarried women imagine these realities may be addressed by turning attention to the extremely strong social stigmas and cultural norms that perpetuate men's ownership of land. They may also be better understood when we recognize the status given to having one's own "home" through marriage, all of which cause women such as Beatrice a great deal of anxiety and despair, as well as feelings of vulnerability and alienation.

Despite the fact that they may inherit *shambas* in the future, daughters who continue to remain on their family's land face extremely strong social stigmas, especially if they have children out-of-wedlock and/or turn to sex work for economic survival. While they have an obligation to contribute labour on the *shamba*, they do not necessarily control the returns from that labour, and therefore are forced to engage in alternative means of income generation. Most single women attempt to find an alternative means of survival, normally through marriage as second wives, through employment in towns as "housegirls," or by taking on lovers or engaging in sex work to generate an income and gain access to resources. While they may have secure rights to land in the future, they themselves do not view this as an advantage, as social stigmas constructed within patriarchal ideology weigh heavily in their lives.

Rina

Rina is a 50-year-old widow whose husband died eight years ago. She was "chased" from her first marriage because she was unable to bear children, and she re-married as a second wife. Rina has only one daughter. She would like to leave her shamba to this daughter, but has reservations based on her own experiences. She explains:

> *It is said that a girl cannot stay in her home. Staying there usually means conflicts, so it is better to find a place for yourself. ... [Then], you become happy because now you are in your house, with your own husband. It's known that you are in your home.*

Rina has considered obtaining the title deed for her land in order to leave it to her daughter, but is also considering leaving her land to one of her stepsons, despite the fact that she has had a hostile relationship with her co-wife. She explains:

> *If my daughter feels that the shamba should belong to her, then I will give to her. ... I am supposed to do that [obtain a title deed], but I don't have enough money for the whole process. ... [My land], it is usually supposed to be inherited by one of my stepsons, the one that I feel is good to me. ... If he takes good care of me he will get, but if he doesn't, he won't get. (L028)*

Because Rina has no sons, she can legitimately leave land to her daughter under customary law. However, she is considering allocating her parcel of land to her stepson. Faced with an economically uncertain future herself, she is seriously considering this avenue because it would enable her to use the land as an important lever in exchange for care in her old age, as well as access to resources that she feels her stepson and wife would provide. Rina's account illustrates two points. First, decisions on land allocation are not always made by men. Women, as widows and heads of household, can make land-allocation decisions. Second, despite the fact that customary law allows for daughters to inherit land when there are no sons, in economically difficult circumstances this does not guarantee that the land will be inherited by daughter(s), even if the decision is made by women. Hence, women sometimes perpetuate the very system that undermines their position, because they have few resources available to them when they get older and because they consider in advance the heavy weight of cultural norms their daughters will have to face when they inherit family land.

The cultural significance given to women's ownership of land vis-à-vis norms and fierce social stigmas makes it extremely difficult for unmarried daughters to remain and inherit family land. As such, these social stigmas are not just "quaint" cultural ideology but are constitutive forces with real effects and far-reaching implications that weigh heavily in women's lives and influence the way women make decisions about land. Stigmas often manifest themselves as forms of harassment from families and community. Given these factors, it is not surprising that daughters in Maragoli rarely inherit land. Indeed, none of the women interviewed in this case study had inherited land from their fathers. Furthermore, as the preceding narratives have conveyed, women who face fierce social stigmas suffer acute emotional stress, which adversely affects their health and, consequently, their ability to carry out soil management and farming. In addition, not being able to control the proceeds of their labour, and in some cases not having secure knowledge that they will inherit family land, women prefer to engage in off-farm income-generating and coping strategies (as discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight). The withdrawal of women's knowledge, labour, and energies from the *shamba* — partially or completely — has less then positive implications for agricultural production and soil management.

When women purchase land

Land in Maragoli is in short supply and very expensive, making the option of purchasing land unviable for most economically poor farmers. When it is available, however, it can be purchased from those who migrate to less densely populated areas outside Maragoli, such as Kitale and Nandi, where land is less expensive. Given an average cost of 50,000 shillings for half an acre, only economically wealthy farmers are able to purchase and increase their landholdings within and outside of Maragoli.[47]

Women rarely purchase land, not only because of the high monetary costs involved but because when they do attempt such a purchase, these transactions are bitterly disputed by their husbands and by clansmen in the community. The following account of Jedda, an economically wealthy woman who purchased land in her own name, and the reaction of her husband, Lucas, demonstrates this situation.

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[47] *Economically wealthy farmers normally own more than one plot. These are dispersed geographically and require access to transportation and hired labour in order to farm and maintain. They are often designated for different purposes and crops, although an increase in theft of crops has made it more difficult to manage geographically dispersed plots in the current economic climate.*

Jedda

Jedda is 56 years old. She is the chairperson of her women's group and is actively involved in community affairs. She explains, on a broad level, the types of constraints that women face with their husbands in attempting to acquire title deeds in their own names:

> *It is just lack of money. But if you had your own plot, it could help you get a loan in the bank because you cannot manage to get a loan without security [collateral]. ... A lot of property is owned by men, and when you tell him to give you a plot as security, he refuses. Yet if you bought, he rushes to get the title deed in his name. Is that very fair, surely? It's so unfair. ... Men cannot give you a title deed, unless you talk to him so nicely, so that he can give you a letter with the title deed. So that he can introduce [you] to the manager of the bank to get a loan. Otherwise, if you don't talk nicely you won't be given a title deed. They're very difficult. Men are always difficult.*

Jedda bought a plot with her own money and had the title deed registered in her name, only to find out that her husband had gone to the land registration office without her knowledge and had it transferred to his name. She then proceeded to "talk to him so nicely" in order to convince him that both their names should appear on the deed. This allowed her to process an application for a loan at the local bank.

After her own experiences, she reflects on the reasons why men feel the need to control title deeds:

> *Men are afraid of putting the title deeds in our names because they are afraid we will run away. Women will say, "I can go and do something else, I can do without you." So, I think that men are afraid of this. That once they have given women something, that they will talk among themselves and exchange ideas with other women. ... Women will boast. But the man will feel very bad, because this will go to other men, and they will start talking about you, [saying] bad things about you. They'll feel that you are spoiling it for other men. Because this title deed was given to that woman and now she is talking like that, "I can't give it to my wife." (L014)*

Jedda recognizes that men's control over title deed — both a material and a symbolic manifestation of land ownership — is a way of maintaining control over women. She believes that women's ownership of land and title deed instills fear in men. They fear that if the idea of women's ownership of land gains momentum as the "word spreads," they will lose all authority and control over women. For these reasons, men maintain control and scrutiny over this process within conjugal relations, as well as within patriarchal discourse, in order to restrict women's actions and ownership of land. They use patriarchal ideology to maintain their control, as Jedda's husband's account illustrates below.

Lucas

Lucas, Jedda's 58-year-old husband, explains why only men can and should own land:

> *... Not the wife, it is always the husband [who owns land]. ... The reason is that you may have economic difficulties, and a wife is the weaker sex in being tempted to make the wrong decision — "that, after all, I can also find another man outside here." But a man would always want to keep the family [the clan]. But the woman can take the harsh decisions, maybe moving with the man next door (L013).*

Men claim that women are incapable of owning land because of their "incapacity" as the "weaker sex," their "propensity" to make the "wrong" decisions in terms of maintaining clan solidarity. Within this discourse, women need to be "protected" against their "incapacities" and their "tendency to roam" with men outside their clan. This justification for maintaining control over land and the means of production uses the imported concept of men's ownership ideologically in a struggle for resources within the household (Kitching 1980, p. 143), while at the same time drawing on elements of custom that emphasize clan solidarity.

Women's ownership and control of land is viewed as a threat to the patriarchal "order." What is at stake is the balance of power within local gender relations. As Jedda's account illustrates, outright purchase of land by a woman is considered an act of subversion to the "order" of things. In this case, men engage in both statutory law and customary idioms to "restore" the balance. For instance, the cases of Rebeka, Jedda, and Lucas illustrate how men can gain access to land to which women own title deed by manipulating the system of statutory law. As statutory law does not exist in a vacuum, its manipulation to suit the interests of men is most likely carried out by invoking patriarchal custom to land officials — who themselves might be sympathetic to men — in combination with bribery. This type of struggle is limited, however, to economically elite women and men, as status and money are involved in both registering title deed and bribing officials.

Another option available to women is that they may be able to purchase, rent, and control land through the collective idiom of gender-based work groups. While none of the women's groups interviewed in this case study owned land collectively, one group had had begun to rent church land to cultivate cash crops. If successful, this could be a potential avenue for gaining access to income from farming, allowing women to invest their energies in land and labour that they more freely control and benefit from. Although it should be noted that the success of this enterprise depends on several factors, including the size of plot available for rent. Purchasing land, however, is an option open only to economically wealthy women's groups, given the high cost of land and the limited availability of land for sale in Maragoli.

Conclusions

As material and symbolic struggles over resources intensify in an environment where there is insufficient land available, as well as a pervasive patriarchal ideology, women's rights to land have become increasingly insecure. Seen as both soil and semiotics, the Maragoli landscape is the site not only for social and cultural production and reproduction, but also, as in the Zimbabwean case illustrated by Moore, for symbolic struggles (1993, p. 396) that are played out within the context of inequitable power relations enforced by patriarchal ideology. Land tenure systems constitute an arena of struggle in which women wage fierce yet creative battles to defend their long-term security and rights to land, using diverse and creative strategies — including the manipulation of customary and statutory law, "back-door" decisions, "tricks," and, as Mbilinyi suggests, "guerrilla tactics" (1989). Men engage in this struggle as well, fiercely defending their privileged positions as "commanders" and owners of "property" in an era when there have been major dislocations and transformations in their roles and functions. Men turn to patriarchal ideology to re-establish authority in spheres concerning ownership and control over property. But what is at stake is beyond property: it is the balance of power within local gender relations. Men draw on idioms, norms, and stigmas within patriarchal ideology, as they have the upper hand in re-creating and perpetuating selective elements of customary law to their advantage.

Norms, idioms, and taboos within customary law are continuously evolving. They constitute a set of shifting symbols that not only define society but also create strategies that serve economic and political interests (Glazier 1985, cited in Mackenzie 1990, p. 613). Faced with social disruption and major threats to their power and position within society, men use customary law selectively as an instrument to control resources and behaviour within conjugal relations, including the rigid rules around marriage, land tenure, the institution of "widow-inheritance," bridewealth, and divorce, and the stigmatization of "roaming" and having children out-of-wedlock.

Given these realities, the position of women in securing rights to land and defending threats to their security in tenure is far from being equitable. In addition, their ability to negotiate rights to land is mediated by class, age, marital status, and life-cycle positioning, as well as status, identity, and reputation. As such, *who the farmer is* has implications in terms of the types of struggles that take place and the farmer's ability to participate in different legal spheres and customs. Women have differential access to both legal spheres. Economically poor women, as well as those who are new to their marital life-circumstances and those who 'deviate' from customary norms such as marriage, may be the most vulnerable of all, having very few options to access and maintain rights to land. Moreover, it is important to note that the accounts in this chapter are based on the experiences of women who were able to succeed in maintaining rights to land. Chapter Eight discusses other stories that are often hidden from view when men are able to successfully "chase" women from their *shambas*. Such situations reveal what happens to women, their land, and their extensive agricultural knowledge when they are not able to defend their rights.

The results of women's struggles to secure rights to land are critical for sustainable soil management and farming. Struggles over threats to security of tenure highlight the importance of a woman's ability to secure long-term rights to and control over land, as both a material and symbolic resource. As the micropolitics of such microniches as the banana and garden vegetable plots demonstrate, when women have secure rights to land, they are more willing to invest in long-term strategies to sustain the soil. This critical factor determines the extent to which women, as the principal farmers and managers of the soil, are willing to invest in or withdraw from labour and strategies to sustain the soil and farming within real limits set by the patriarchal "order."

While the next two chapters illustrate that certain norms and idioms relating to labour roles and responsibilities have been transformed in the face of historical and political-economic changes — which have intensified women's labour in all aspects of life — this chapter has demonstrated that the norms and idioms that have remained entrenched, and are fiercely resisted by men, are those that pertain to the control over property and land, and, therefore, power within changing gender relations.

PART IV

Between Toil and Soil:[48] Gender and the Micropolitics of Labour

The view of a complex society, or of any society, leads one to a paradox. Formal reglementation can control certain behaviour, but not the aggregate of behaviour in a society. The more 'rational' a society seems in its parts, and its rules, and its rules about rules, the thicker the layer of formalism and ideological self-representation to be penetrated to find out what is really going on. ... But over time, reglementary control can only be temporary, incomplete, and its consequences not fully predictable. The study of reglementation is therefore the study of the way partial orders and partial controls operate in social contexts. (Moore 1978, p. 30)

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[48] *The term "between toil and soil" is taken from Crowley and Carter's recent work by the same title (Crowley and Carter 2000).*

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The Diversity of Farmers' Gendered Experiences

Chapter Five

Attention to the complexities of resource politics in particular localities ... requires close examination of the myriad struggles over the cultural categories through which access to critical environmental resources are contested. An analysis of peasant politics needs to take peasant culture seriously, not simply as a quaint epiphenomenon of structural features of society, but as integral to resource conflicts themselves. (Moore 1993, p. 382)

This goal of this chapter is to move beyond the undifferentiated and 'lifeless' categories of 'farmers' and 'female-headed households' that are so often used in conventional approaches to soil management and agriculture. By focusing on the diversity of differently positioned individuals in terms of their multiple roles, responsibilities, and livelihood strategies pertaining to agriculture, soil management, and other livelihood concerns, this chapter brings to life the complexities, options, dilemmas, and aspirations farmers face in their everyday lives. Such a focus also recognizes that the ability of farmers to access and control labour as a key productive resource for farming and soil management is inextricably intertwined with their diverse and multiple experiences as wives, co-wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, daughters-in-law, and widows — and as women and men. Local diversity and complexity shed light on the different degrees of labour burden that various farmers face. These burdens both constrain and enable them in their efforts to sustain their soils and their farms and meet their broader livelihood needs.

Because much of soil management and agriculture in Maragoli depends on household labour, it is important to understand the multiple constraints and opportunities that women and men face in different personal circumstances and within gendered power relations at the household level. Carney and Watts explain:

A focus on local power structures within the household ... in particular domestic power, and the dominant male order which it sustains, is central to the process of vesting rights of access and control over people and resources within household social structures. Understanding the complex overlapping rights and obligations, and competing interests between household members — that is to say, the relations of domination within the household and the cultural representations that produce and reproduce these power relations — is a critical starting point in understanding the politics, and the points of resistance, associated with new forms of labour control and social integration. ... (1990, p. 217)

Using the household as a point of departure, the everyday micropolitics of women's and men's struggles over relations of production, as well as the symbolic and discursive contestations that constitute those struggles (Moore 1993; Schroeder 1996), are discussed in this chapter. The goal is to gain an understanding of the local dynamics of labour and gender relations, and how these affect sustainable farming and soil management specifically.

Such a focus challenges overly simplistic conceptualizations of social realities and demonstrates the ways in which competing claims to labour and struggles to control it are articulated through cultural norms, idioms, and taboos in the charged contexts of local gendered politics (Moore 1993, p. 381). Similar to property relations, cultural aspects of life are constitutive forces that affect relations of production:

> *Culture ... does not stand apart from the socially organized forms of inequality, domination, exploitation, and power that exist in society but is implicated in and inscribed in these practices, which are maintained and contested symbolically as well as instrumentally, discursively as well as forcefully. (Coombe 1991, cited in Moore 1993, p. 382)*

Struggles over symbolic processes are important because they are also conflicts over material relations of production, the distribution of resources in society, and, ultimately, power (Coombe 1991, cited in Moore 1993, p. 382). Consequently, these struggles are the basis for heated gender politics at the level of the household.

This chapter begins its exploration of the micropolitics of labour and the diversity of farmers' experiences within relations of production by situating the discussion on the gender division of labour, as it is publicly articulated by men and women through cultural norms, idioms, and taboos. In other words, it explores the way in which gender roles and responsibilities are 'ordered' by Avalogoli cultural discourse and patriarchal ideology. The chapter then focuses on the manner in which cultural idioms, norms, and taboos are invoked and negotiated in everyday practice. The category 'farmer' is scrutinized, demonstrating that the gender division of on-farm labour is contingent not only on gender, but also on women and men's positions in terms of marital status and household headship, class, social differentiation, and age and life-cycle positioning. An awareness of farmers' diverse and varied experiences, as these affect their labour burdens, is vital to understanding soil management. There are also situations in which people lack access to and control of labour (sometimes their own), because of inequitable power relations both within and outside conjugal relations. All of these diverse situations are explored, with a view to identifying circumstances where farmers face an acute shortage of labour and are especially vulnerable in terms of intense labour burdens. These problems affect their ability to sustain their soils, their farms, and, inevitably, their quality of life.

"The Avalogoli Way": ordering gender roles and responsibilities

Cultural meanings are central in gendered relations in production and have an important bearing on soil management and farming in Maragoli. Articulated through cultural idioms, norms, and taboos, cultural meanings are harnessed by both women and men to perpetuate gender roles and responsibilities and sustain power relations, as well as to challenge and contest them. The perpetuation of cultural meanings lends itself to laying out a social map of gender roles and responsibilities as they *should* pertain to all aspects of life, including the way farming, soil management, and household roles and responsibilities are 'traditionally' meant to be practiced by women and men. The gender division of labour is 'naturalized' through cultural understandings that encourage public consent and deference to the pervasive patriarchal ideology (Moore 1993, p. 383). Despite struggles to establish hierarchy, cultural norms between women and men are continually contested. These conflicts

illustrate that the micropolitics of labour are interpretive struggles over gender responsibilities and labour obligations, especially in light of changing historical and political-economic circumstances that have transformed the boundaries of who does what on the *shamba* and in the household:

> *Socially dominant representations pertaining to gender, cultural order of the household and property rights are in conflict with the new experiences of material rights. ... [S]uch contradictions are rarely contained through coercion but rather through bargaining and negotiation. ... [They are] struggles over meaning. Such negotiation is rarely an interpretive contest between equals because these struggles must confront the hegemonic cultural representations which precisely attempt to contain contradictions and conflicts and so to contain the vagaries of lived reality. (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 211)*

George explains the importance of upholding 'tradition' in terms of gender-based duties and obligations:

> *[There are] cases where you've seen a woman and man marrying and swearing that "I'll take care of you whether there are difficulties or not." And [when] old age [arrives], those things are forgotten and lead to the early deaths of husbands. ... Tradition should not be overlooked in order to maintain a family. Tradition should be upheld. A wife should remain responsible to the husband. All the domestic duties that a woman is supposed to do, a man must not be tempted to do, because some of those duties, like making fire, [collecting or supplying firewood, and lighting the stove], cleaning the house, and those [other] ones, traditionally, they are the responsibilities of a woman, not the husband ... even if she has to delegate [them] to somebody or employ somebody to do the duties.*

He explains what would happen if a wife asked her husband to carry out duties that were 'traditionally' considered to be her responsibility:

> *There will be differences between them. You know, if the wife tells the husband to go and sweep the house, it becomes very abnormal. There will be resistance. And when the resistance begins to be noticed, they [the wife and husband] will tend to keep away from one another.*

If a man agrees to carry out duties that are 'traditionally' considered those of his wives, this would have certain implications within the community, and would lead people to conclude the following:

> *Either the wife is dead ... or [they] conclude that something is wrong in the home. There is no order. She is unsuitable to [carry out] the duties of the wife. The community will resist. It is unusual and abnormal. Even if the husband reacts [in a way that is supportive of this behaviour], the community will come and say no, "you don't stay in this house." (L013)*

Similarly, in Maragoli, 'traditional' representations of gender roles and responsibilities are continually being contested and transformed in light of new political-economic and historical changes. Nevertheless, "the Avalogoli way" — with its strong patriarchal ideology, structures, discourse, and interpretations — continues to hold sway in many regards. Thus, it has become the focus of heated gendered conflicts within the household.

The following accounts of George and Miriam, a married Logoli couple, highlight important aspects of gendered roles, responsibilities, and conflicts over relations in production, and show how these are mediated by cultural representations and perpetuated by patriarchal ideology.

George

George, a 58-year-old economically wealthy elder, describes how gender roles and responsibilities on the shamba *and within the household are defined by 'tradition':*

> *The husband is the provider, ploughing and providing in the* shamba, *but still the wife will have the responsibility to ensure that plants are properly planted and so on. Harvesting is the same: it is the wife who knows where those things will be harvested and stored in the house. The husband provides the means, and [the] wife is to ensure that things are done to the family. The husband provides the means, [and] that means provides the money, labour force, and supervision.*
>
> *Before Christianity came, it was a known factor that a woman would be your helper. And you would marry a woman to come and help you with domestic duties in the house, like sweeping. And when you marry her to come and do those duties, she helps you lead a better life ... In marrying, one would look for a good girl with good character. Not a girl who is a prostitute; [one] who does not roam here and there and then gets married to so and so; [but one] to maintain the home and also the family and the clan. Because in the old days, if a woman was married to a community, that woman would be an asset to the community. They will value her because it is the teachings. The family or community comes from the home, and the person who does that is the woman, and so they have a lot of respect for her, because she is the initiator of bringing up children, and the home, and community as well. In the old days, if a woman is married to a certain somebody, like here, then she is also married to my clan. The clan looks at her as a wife of the clan. They'll expect her to do the things that a woman is expected to do. People will be monitoring if she misbehaves a bit. The clan can tell you to chase her [away]: [they will tell you,] "this is not the best wife."*

George's narrative illustrates that men's interpretations and reconstructions of norms substantiate women's responsibilities in a way that establishes men's control over women's labour within the norms of the Logoli patriarchal 'order.' It also demonstrates that the persuasive language of 'tradition,' in conjunction with clan sanctioning, is invoked by men as a powerful tool in the reconstruction of gender-based duties and obligations. This discourse not only *restricts* what women can do, but also articulates what they *should* do to be considered "good" wives.

Farmers in Maragoli contend that, within such an 'order,' women should not plant trees, bananas, or hedges; clear the land; dig trenches or terraces; or construct or repair houses (in particular, they should not lay foundations or frames). Considered as "helpers," women are responsible for the family and home. Their duties encompass the following: digging and weeding the soil; planting seeds; harvesting; storing farm produce; doing kitchen work (preparing meals, cleaning utensils) and housework (cleaning, doing laundry, sweeping rubbish from the house and compound); collecting animal fodder, manure, and water; collecting and splitting firewood; and caring for their children and parents-in-law.

Norms have different implications for men, and restrict men from weeding the *shamba*, carrying out housework, carrying water and baskets (used for collecting farm produce), and smearing the floors of houses.[49] They also set the parameters for men's work and obligations, such as providing the *shamba*, clearing land, digging and tilling the land, digging trenches, constructing and repairing houses, and grazing cattle. Children and unmarried adult daughters and sons who live on the compound also figure into the 'traditional' division of labour in a way that is differentiated by gender. Young women are 'traditionally' charged with taking care of small children, digging, planting seeds, and harvesting, as well as assisting in household duties, such as fetching water, doing laundry, and cleaning. Young men's duties include grazing livestock, clearing land, and sometimes, fetching water and splitting wood.

Regardless of age, this gendered 'order' clearly places the responsibility of much of the day-to-day household, family, and on-farm labour on the shoulders of women. It also positions these labour inputs and duties within the realm of what is considered 'normal,' and valued by 'tradition.' As such, a "good" wife is not only defined by her character (i.e. her reputation as a "good" wife), but also by how successfully she fulfills her multiple responsibilities to her family, especially through her prominent role as a farmer. Women have always been farmers, and their 'goodness' continues to be defined by their farming abilities — by how hard they work and how productive the *shamba* is. An older Logoli woman explains:

> *Girls were mostly on the farms and in the kitchen. ... Girls knew their place was on the farm. ... The criteria for selecting a good woman included how well she prepared the land. People wanted many wives who were hard workers on the land ... (L032)*

Women engage in struggles over interpretation cultural meanings as well, but not always as outright contestation. In fact, women sometimes interpret cultural norms and taboos to argue for men's increased labour input into the *shamba*, as well as contribution to household income. This is evident in Miriam's narrative below, and in the account of Frederika later in this chapter.

Miriam

Miriam, George's wife, explains that taboos also play an important role in women's lives, as they are used as a powerful argument in favour of men's labour and participation on the farm:

> *Taboos are good because they make men help us. The only advantage is the taboos give equal responsibilities to both men and women, otherwise, if the taboos were not there, then men would never touch anything. (L014)*

[49] *Smearing is the process of getting and applying mud, sand, dung and other materials to make a floor for a house.*

The norm of a 'good' husband is used by women to argue for men's labour input into farming and soil management, for the provision of income to meet the monetary needs of the family, and for the provision of a house and *shamba*.

Photo 10: "I stood here in front of my house that has collapsed. This house used to be the main house. [My co-wife and I] used to live in different rooms and now we live in the kitchen ... My husband is in Nairobi ... People talk about our collapsed house and wonder why our husband has never bothered to come and construct another house ... Women do not build a house; men are the ones to build. Because a husband would not enter it even if he is stuck in town and found out that I had already built the house." (L036)

Photo 11: "This one I took to show the tasks that women do — you have to go to the water spring, do domestic chores, and if you haven't brought in any water from the spring, then you have no water in your home ... It is a bad thing because by the time you go to bed, you are so tired and the same work awaits you. The next day, you have to do the same thing again!" (L016)

Photo 12: "I decided to take this one to show that we bring our cows water after feeding them. The other lady is carrying vegetables for re-sale." (L036)

Photo 13: "Here, I am tilling the land. I'm clearing this bush. You can just dig them into the soil, but we clear because of the black-jack weed. You know that this weed is not good. So you feel it's better if you cut it and maybe heap it in one spot, or sometimes you can burn [it] because it is not a very good plant." (L016)

Photo 14: "This picture shows three girls bringing water from the spring." (L033)

The construction of these gender roles gives rise to strong normative and interpretive currents within relations of production. What is 'normal' and 'traditional' is established through discursive practice (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 230). A 'good' Logoli wife does not "roam." She is expected to fulfill her roles and responsibilities on the farm and within the household, to persevere in the face of hardships, and to maintain a posture of deference to male authority (Abwunza 1997). A "good" husband does not revert to violence or alcoholism, or neglect his role and responsibilities as a provider for his family. Deviating from 'traditional' norms has very different repercussions for women and men. Sanctions are deeply gendered, as men are in powerful positions in terms of invoking, remembering, and reconstructing elements of tradition within their capacities as elders. Abwunza has demonstrated that tradition is based on cultural norm that men have the right to rule over women and children as "commanders," and this rule extends over the ownership of production and the control of decision-making (1997, pp. 21–22). However, this "rule" does not extend monolithically and unquestionably, but is contested actively and creatively by women.

The diversity of farmers' lived experiences

Despite seemingly rigid and static Avalogoli cultural idioms and norms meant to 'order' gender roles and responsibilities and thereby maintain power relations, farmers' personal narratives and everyday experiences illustrate that there is a great deal of diversity, variability, and flux in the way people live out gender roles and responsibilities in practice. This diversity reveals much about the lack of congruence between conscious, articulated, and culturally understood models of society and the way life is actually lived in everyday life (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Moore 1978). Focusing on the diversity of everyday life makes it clear that the study of relations in production needs to encompass and take seriously social and gender relations. In order to do so, it is important to examine the diversity of farmers' multiple positions, which are affected by axes of difference such as gender, marital status, class, life-cycle position and age (Carney and Watts 1990, p. 217). In turn, farmers' positions affect the types of resources they are able to access; the types of farming activities in which they engage; and the different amounts of energy, time, and labour they are able to invest and control in order to sustain the soils.

The complexity, diversity, and variability of farmers' lives, and the way they differentially access and maintain control over resources within gendered relations of production, are demonstrated in the many personal circumstances that follow. These personal circumstances are differentiated by marital status, class, and social status, and by age and changing life-cycle positioning, and are brought to life through farmers' narratives and photographs.

Marital status

Marriage is an important channel by which both women and men gain access to and control over the resources necessary for farming, soil management, and livelihood sustenance. It is also a central organizing cultural concept through which identity, codes of conduct, and behaviour pertaining to on-farm labour, roles, and responsibilities are defined. Farmers' accounts illustrate that there is a great deal of diversity in the way women and men experience marriage. This diversity calls into question the adequacy of the conventional Western concept of a nuclear household unit characterized by the pooling and sharing of labour and income (Moore 1988, p. 55) and operating on the basis of monogamy. Further, the dynamics and

variability of conjugal relations in Maragoli challenge unproblematized Western models of the male head of household. These local realities highlight the need to explore aspects of diversity that centre on different marital situations, including polygamous marriages and variances in household headship. They also highlight the need to investigate struggles over the fulfilment of gender roles and responsibilities, as well as struggles over resources and meaning within conjugal relations at the level of the household. The discussion that follows begins by investigating the renegotiation of the conjugal contract (focusing attention on struggles over gender roles and responsibilities), before highlighting how these struggles play out in situations involving polygamous and women-headed households.

Renegotiation of the conjugal contract and gender struggles over roles and responsibilities

The 'conjugal contract' is crucial for understanding Avalogoli norms and idioms pertaining to marriage, as well as the actual practices by which gendered responsibilities for soil management and farming are negotiated and divided between spouses. The conjugal contract is not a fixed given but has been transformed and reworked over time in response to historical and political-economic changes. These changes have brought about an escalation of gender micropolitics — a charged social terrain where renegotiation of the conjugal contract and struggles over symbolic and material resources, as well as over the fulfilment of gender roles and responsibilities play out in everyday life.

In spite of these struggles, women and men renegotiate the conjugal contract within inequitable power relations that place men in a more powerful position. In renegotiating the conjugal contract within the strong normative currents of patriarchy, women cope and create room to maneuver in various ways. They argue that men should provide labour and cash according to Avalogoli 'tradition.' They emphasize men's roles as "providers." They withdraw their own labour to the extent possible, and, in extreme circumstances, they may revert to a final act of resistance: divorce. Men, too, respond in different ways. They invoke strong norms and idioms around women's "persevering." They also revert to physical acts of violence to restore 'order.' These situations are illustrated by the personal narratives and photographs of Rhoda, Frederika, and Jessika.

Rhoda's narrative demonstrates the way that changes over time have led to women's increased demands for men to fulfill their roles as providers, and a subsequent escalation in gender conflicts within the household.

It also highlights several important characteristics of the Logoli conjugal contract and the gender division of labour. First, it corroborates Wagner's (1970) and Kitching's (1980) descriptions of the gender division of labour in Maragoli in the 1930s and 1940s. While married men allocated separate parcels of land for their wives' use and their own use, a woman's plot was not distinguished in any way by the labour process of cultivation or crop mix (Wagner 1970, cited in Kitching 1980, p. 83). Rather, women's plots were distinguished in end use, as women controlled produce from their own plots, which were meant to provide for the family (Wagner 1970, cited in Kitching 1980, p. 83). While women allocated their own labour to their husbands' plots as well as their own plots, they did not control the end-products of the labour, because their husbands retained exclusive rights over these products (Wagner 1970, cited in Kitching 1980, p. 83). This aspect of the Avalogoli gender division of labour continues today. It is distinct from many other African contexts in which the conjugal contract is marked by a gender division of labour based on

men's control over cash crops and women's control over subsistence crops (Schroeder 1996; Carney and Watts 1990). In Maragoli, such a clear-cut division of control does not exist — a finding that is further substantiated by the gender disaggregated survey on crops carried out by Carter et al. (1998). In short, rather than being divided by crop type, on-farm labour is divided according to gender roles and responsibilities pertaining to specific on-farm labour practices (such as digging land and planting trees, as described in Chapter Six).

Rhoda

Rhoda is 70 years old and has been married for 55 years. She recounts the 'traditional' gender division of labour when she was young:

> *During the days [when] we grew up, we never bothered with being dependent fully [on] a man. Before, women arranged for food on their own with less of men's input. You could plant your own cassava or potatoes and keep a share for him. When the problems increased we just took a hoe and went to the farm. Then the food you harvest[ed] there, you cooked and shared it with your husband. You would not rely on him. So it didn't matter whether the man walked in with anything or not, because women had their own food already. That's how it was. We fended for ourselves, we never told our husbands to go to town to bring us money.*

She explains that there have been drastic changes over time, as shambas *no longer provide adequate food for many farmers, and women look towards their husbands to assist in the provision of income towards the purchase of food and other livelihood needs. When men are unable to fulfillthis role, there is an escalation of hostility within the household:*

> *[N]ow, there are very few homes with cassava and potatoes and such kinds of foods. And all the food, nearly all the food has to be bought from the town, and the husband is always looked upon to come home with food items. So the man who cannot buy food is courting domestic trouble, you know, and that's where the friction begins. People now have problems. Today's women begin cursing, "wherever he went, he doesn't care about his children." They tell their husbands "unless you bring food, you will see me," and they become hostile. They simply refuse [to persevere].*

Rhoda reflects on having persevered through many hardships in her life while she observed other women ceasing to do so and failing to behave in the 'proper' Avalogoli manner:

> *When I took the hoe and tilled I thought I was improving things. I [now] wonder, was I improving things or spoiling things? I always think about it myself when it rains on me: it looks like I was asking for trouble. Then I ask myself about these women who roam around. They have everything. Then I brush off the thought. Today's women cannot work on the* shamba *and feed a man who sits at home; they have refused to persevere. They do not conform to the old style of life where a woman's position was known. So, if I was a soft person I wouldn't be here. If I was a soft person, I wouldn't have worked on other people's* shambas *to feed my children. I want my name to be good and make history. People can uplift my name and use me as an example, and say that this woman was in problems but persevered until the end. My name will spread among my relatives and children. (L041)*

In addition, Rhoda's narrative demonstrates the heavy weight of cultural norms in giving meaning to what is valued. When wives "persevere" within marriage, even under the most stressful and intolerable of circumstances — within what is considered the "old style of

life" — they are upheld as examples for others, and are immortalized as such after their deaths. This is a key factor to consider in understanding the negotiation of labour responsibilities and obligations between women and men, and the limits that are set by patriarchal norms. Women who "persevere" and fulfill their duties are upheld as good wives. They not only find themselves in a better position in terms of their status and reputation within the community; they are also in a better position to hold men responsible for the fulfillment of their duties, including provision of resources.

As Rhoda's narrative illustrates, there have been drastic changes in roles and responsibilities. These changes have led to an escalation of intra-household politics, and must be contextualized within broader aspects of history, political economy, and the environment. For instance, male out-migration and the subsequent loss of male labour and decision-making in agriculture and soil management arose from colonial policies and drove men to towns and plantations in search of waged work. While women have always been the principal farmers in Maragoli, the scarcity of men's labour has further entrenched women's agricultural responsibilities. Women's primary role continues to be that of farmers, based on the duty of providing labour and food for household needs in exchange for usufruct rights to land. However, because of smaller plot sizes, the loss of communal grazing land and the increased necessity to purchase food with cash, women's roles as farmers alone can no longer fulfill livelihood requirements.

Further, male out-migration not only made men's labour in agriculture and soil management unavailable, it also placed a great deal of importance on monetary remittances from men's employment, thereby further entrenching the Avalogoli 'tradition' of men as "providers." Although cash became a necessity through the imposition of hut and poll taxes, new burdens from recent measures, aimed at 'adjusting' the Kenyan economy, have intensified demands on men to provide income for their families, in the sense that they must now meet the escalating costs of school fees and health care (an issue that is further expanded in Chapter Seven). The failure of men to meet these needs in an economically stressful environment has been a major factor in the escalation of gender politics focused on the renegotiation of the conjugal contract. Rhoda's narrative describes such an escalation of hostility between spouses based on husbands' failure to fulfill their role as "providers." This situation was not present when she was growing up. As Frederika's narrative will show, these political-economic transformations have created significant changes in relations in production, and have also prompted intense gender struggles over labour, its end-products, and its meaning. This is taking place in a situation in which women face increased burdens in agriculture, soil management, and other spheres of life. Men have responded in different ways in their efforts to re-establish control and 'order,' including reinforcing patriarchal norms and idioms, as well as engaging in acts of physical violence.

Frederika's situation is not unique. It illustrates two major points. First, that, women carry out the bulk of farming, soil management, and household labour in Maragoli, even in many cases where their husbands reside in the household. Women take on these tasks and responsibilities, adding to their already heavy labour burdens, when husbands do not satisfy the monetary needs of the family. The situation is more difficult for economically poor women and children, who often have to hire out their labour on other people's *shamba*s, sometimes withdrawing their labour from their own *shambas* at crucial times, such as during digging and planting season. Faced with this situation, women attempt to negotiate their husband's labour input into agriculture and soil management with different degrees of success,

by invoking cultural norms which point to men's failure to fulfill their roles as "providers." In this way, Frederika negotiated her husband's labour input, as well as his wages at pay point, by drawing upon Avalogoli cultural discourse and highlighting his failure as a "provider," in conjunction with his alcoholism.

Frederika

Frederika is an economically poor married women, aged 52, who married young through arranged marriage. She carries out most of the household and on-farm labour:

> *My duties are to fetch water, sweep the house, prepare food, going to the* posho *mill, come back and prepare a dish for the children and my husband, [and do] laundry [and] make sure that [the] children have clothes. Myself, I have a problem getting clothes, and so I have to hire my labour in the neighbourhood for cash, especially during the months of December and January, when there are many things — there is a lot of work on the* shamba, *hunger is so much and there is nothing in the house, and drought — it's really tough. I do this because I have no one to assist me. None of my children are employed. My husband is an alcoholic. He comes back [to] the house and demands food from his missions, not knowing how it is acquired. He never performs any house duties. Furthermore, my own children, while on vacation, have to hire their own labour for cash to purchase books and uniforms.*

Frederika's husband helps minimally in carrying out shamba *work. She carries out most of the* shamba *and soil management work. She explains:*

> *When I've prepared my land, I do plant things like maize, cowpeas, beans, cassava, millet. ... After I've dug, I incorporate maize stalks from the previous harvest underneath the soil. I remove dropped leaves from the trees and put them together with manure. I also dump there manure, that is decomposed leaves, grass and manure from the nbombe. On my bananas, I clear the bush, spread some stalks and also add manure, and I've put there trenches [through the negotiation of her husband's labour input].*

Her husband used to work as a shamba-*boy. In order to gain access to his earnings, Frederika devised ways of intercepting his wages:*

> *He used to assist a bit, noting that he was always drunk. I learned to cope right from the beginning and had to work even harder. Even when he was a* shamba-*boy, in order for me to get money from him, I had to go to the pay point. Otherwise, I will get nothing. I used some for paying school fees, buying soap, and for clothing. Otherwise, he simply disappeared into beer drinking. Now, my husband helps on the farm in the mornings, clearing the compound and grazing the cows. Then he leaves in the afternoon. His priority seems to be beer and cigarettes. He buys those things before he thinks of anything else. Afterwards, he comes to beat me. It is problems all through. I have just persevered since we women need to bear with such situations. (L040)*

Although he no longer earns a salary and contributes little to the day-to-day running of the household and shamba, *she continues to live in fear of violence from him.*

Photo 15: A photograph taken by Frederika. She describes: "this is a picture of my husband grazing the cow on the shamba, which doesn't produce good harvest. So the grass is only good for the cows... We cannot afford getting the manure. We have tilled and tilled — now it is tired. It is a bad picture because this land is not productive." (L040)

Second, Frederika's narrative demonstrates that, although women may be able to negotiate their husband's labour and income, men not only retain the upper hand in the creation and recreation of patriarchal cultural norms and idioms, but also wield power in other real ways. Physical violence is a common occurrence in Maragoli and is a clear manifestation of men's power over women. It is a means of re-establishing men's authority over women. It is used as a weapon to control women's behaviour and therefore maintain patriarchal 'order' within conjugal relations. Women often feel that they have limited options and have to "persevere" in the face of violence.[50]

Polygyny: the struggles of co-wives

Another Logoli reality that challenges simplified concepts of 'the household,' and marriage in particular, is the existence of polygyny. The existence of co-wives creates distinct problems and constraints in terms of the allocation of resources, the distribution of power, and the escalation of gender politics within the household. Jessika's narrative illustrates the types of limitations set by the patriarchal 'order,' and describes a situation in which resources have to be shared among co-wives.

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[50] *Women can do several things in response to violence or disputes that they feel are 'unjustified.' They can return to their homes, go to the elders, or "walk" from the situation. Usually women go to their parent's homes to let things blow over or to demonstrate the value of their labour and input into the day-to-day running of the* shamba. *In some cases, the matter is mediated and thrashed out by family members and the elders in the community. If the woman is found to be in the wrong, her parents ask her to return to her husband's home. If the husband was wrong, he is made to pay a fine.*

Jessika

Jessika is a 44-year-old senior co-wife who resides with her husband, while her co-wife has a separate house and plot. Jessika explains the gender division of labour within the household:

> *In the house what I do in the morning is sweep the house. After that I prepare breakfast and then wash the utensils. Then I search for cow feed. Later on I go and till the land. By this time he has already left. He does not do much of it. Most of the* shamba *work is done by the woman. This is because our plots are small. ... He can plant the seeds after I have tilled but he cannot frequent the land and till it. ... We don't hire labour for tilling. I do the tilling by myself. ... Our husband, when we are tilling, he has to purchase the seeds and fertilizer for planting. He is responsible for that. He provides money for specific purposes. ... Like he says, I've left this money for you to buy the food that you will eat. ... What he wants is napier grass and the maize planted in a proper manner. He supervises the planting, but when they are ready for harvesting he doesn't control the usage. We just use. Like vegetables — he doesn't decide for me, I just do it myself.*

Jessika's husband provides income towards her cash needs, although this is insufficient and irregular because of his work as a carpenter, and because it has to be shared with her co-wife. Jessika carries out most of the work and decision-making pertaining to her shamba, *while her husband carries out a 'supervisory' role. Although Jessika is held up as an exemplary co-wife in the community, and she is in a more powerful position as senior co-wife, she does not agree with polygyny, but believes that it is a "man's choice":*

> *I don't think it is a good thing. The reason why I think it is a bad thing is that when you are two, you can easily develop. You educate your children, eat well, and dress well —do everything to make your home good. But if you have a co-wife, the income is low. Your children can never get educated. Expenses are not met. Then you start blaming each other, meaning, if the income is low, you can't distribute it easily because it's not enough. ... You can't get along well. So you kind of blame each other.*

Having a co-wife means that resources such as land and income have to be shared among wives and children. This leads to an escalation of intra-household conflict. However, rather than engaging in the bitter war of words that normally ensues when a husband marries a second wife, Jessika chose to ignore the hostility and "keep quiet":

> *I used to have such feelings when it had just happened. ... Those days I used to feel he had degraded me because I thought, if he knew I was his wife, why did he marry another one? I reached a stage where I considered leaving, but then I thought, my children will remain in problems. ... That is why I'm still here. Now even many people are giving me as an example: "go to Jessika so that she can explain to you how people stay," because I am not complicated, they know that. So somebody can say, "you are very stubborn — you should be spending some time with Jessika and her co-wife. They will tell you how life is."*
>
> *It's a matter of perseverence. Even if you experience some difficulties and you are there, what will you do? There is nothing you can change. ... It's hard for a young woman to settle for marriage. In order to settle you need to be patient, whatever the circumstances. This is because a man's word is final, even if he wants to marry a second wife. ... So life becomes tough and this is when most people give up, because he doesn't provide food and there is no good care. (L027)*

Photo 16: Jessica explains her photograph: "This one is my cow. I am trying to take care of it so that I can get milk from it. But the facilities to make a good boma *for feeding are not available. If you feed it well with good grass, it can give you milk. When its Okay and gets calves, you can sell and use the money in case of problems... I use cow dung manure. The cow dung is always taken to the shamba, so that when the tilling season comes, all I do is mix the soil and then the whole shamba is fertile. It's my husband who insists on commercial fertilizer, but we only use it if at all the manure hasn't decomposed ... I prefer cow manure because if you compare maize planted by manure and [that] planted by fertilizer, there is a difference. And also, when you use manure to plant maize [and] then the rain disappears, at least [it] will germinate, but when you use commercial fertilizer and the rain disappears, then nothing comes up." (L027)*

Jessika states that "a man's word is final." This statement captures the degree of power and authority that men hold in defining conjugal relations and allocating resources within the household. Despite Jessika's disagreement, she chose to accept her husband's decision to marry a second wife. Like many other Maragoli women, Jessika chose to remain in a situation with which she did not fundamentally agree, a situation in which women face violence and in which they continue to provide labour without equitable returns. Jessika's decision must be weighed against two critical factors that help to explain the dynamics of gender relations in Maragoli, and women's position within conjugal relations: the weight given to the norm of "persevering" and upholding men's roles as "commanders"; and the options open to women when women do, in fact, stop "persevering."

There are consequences that ensue when women stop "persevering," even in the face of violence, abuse, or inequitable circumstances. One extreme final act of resistance is referred to as "walking" — where women effectively divorce their husbands and forfeit their usufruct rights to land. Further, children are considered the "property" of the husband and his clan, especially if bridewealth payments have been made. Therefore, when women "walk," they either leave their children behind in uncertain environments (in most cases, in the hands of stepmothers) or leave their children in their parental homes (if this is an

option). In both cases, their children's inheritance rights may be rendered vulnerable. These important consequences are factors that keep women from "walking." As Chapters Seven and Eight illustrate, women face stark livelihood options when they "walk." Rhoda's account in this chapter demonstrates that strong cultural stigmas exist against women who "walk."

In between the extremes of "persevering" and "walking" is the option of withdrawing labour from their *shambas*. While it has been demonstrated that women can withdraw their labour from their husband's *shambas* in other African contexts in situations where they do not control the returns of their own labour (Schroeder 1996; Mackenzie 1995a; Carney and Watts 1990), the same cannot be said for Maragoli. There are some significant reasons why women cannot totally withdraw their labour from the *shamba*. The first is the weight that is placed on being a "good" wife. Being seen as a 'bad' wife has symbolic and material consequences. Women are stigmatized and their lives become the subject of intense critical discussion and scrutiny by others. By totally withdrawing their labour from the farm, they are viewed as 'bad' wives and farmers, and are risking their long-term claims to the land for themselves and their children. Women must, at a minimum, invest in farming as a symbolic and strategic gesture towards fulfilling their role as a 'good' wife, while investing in other livelihood options that are more lucrative in terms of generating an income and sustaining a livelihood. Making only a minimum commitment of energy, time, and labour into the farm has long-term negative implications for soil management, which normally requires intensive labour inputs.

The second reason why women cannot totally withdraw their labour from the farm and the household is because women who do so cannot continue to stay on their husband's and clan's land, as withdrawal of labour can result in being "chased away." There are also practical restrictions that make the option of withdrawing labour untenable. There is no alternative land on which to allocate their labour available, except in the rare case where a woman can borrow or rent land. Borrowing land requires access to people who may be willing to do so.[51] The option of buying or renting land, even for groups, is not viable because of the high price of land, as well as men's resistance to women purchasing land in their own names (as illustrated in the previous chapter).

The preceding discussion highlights the different ways in which marriage is experienced and focuses on the negotiations and struggles that take place within the household. These negotiations are significant, because they reveal that struggles over meanings and symbols are in themselves struggles over resources (Moore 1993). Marriage, then, is a site for gender politics. It is an arena for material as well as symbolic struggles between women and men, where negotiation over roles and responsibilities impinges on access to resources that are central to sustaining the soils, as well as sustaining livelihoods. The issue of household headship continues to expand our understanding of conjugal relations and diversity in marital status.

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[51] *This situation is in stark contrast to other case studies such as Carney and Watts' (1990) and Schroeder's study of Gambia (1996). Maragoli is distinctive, as there exists no large-scale estate farm where women can withdraw their labour, as is the case in Mackenzie's study of Murang'a, Central Province (1995a).*

Women-headed households

While much of conventional research assumes that the 'head' of the household is male, farmers' experiences in Maragoli challenge this assumption. Women-headed households are both numerous and varied in Maragoli, and represent an important segment of society that is often vulnerable in terms of access to and control over resources. In particular, their circumstances have implications in terms of women's rights to on-farm labour and its products, as well as women's status within society. Women-headed households can be classified into two groups: de facto and de jure heads of household. The discussion below explores the different situations, experiences, and constraints that arise for women in both these cases.

De facto women-headed households

De facto women-headed households are defined as those where husbands have out-migrated, or where husbands and wives reside together but their marriage exists "in name only." In these cases, women are in charge of day-to-day farming, soil management, and livelihood responsibilities and decision-making. The following narrative, by Etta, illustrates a situation in which both circumstances have come to apply over time.

Etta

Etta is 56 years old. Her husband married a co-wife twelve years into their marriage. She explains:

> *Since I got married, life was good. But somewhere along the way of my married life, my husband began misbehaving. I thought, what has become of my house? Is it because my husband has married a second wife, hence undermining me? He reached a point of ordering me to leave his compound and go. ... His people [his brother] got inspired and investigated the whole conflict and found me innocent. They concluded, "Etta, you have no reason to leave." ... Why was I to leave so abruptly? So this matter has in the past disturbed my mind. ... So he has to favour the second one [wife] and tends to hate the older one. ... My* shamba *was big enough, but he divided [it] and gave some to my co-wife, and left me with a small piece. ... If you don't get enough strength and courage, it's very difficult. ... Because you have to take care of your children. The children cannot suffer.*

When Etta's husband married a second wife, he allocated part of Etta's shamba *to his co-wife. When he began to neglect his obligations towards her, and ceased to fulfill his role as a "provider," she began to hire out her own labour on other people's* shambas.

> *When they were still working is when they were really bad people. ... They didn't send me anything. ... Even those days, school fees were not very high, and these children of mine, [they] made them not go to school by not paying their school fees. I told my children to just persevere because I had nothing else to say. Even when he was still paying fees, I would go there and he used to give me only school fees and nothing else. Then I would come and start afresh digging for other people's farms.*

She eventually took a job as a cook in a local school and later became a Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA). She now supports her family, and sometimes even her husband.

> *Now that he is out of work [retired], his economic power has gone down. He still gets a pension that he uses. When he's broke you will see him coming. And when he comes, he comes as a good person and very friendly. ... We greet each other, but he rarely comes to my house. ... I prepare a meal and we eat, but he never spends a night in my house, no. (L017)*

Etta's marriage exists "in name" only. She has taken over all the roles and responsibilities in terms of farming, soil management, and "providing." She makes all the decisions regarding the household and shamba. *She is a de facto head of household.*

Etta's account, along with those of Frederika and Jessika earlier in this chapter, demonstrates that, while women may reside with their husbands, their husbands may provide little or no farming and soil management labour, or vital resources such as cash for sustaining a livelihood. Nonetheless, women publicly cite their husbands as 'heads' of household, although it clear that their husbands' input, in terms of both labour and income, is minimal at best. Similar to Pottier's findings in Rwanda (1989, p. 465), neither Logoli women's initial responses, nor public transcripts about agricultural and soils practices, reflect the extent of women's knowledge and decision-making power in these areas. In-depth accounts gained through multiple interviews reveal that women are the farmers and sustainers of the soils. They make the bulk of decisions based on in-depth knowledge, gained over the long term, regarding the microenvironments of their *shambas*, even though they do not always publicly subscribe to these roles. Hence, agricultural researchers and development agents may underestimate the central role of women by relying on their public transcripts or the superficial conversations that often occur when using rapid and non-participatory types of methods.

While many soil management 'development' initiatives may overlook this basic reality by assuming that men are the principal farmers and sustainers of the soil, Logoli men themselves reinforce this assumption by invoking public transcripts which uphold them as "commanders" of the household, *shamba*, and decision-making processes. What is significant is that men perpetuate this discourse, representing themselves as 'heads' of household, because they recognize that important 'development' resources are normally channeled through the head of household. This picture of soil management, farming, and "providing" for livelihood sustenance also upholds 'traditional' cultural norms and idioms regarding gender roles and responsibilities. Women continue to uphold this discourse of men as 'heads' of household even in situations where their husbands have out-migrated for a great number of years. They do this to create room to maneuver and to deflect the strong taboos and stigmas that are associated with being women heads of household.

Women whose husbands out-migrate constitute a particular group of de facto heads of household. Whether they view themselves as such depends largely on their own subjective understanding and may be affected by their life-cycle and household positioning. For instance, younger newlywed women are more likely to perpetuate the discourse of their husbands as 'heads' of household. De facto women-headed households differ from de jure women headed households (such as those headed by widows) because women in the former situation do not face the same social stigmas and threats to land security. However, while their marital status allows them to escape the heavy social stigmas associated with being unmarried, they share similar types of labour and monetary constraints as widows. This situation is made especially intense when their husbands do not provide remittances. This highlights that the successful engagement of men's waged labour in urban centres does not guarantee income to their wives and families in the form of remittances, as men often take on second wives or lovers in urban settings, effectively diverting these resources from their wives. The account of Elizabeth, a young Logoli wife, illustrates such a situation later in this chapter.

De jure women-headed households

De jure women-headed households are defined as those where women are responsible for the livelihood needs of all residing in the household and have the power to make major decisions. They include those headed by women who are widowed or divorced. In this section, the discussion is limited to widows, as divorced women rarely retain rights to land in Maragoli, or continue to engage in farming and soils management. They are more likely to be "chased away" to rural towns and urban centres and frequently engage in off-farm income-generating activities, a subject that is discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Widows are common heads of household in Maragoli. There is a great deal of diversity in widows' positionalities. For instance, of the fifteen widows and two widowers interviewed for this research, their ages ranged from 36 to 90. Five had co-wives and two were economically elite. There are noticeably more widows than widowers in Maragoli, because men can remarry without losing access to land and property. On the other hand, women cannot remarry and continue to remain on, or retain rights to, their deceased husband's *shambas*.[52] Widows who continue to "persevere" and remain on their husband's *shambas* after their deaths are often concerned with maintaining their sons' rights to land, as well as retaining their own access to land and its products. The following narrative describes the constraints and problems widows face in terms of labour and resources.

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[52] *When a woman remarries, she loses her claim to her ex-husband's land and property, and must move to her new husband's home. She often leaves small children behind or in her parents' care. These children may subsequently lose all rights to land from their biological fathers. Thus, land tenure rights for their children are a central concern for widows, and a major deterrent for women who consider "walking."*

Queen

Queen is an economically poor widow with five children. She explains her circumstances and some of the problems she faces as a widow:

> *I was born in 1955 and got married in 1972, I got five children, then my husband passed away, in 1983. Since then I've been living in problems. I can't even farm because my arm is almost withered. Most of my children have never gone to school. Feeding is a problem: in order for us to get a meal, they [the children] have to sell their labour. And this is how we survive. ... I just do normal house chores. One of my children does work as a house servant. ... And one of my sons is in Nairobi roaming about. It's now five years and he's never been seen.*
>
> *I feel bad when I stay with my children without anyone to help me. That's my biggest problem. You know it becomes more difficult when a man dies — everything remains under your responsibility. ... It's been very difficult ever since he passed away. When he was alive, he could go for casual jobs and sometimes he used to help and buy us some food. ... But, as you know, when men live in town, they become unpredictable — he could finish even six months without sending anything.*
>
> *There is a difference, because, as you know, when you are alone you handle all the problems and needs alone. But those who are two easily share their needs. And there are certain jobs that can only be done by men. When there is a man in a home, he can plant bananas because I, as a woman, cannot do it. If the house needs repair, then he can do it. ... Like the way my roof leaks. ... [and] demarcating the plants that mark the boundary — they are planted by men only. Men build houses, even making trenches. Women can also dig but it's men who do it better, not women. Women cannot manage to use the spade while removing soil. (L030)*

Photo 17 (taken by Queen): "This is napier grass and bananas. I took it to show the things that help me. If I'm in need of anything, I cut these napier grass and bananas and sell them and the paw paws are for children to eat." (L030)

Because she is a widow, and economically poor, Queen and her children are forced to hire out their own labour to make ends meet. This takes time and labour away from her own *shamba*. This is further compounded by her poor health, which does not allow her to fully carry out her labour on the farm. Queen also sheds light on the gender division of roles and responsibilities in Maragoli, which restricts women from carrying out certain one-time labour specific activities, such as planting bananas, although they carry out the bulk of the day-to-day on-farm labour.

Often, the presence of a husband seems to makes little difference in the amount of labour women carry out. However, women who are like Queen, insist that life becomes harder after one's husband dies. At the same time, they insist that their husbands provided inconsistent, unreliable, or no monetary remittances and day-to-day labour in the *shamba* and the household when they were alive. While recognizing that a sporadic income is better than no income at all, cultural norms and idioms provide an avenue to reconcile this seemingly contradictory discourse.

A husband's presence, although often "just in name," holds powerful meanings in Maragoli, as marriage is a norm by which all is measured. When women first become widows, their conduct and behaviour is closely watched by the community and clansmen, as Desi's account showed in Chapter Four. Widows often reported that the first few months after their husbands' deaths were the most trying. This is not just because of the added stress, labour, and monetary requirements pertaining to the funeral and attempts at land appropriation, but also because this was a period when they were closely scrutinized by their husbands' families, the community, and friends. While widowhood does indeed bring some degree of personal autonomy and new measures of decision-making power for women as heads of household, these gains are offset by strong social scrutiny, stigmas, and taboos. They are also accompanied by the intensification of labour, especially in situations where husbands had provided labour or income in the past, or in situations in which women suffer from "bad" reputations.

Through their stories, Rhoda, Frederika, Jessika, Etta, and Queen begin to illustrate the diversity of marital and household situations that exist in Maragoli. Depending on these various marital and household circumstances, each woman has different means and opportunities available to her at particular times. Each woman encounters different opportunities, constraints, obligations, and status within the household and community. The degree to which each woman can depend on her husband's labour input, income, and support is different in each case. For example, Etta and Queen are both primarily responsible for financially supporting their households and sustaining their *shambas*. On the other hand, Jessika can sometimes rely on her husband to make financial contributions to the household, soil management, and farming requirements, which are irregular; and Frederika can rely on her husband's labour inputs on the *shamba* only minimally.

Class and social differentiation

Male out-migration has played a significant role in affecting social differentiation in Maragoli over time, as Crowley and Carter explain:

> *Who migrates and who does not, the differences in benefits from off farm opportunities, and assessments of returns to labour on farm made within this broader context have had a profound impact on agrarian change and its social significance. (1996, p. 2)*

During colonial rule, changes brought about by the education of children at missionary schools, as well as the growing importance of cash remittances from male out-migration and waged employment, affected the seniority within the lineage as the basis for accumulating goods, status, and political power (Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). Thus, differentiation within Maragoli society became rooted in the relative success of the individual in a cash-driven market economy through the accumulation of monetary wealth. A new indicator of wealth became the ability to hire other people's labour for agricultural purposes beyond the extended family (Carter et al. 1998, p. 9). The accumulation of monetary wealth not only continues to play a key role in the differentiation of society and the formation of class in Maragoli today, but also in understandings of culture based on power, class, and status. Farmers' accounts illustrate that the degree to which farmers are able to access income has implications on the extent to which they are able to access other people's labour as a key resource necessary for agricultural production and sustaining the soils.

Economically poor farmers

Economically poor farmers, in particular, face acute constraints in terms of providing and accessing labour to sustain their soils, their farms, and their livelihoods. Queen's and Frederika's narratives illustrate that they face an intensification in their labour burdens: they not only have to care for their own *shambas*, but often have to hire out their labour on other people's *shambas* to make ends meet. In effect, they compromise their roles as farmers, expending their energies and labour in sustaining the soils and farms of other people before tending to their own. Consequently, their *shambas* often suffer from poor soil management and unsustainable farming practices. Economically poor women who "deviate" from patriarchal norms, or are in the early stages of marital life, may be in the most precarious positions of all. As discussed, they lack control over the allocation of their own labour, as well as the proceeds of that labour. In addition, these women have few alternative livelihood options.

Furthermore, economically poor farmers face acute shortages of cash. This means they are disadvantaged in many ways. They cannot afford the soil management and farming inputs necessary to sustain their farms in the long term. They also lack access to economic resources such as start-up capital and credit, which could potentially alleviate some of the constraints they face. Often, they lack access to cash for basic needs, such as food. In addition, they are unable to meet other livelihood requirements — for example, they cannot afford to send their children to school. In this vicious circle, economically poor farmers are unable to devote the time, energy, and labour that they would like to give to sustainable farming and soil management practices. This stark situation is exacerbated by feelings of despair, a lowered status within society, as well as acute constraints, such as lack of food and lack of income to meet health care or education requirements.

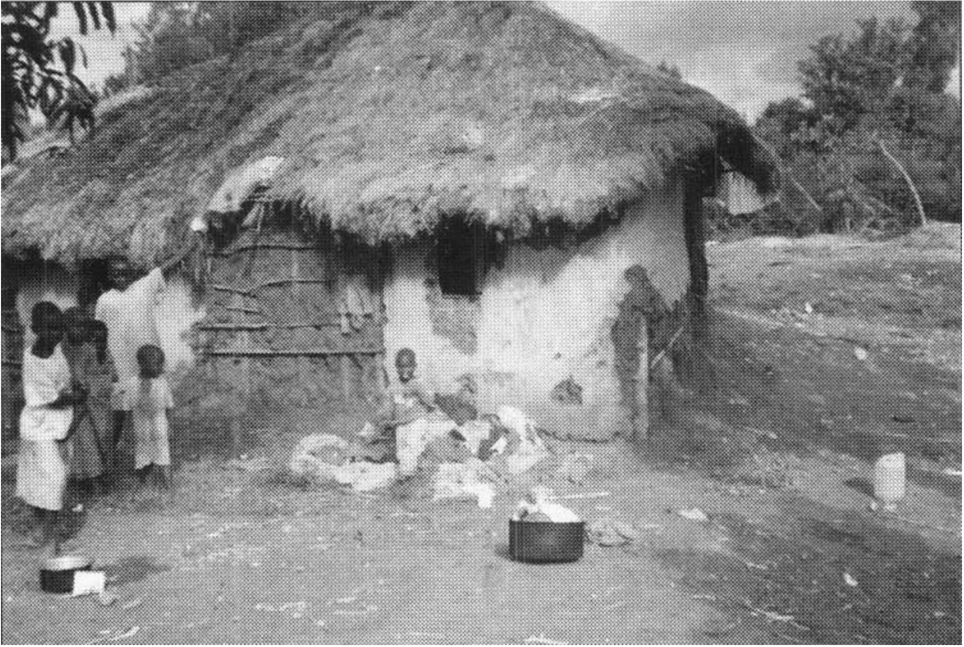

Photo 18: This photograph was taken by Patroba, Rhoda's 34-year-old friend and neighbour. Patroba explains: "She is my best friend. This picture shows how she lives her life ... it is a bad picture because they are so poor that they don't have time to work on the shamba *and also work on the house ... you can see these dirty beddings where the child is sitting ... At least, I am better off, because I have a cow and some tea bushes." (L015)*

While there has been an increased differentiation of Avalogoli society in recent times, the situation is not simply a picture of "haves" and "have nots." Intricate and complex sets of social ties, relations, and obligations detract from such a simplistic picture. As discussed in Chapter Eight, women and men engage in, and invoke, multiple social relationships and kinship ties to access resources. Thus, elite relatives, friends, and neighbours do not 'enjoy' their wealth in isolation — they are subject to the expectations, rights, and obligations of poorer relatives, friends, and neighbours. For economically poor farmers, kinship relations are important channels of access to resources required for farming, soil management, and broader livelihood needs.

Economically wealthy farmers

The following account illustrates the resources and constraints that economically wealthy women sometimes face, despite their privileged status.

Febe

Febe is an economically elite woman. Her husband resides with her but contributes little input and labour towards the day-to-day running of the shamba *and household.*

> *My husband doesn't do any work on the* shamba. *I dig, plant, cultivate, weed, and even harvest. I do the cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the houses. He only provides the money. The money comes from his pension. And sometimes he helps with planting. (L014)*

Photo 19: This photograph was taken by a 52-year-old farmer named Rebeka (see Chapter Four). She explains the significance of this photograph: "I took this one to see how my bananas look like. And I can see they're really green." Rebeka has a full-time shamba-boy whom she supervises. "You put manure in it ... you don't put it on the stems, you put far, and you put fresh cow dung. The water from the cow dung when it rains goes underground to the roots." (L003)

Photo 20: This photograph was taken by a 50-year-old economically elite farmer. She explains: "This picture is my workman trying to pour the urine on napier grass. They clean [the cow shed] everyday — as they clean that place, the water goes there. I have to remove that water the same day." (L004)

Similar to other Logoli men, Febe's husband considers himself the 'head' of the household and a successful "provider" of money for both agricultural and household use. His contributions end there. He has little knowledge of the day-to-day details regarding farming, livestock, and soil management. It is important to note that he considers himself the 'head' of the household by virtue of the fact that he is the senior male and fulfills his duties as the "provider." However, he is not the 'head' of household in terms of decision-making pertaining to farming and soil management.

While much of the work associated with agricultural production and soils management is shouldered by women, economically wealthy women are advantaged in many ways. While Febe describes carrying out activities such as digging, weeding, and harvesting, in practice, she takes a supervisory and decision-making role in terms of farming, soil management, and household work, rarely engaging in labour-intensive activities herself. In effect, she is the manager of the *shamba*. This situation highlights another important insight into gender relations, and challenges homogenizing definitions used to describe farmers. Economically wealthy women like Febe are able to pay for other people to carry out labour-intensive activities related to farming, and soil erosion and conservation. They carry out the task of managing and supervising hired labourers, which requires monetary payment (usually 40-50 shillings per day) and the provision of a meal. Economically elite women often hire permanent *shamba*-boys and 'house-girls' to carry out the day-to-day farming, soil management, and household work. The involvement of *shamba*-boys gives rise to interesting power relations, as this is a circumstance in which women are in a more powerful position than men.

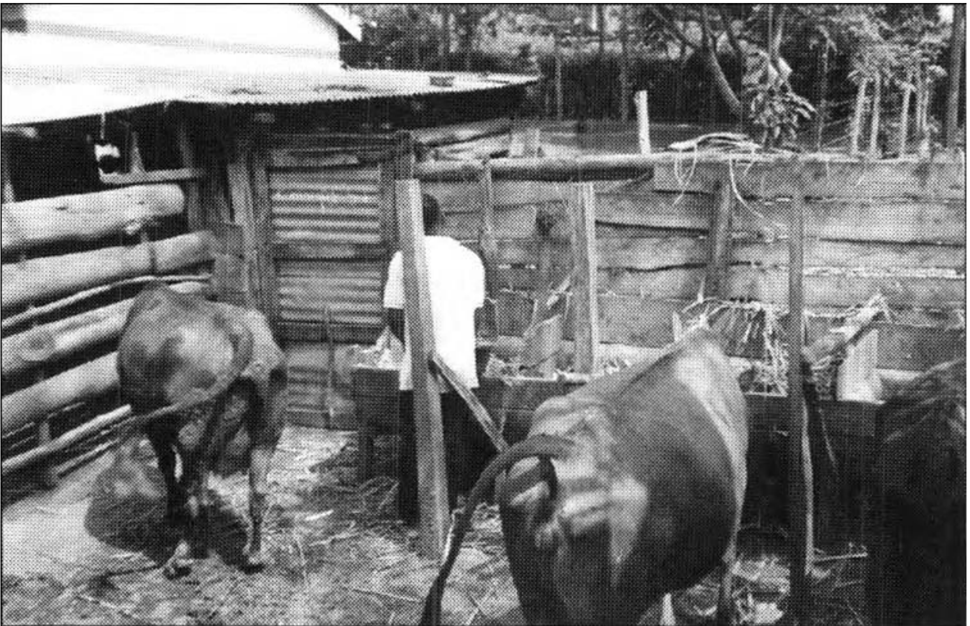

Photo 21 (taken by Rebeka): "This picture shows where my cow stays and I took it when one was eating and the other one was trying to run. It is good because I can see the cow seems to be healthy." Rebeka employs one shamba-boy full-time, but, on the other hand, she claims, I only use women to dig and plant ... Here I am trying to show [that] we put the cow dung in my land, because we get cow dung from here and then make manure [for] my land. We take it and put it somewhere. After three months, we turn it. After again three months, you turn it again and take it somewhere where it will dry. When it dries is when you can use it for planting." (L003)

Another advantage that economically elite women have is access to inputs for soil management. They often own a great number of livestock that they keep in elaborate cow bomas, from which they obtain large quantities of organic manure for maintaining soil fertility. From these bomas, they are also able to collect slurry that acts as an effective fertilizer on crops such as napier grass, and substantially increases yields. They also tend to own a larger plot of land, sometimes spread over more than one *shamba*, on which they diversify and spread risks over a variety of soil types and microenvironments (Crowley and Carter 2000). Many grow enough napier grass on one single plot to feed their livestock, and sometimes sell the surplus. They may also engage in extensive soil management techniques, making them obvious targets as 'progressive farmers' by agricultural extension workers and 'development' practitioners. One economically wealthy woman explained that she learned from extension workers how to use leftover brewer's waste from a beer brewery in Kisumu to feed her livestock. This technique increased the quantity and quality of organic manure and urine produced from her cows, which in turn increased her crop yields.

However, being economically elite does not necessarily translate into full access to and control over resources such as labour or income. This depends on a woman's personal relationship with her husband and her positioning in the household. For example, one economically elite Logoli woman described a situation in which, despite the fact that she had a separate income from teaching, her husband appropriated her salary at pay point throughout their marriage by invoking his status as the 'head' of the household. This left her with little income to run the household and *shamba*, and provide for her own needs. While they continue to live on the same compound, they reside in separate houses. Her access to resources, such as transportation and income, which are vital for managing and farming numerous dispersed plots, is limited and controlled by her husband. This example challenges the prevailing view of the 'pooling' household, questions gender-neutral assumptions about access to resources as a given for elite farmers, and highlights that elite women can also be vulnerable in their personal circumstances within conjugal relations.

Age and changing life-cycle positioning

Depending on their personal circumstances pertaining to age, life-cycle positioning and household circumstances, women and men differentially access and control on-farm labour vital for farming and soil management.

Children

On one end of the age scale, young children have always been expected to contribute their labour to lighter farming and soil management practices, although formal education and economic demands have drawn away even these contributions from the *shamba*.[53] An older Logoli woman explains:

[53] *Schooling during colonialism had an important gender dimension. Boys were encouraged by the colonial government to attend formal schooling. They were also encouraged by their parents, in order to increase their chances of gaining access to waged employment, and, hence, cash remittances to the household. Even when colonial policies began encouraging girls to attend, it took some time to convince people to send girls for formal education, because this had major repercussions on the labour availability on the farm and in the household compound, and because girls who received formal education were stigmatized initially.*

Adults used to work on the shamba. They could till and the children did the weeding. [Small] children never used to till. Children of this age never worked on the shamba. ... these ones [girls] would be told to babysit; these ones [boys] would be asked to take care of cows. It is the big children who would till the land. It's the adults who tilled the shamba. Today, if there is no education, then they are just taken to the shamba. But during our days, it was said that if [small] children worked [tilled] on the shamba, they will get stunted, they won't grow tall. (L046)

Today, formal schooling and education have continued to make children's labour input into farming and soil management minimal. Despite this loss of labour, women place a great deal of importance on the education and schooling of both daughters and sons, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Education is perceived as a potentially lucrative avenue for gaining employment and providing resources. Nevertheless, both unmarried young women and men are expected to contribute their labour to the compound, household, and *shamba*, although the type and amount of labour is differentiated by gender, varies during the annual cycle, and is also dependent on class. While school-going children and adults are not expected to contribute to the day-to-day labour requirements during the semester, their labour in the *shamba* and the household is expected and valued during periods of school leave, as it lightens the labour loads of the women on the compound. Economically poor children sometimes have to hire out their labour on other people's *shambas* to contribute towards their school fees

Photo 22 (photograph taken by Queen): "This is showing a good thing, because I have my children in it. I have a schooling child, the second born; this eldest daughter of mine was coming home from school ... The others don't go to school. I have to dig my land, I have to go and hire out my labour, so that I can get a way of buying her books, pens, and other [things] that they want [me] to pay [for]." (L030)

Photo 23 (photograph also taken by Queen): "That one now is my eldest son. He was feeding the sheep. When this one saw that school fees [were] not available, he decided to step down. Now if we are two like this [my son and I], if I go out for labour, or he goes out for labour, [the] money we get, we use ... to buy food, and part goes to buy her books, pens, uniforms, and other school expenses ... There is not enough, so they [the other children] don't go to school, they are just there." (L030)

and household expenses. However, children do not always cooperate with their parents, and often complain about economic pressures and social norms that control their behaviour, labour, time, and personal freedom.

Young women

Young women in the early stages of their marital life face especially acute problems in terms of the control and allocation of their own labour and its product. This situation is exacerbated when their personal circumstances defy the dictates of cultural norms, which unleash strong stigmas and sanctioning, especially in situations in which they have children out-of-wedlock. The following narrative illustrates such a situation.

Elizabeth

When she was nineteen, Elizabeth had a child out-of-wedlock. She eventually married the biological father three years later. She describes her circumstances and the reaction from the community:

> *It is not allowed for young girls to get children before marriage, so when it happens you are abused. You are told that you are a bad girl and you've left school before completion. ... I was told, "You are a mother, why can't you go home and take care of your child?" My dignity in the community was lowered. ... My main problem*

was the child, because my parents could not afford feeding and clothing the child. So the little money [I had, I] shared between [myself] and the child. I finished school and decided to practice farming until I got married. My husband agreed [to marry me]. He called me and then he sent some old mamas to come and collect me.

Elizabeth's husband lives in Nairobi, where he works as a casual labourer. He sends few or no remittances.

He is in Nairobi looking for a job. Earlier, he had a casual job and he only contributed 150 shillings per month. I buy food [and] clothing, but the money is so little — like now, my son is sick but I cannot afford to take him to hospital. ... It is difficult being alone, because everything is upon you: feeding the children and clothing them, educating them, and doing some household work, and even going to the shamba. And, for instance, my house is not roofed properly, so when it leaks I have to get someone to repair [it]. ... I am left without seeing my husband.

Elizabeth's husband is the only son in the family. Her sisters-in-law are not married, and continue to live in the household. Her mother-in-law has yet to allocate the most lucrative portion of the land to her, although Elizabeth has been given a small plot where she grows cabbages, sugar cane, and bananas. She carries out the bulk of the shamba and household work, and, yet, is not recognized or compensated for her efforts. She has frequent quarrels with her sisters-in-law:

All the work is done by me, and the in-laws only do a few duties. Mostly my mother-in-law is picking tea, because it is not frequent. I go and fetch water six to eight times a day. [When] it is dry like now, you can go a lot of times. I also cook, clean, graze the cow, do washing, take care of the children, and work on the shamba. Digging, they [sisters-in-law] help me on the mother-in-law's farm. Also they help me cook and iron, and sometimes washing of the baby. Sometimes when visitors come, most of the time I am the one who does [the cooking]. And when eating time comes, I'm given a very small portion, yet I work more. I feel that is mistreatment. The work is not divided fairly. ... On the side of food, it becomes a problem because my husband does casual work. He cannot afford bringing money for food so it becomes a problem because [the sisters-in-law], they quarrel. It is painful. They say you are just eating yet your husband brings nothing. (L006)

In Maragoli, a women's position in terms of age and life-cycle positioning affects the amount of labour and degree of control she exerts in making decisions and accessing resources that are vital to farming and soil management. The degree of control affects her own labour and its products. The cultural interpretation of her personal circumstances affects how she is viewed by her husband, her in-laws, and the community, and the degree to which she has to prove herself as a "good" wife. Elizabeth's account illustrates that young women who have children out-of-wedlock face strong social stigmas that paint them as "bad" women. Even when a woman manages to marry the biological father, this stigma does not go away and is manipulated by her husband, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other members of the compound in order to make additional claims on her on-farm labour until she has proven herself a "good" wife. The fact that Elizabeth had a child out-of-wedlock has been used as a lever by her unmarried sisters-in-law, who themselves face strong social pressures from their brother and members of the community to leave their home and to marry. They manipulate the cultural stigmas and norms to transfer some of their own labour responsibilities to Elizabeth. This lever is also used by her mother-in-law,

Photo 24 (taken by Elizabeth): It shows her small plot where she grows napier grass, sugar cane, and a tree in the background (upper left-hand corner). She remarks, "when the leaves of the sugar cane dry up, you can use them for mulching ... this tree in the shamba provides shade which is not good for the crops because they have no sunshine to mature." (L006)

who, in the absence of her deceased husband, has not initiated the allocation of the most lucrative part of the *shamba*, the tea plantation, to her son, thereby withholding the rights to access, use, and control its products from her daughter-in-law.

Elizabeth's experiences are not unique. Cultural taboos are often used to exert power over young women during the early stages of marital life to gain access to their labour. This means that they work on *shambas* where they do not always control their own labour, or benefit from the products of that labour. They often work "like maids" and face heavy work burdens and time constraints, which leave little time to work on their own plots, to undertake labour-intensive sustainable soil management and farming practices, or to partake fully in important social institutions.[54] In addition, they face constraints in terms of accessing resources such as land, farming and soil management inputs, and food. Nonetheless, over time, they learn to hire out their own labour to meet their monetary needs, join women's groups, and forge relationships and alliances with others who are sympathetic to their situation.

Despite all the injustices and mistreatment that Elizabeth faces, she has been allocated a small plot, and is able to access a small amount of organic and green manure from the compound and have a trench built, which illustrates her ability to negotiate these processes.

[54] *During interviews with Elizabeth or when passing by her compound, I often found her alone on the compound. On these occasions she had been left behind to continue working on the* shamba *and household while her in-laws and neighbours were attending community events or participating in funeral ceremonies.*

By calling upon cultural idioms that emphasize the value of her hard work — in effect her "perseverance" and her rightful position in the household — she is increasingly able to find room to maneuver and to access and use the land (albeit a small plot at the time), despite power relations which place her in a vulnerable position.

The importance of bridewealth

Bridewealth is an important factor which places young women in particular in a vulnerable position, and which circumscribes their capacity to control and allocate their own labour within conjugal and extended family relations. Participants referred to it as "dowry": it involves the transfer of wealth (usually large sums of money and cows) from the man's to the woman's family. While in the past, marriage and the negotiation of bridewealth was traditionally organized and overseen by parents and elder relatives, today, most women and men choose to elope. Women simply take up residence on a man's compound, thereby temporarily holding off bridewealth discussions and formal wedding ceremonies until a later date. In today's economic circumstances, the escalating costs of bridewealth payments means that they are rarely paid in full, but rather rest on a system of debts to be paid sometime in the undefined future (sometimes never).[55]

Bridewealth is important to young women in the early stages of marital life, because their reputations as "good" wives are reflected in its payment. One woman explains:

> *Dowry is important to all people who want to get married. Going to another family...at least you cannot go there freely. The man must be responsible at least to give the parents something, some ngombes with cash. (L002)*

The negotiation and payment of bridewealth is an important symbolic gesture that opens the way for reciprocal relations vital to both a woman and her family's welfare (Abwunza 1997, p. 21). In turn, it is a potential avenue for accessing future material resources. Given this importance, the payment of bridewealth involves struggles over both symbolic and material resources between spouses. Most importantly, the obligation of the husband and his family to pay bridewealth to his wife's family can be used as a lever of power to control his wife's labour and her right to access on-farm resources. The degree of autonomy and space a woman can maneuver in resistance to her husband's control depends on her relationship with her husband and in-laws. This, in turn, depends on her reputation. An older woman recalls the heavy work burdens she faced when she first married:

> *It depends on the family. You can be married in a family whereby you'll get a mother-in-law who does not like you. She starts creating problems and then makes the marriage to be broken. When the in-laws have interfered with the marriage, there is no peace. You'll get your mother-in-law who will need you to serve that family for many years. And maybe this lady, where she comes from, she is not brought up doing work for eight people. Now she is preparing* ugali *for 10 people, fetching water all day, cooking all the*

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[55] *Bridewealth payment consists of cash and livestock normally consisting of indigenous cows. In the past, it consisted of livestock, cowry shells (used as a medium of exchange in pre-colonial times) and indigenous hoes. Older participants complained that the cost of 'dowry' has gone up substantially over time, explaining that a dowry that used to cost two cows now costs 10 cows plus a substantial amount of cash (10 000-20 000 shillings).*

time, looking after the ngombes *... doing all the work. It becomes too hard for the girl. She's miserable. She is not given any autonomy. You won't be so happy being a slave there. ... She's in that home, doing all the work, and has not been paid dowry. You are labouring without anything to your home. It can take almost four to five years, it is very cruel. You start growing old. ... These are some of the things that make mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law to collide. (L002)*

The payment of bridewealth, which is a powerful symbol of a woman's status as a "good" wife, may be manipulated to maintain power relations so that a woman is never totally in control of decisions pertaining to her own labour and the products of that labour. This has some very real repercussions on farming and soil management, as women sometimes resist in subtle ways. They allocate the minimal amount of effort possible for farming and soil management activities from which they do not gain or benefit, while simultaneously engaging in practices where they control the products of their labour (such as participating in women's groups, income generating activities, and sanctioned and non-sanctioned relationships).

The fact that newlywed women move from their family's to their husband's homes and *shambas* also has important implications for agriculture and soil management labour. Women's original homes vary in proximity to their husbands' homes, because, for an Avalogoli marriage not to be considered incestuous, the man and woman must be unrelated

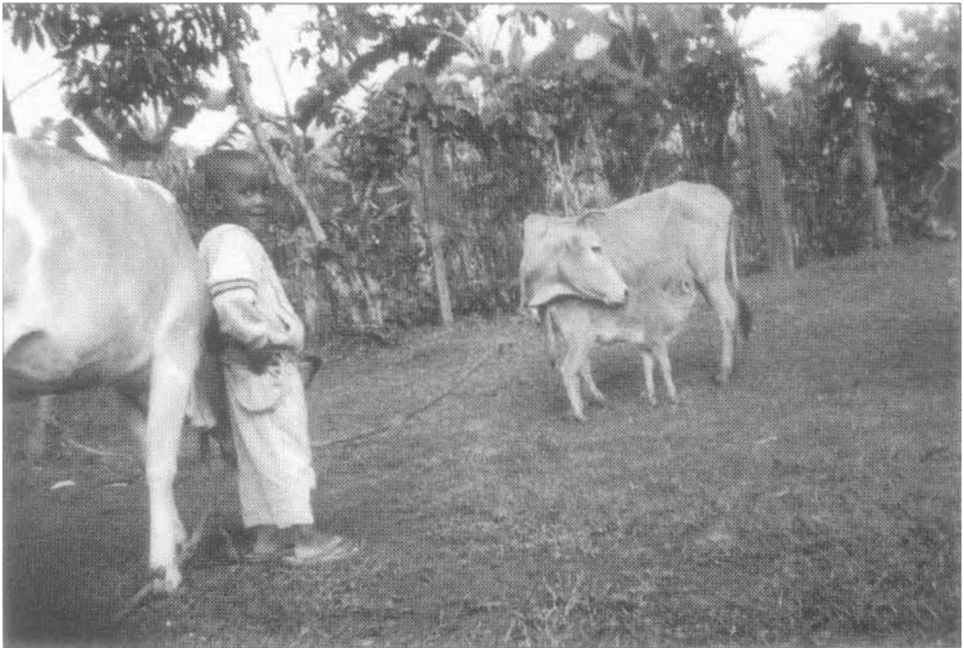

Photo 25: This photograph was taken by Benjamin, a shamba-boy, and shows a group of three indigenous cows and a calf, indicators of his employers' wealth, and can be used for future dowry payments. He explains, "The reason I took a picture of the cows is that they are among the things that I work on the most on the shamba. Because I have to work on the napier grass to feed them." (L020)

through both the mother's and the father's side for at least two generations (Abwunza 1997, p. 16). Because marrying a relative results in a curse that afflicts the whole family, men increasingly search for marriageable women who come from far away and from non-Maragoli areas (Abwunza 1997, p. 59). Given the spatial variability of soils and land, this move means that newlywed women must learn the intricacies of farming and soil management in their new microenvironments from their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. This process of acquiring agricultural and soils knowledge about new microenvironments can be used as another lever over newly-wed women to make claims on their labour.

Women, however, may learn to assert themselves over time as they gain more confidence and knowledge of their microenvironments and forge their own sets of social networks. Moreover, they may also bring new ideas about farming and soil management practices to local environments through this micromigration, which they can, in turn, use to negotiate their own position in the compound.

Older women and men

The extent to which older women and men are able to negotiate access to resources and control the amount of labour which they invest depends on their class and marital status, as well as the types of relationships they have with other family members in the compound. Older women can make claims on the labour of a newlywed daughter-in-law for *shamba* and household work, often retaining control over harvesting activities, especially over lucrative cash-crops like tea, thereby continuing their decision-making roles in relation to the *shamba*. However, once a daughter-in-law has had three to four children and has "persevered," this role as decision-maker is no longer tenable. A mother-in-law must prepare to have the remaining portions of land allocated to her son, and, therefore, her daughter-in-law, for access and use. This may be forced upon her by her husband, who "traditionally" makes this decision. Therefore, her ability to negotiate the timing of this transfer may also be dependent on her personal relationship with her husband.

Older women and men recognize that their children will eventually care for them, and the types of relationships they have with their children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and daughters-in-laws affect the types of resources and care they are likely to receive in later stages of their lives. Consequently, the allocation of resources that remain under their control is also used to negotiate for care and resources in the future. For instance, older women continue to control banana plantations and the distribution of the products from it, such as bananas and intercropped vegetables, as well as banana leaves and stalks used as green manure and fodder. They also control products from family woodlots, and allocate livestock for ceremonial purposes. These resources can be used to gain access to food, labour, and inputs from grandchildren as well as daughters-in-law. In addition, older women also continue to draw on resources from reciprocal relationships maintained with their own married daughters, often drawing upon unpaid debts pertaining to bridewealth. Lastly, as older women often care for grandchildren, they also use this important labour input to negotiate other resources in return.

A man's ability to negotiate his position on the compound rests upon his ability to provide for the family needs in the household and *shamba* over time. Many Maragoli men retire in their homes, and those who are entitled to pensions from previous waged labour are in better positions to negotiate resources for their care, as they are able to continue to fulfill their roles as "providers." These men take on a 'supervisory' role, albeit in name only, over soil management and farming. For example, one elderly elite man with a pension claimed to be the farmer in control of the *shamba*. Upon further questioning, it became apparent that he did not know the types of crops grown or soil management practices undertaken on his *shamba* (or even the ages of his children). Men who are unable to meet these requirements or have failed to meet them in the past complain bitterly about how children and wives do not listen to or comply with the "order" which requires them to provide labour and care to them.

Conclusions

Examining farmers' diversity through a gender lens reveals that women's household and on-farm labour burdens far outweigh those of men in Maragoli. While women have always been the farmers and the sustainers of the soils, this role has been further entrenched over time by historical and political-economic processes that have drawn away men's labour and emphasized men's roles as "providers." The intensification of women's on-farm labour burdens has serious implications for soil management practices that require labour-intensive inputs, and places women in a position in which they may have little choice but to compromise their roles as farmers and engage in unsustainable soil management practices. However, women are not a homogenous category, and unsustainable practices are more likely to be undertaken by more 'vulnerable' farmers. More specifically, economically poor farmers, women-headed households, young women in early stages of their marital life and household circumstances, and unmarried adult women who have "deviated" from patriarchal norms are the most vulnerable in terms of accessing and controlling labour. They also have difficulty controlling the proceeds of their labour and are over-burdened by intense demands for on-farm and household labour. They lack incentives to engage in labour-intensive soil management and farming practices, and are unlikely to have the time and energy to engage in these activities with any degree of thoroughness.

In Maragoli, within a patriarchal 'order' which determines what constitutes a "good" Logoli wife, in a situation where there is scarcity in land and no access to large commercial estate farms as in other parts of Kenya, women cannot easily choose to withdraw their labour completely from agriculture and soil management. Instead, women engage in a host of multiple livelihood occupations and diversify their on-farm options as a strategy towards risk aversion. Women strategically focus their energies, time, and labour on certain micro-niches on the *shamba* where they have long-term security in tenure and status, and on labour enterprises which are economically lucrative, and in which they control the products of their labour. Hence, this allows them simultaneously to invest in powerful symbolisms of being "good" Logoli wives and farmers, and to focus strategically on activities which offer them more autonomy, freedom of movement, and self-sufficiency. Women negotiate control over the products of their labour by engaging in a bitter war of words which points to men's failure to uphold their end of the conjugal contract. This centres not

only on men's failure to uphold their roles and responsibilities as "providers" of income, but also on their diminished roles on the farm. While women's labour on the farm has increased over time in almost all aspects of farming and soil management, men's contribution of on-farm labour has decreased over time. The exception to this trend involves cases in which men's one-time labour inputs have to do with symbolic and material control over property, and, therefore, men's power and authority over women. As the next chapter demonstrates, just as farmers' experiences vary by gender, class, age, marital status, and household headship, the priority, constraints, and meanings they attach to soil management and farming also vary according to different labour practices. These labour practices themselves are gendered and dynamic, and constitute an arena of struggle.

Diverse Farming and Soil Management Practices: "Don't You Know That Agriculture and Soils are the Same Thing?"

Chapter Six

A focus on gendered divisons of labour, responsibility, rights and interests, and the ways these come together, helps us to understand both how these resource management changes come about and what they mean for different people. Because gender relations are the dynamic behind so many aspects of land and tree management [and soil management and farming practices], they are integral to questions of productivity and environmental sustainability as well as those of social equity. (Leach 1991a, p. 22)

Maragoli is characterized by intensive mixed farming on individual smallholdings, and diversity in crops, soil management, and farming practices. This chapter explores the importance of gender relations in production in terms of the diversity of various on-farm labour practices that are vital for sustainable soil management and agriculture. It discuses these relations in production as they relate to five on-farm labour practices: planting trees and hedges; digging trenches; managing livestock and using fertilizers; digging and clearing land for planting; and growing cash and subsistence crops. It illustrates that, irrespective of type of practice, in Maragoli, women are predominantly the farmers and carry out their roles and responsibilities in increasingly stressful circumstances — circumstances in which their labour burdens have intensified over time and they do not always control the proceeds of their labour.

By focusing on five key soil management and farming practices, this chapter highlights what has always been known to Logoli farmers: that agriculture and soils issues are inseparable. Furthermore, there is a fundamental yet evolving relationship between the gender division of labour and soil management and farming. Faced with an ever-changing environmental and political-economic context, the gender division of labour in Maragoli has been adapted and transformed in practice, sometimes challenging traditional gender roles and male authority, while, in other cases, reproducing patriarchal 'order' and entrenching men's power and control over women and "property."

While women continue to carry out the bulk of the day-to-day activities in farming and soil management, they have taken on additional roles and responsibilities that were 'traditionally' considered those of men. Although some men still carry out 'traditional' roles and responsibilities, these activities are not consistently or uniformly carried out, and men's labour input into the *shamba* has generally been on the decline. Hence, while women have taken on more on-farm labour responsibilities, they have not always been able to gain more rights for themselves in terms of decision-making and power within the

household and with respect to certain practices. Moreover, women's degree of autonomy depends on their household circumstances and positioning, as well as how successfully they negotiate the heavy weight of patriarchal norms and idioms and the fierce social stigmas perpetuated by taboos, as described in the previous chapter. In the past, men's roles and responsibilities rested on one-time labour contributions such as planting trees and hedges, digging trenches, and clearing land, as well as caring for livestock and providing specific labour inputs pertaining to certain types of crops. Today, the practices that continue to be controlled by men, and remain a taboo for women, are those that represent men's authority in terms of their material and symbolic control over land and property, and therefore power.

Despite the fact that women's labour in farming and soil management activities has intensified over time, and women are increasingly responsible for off-farm responsibilities, they manage to engage in a multitude of diverse farming, soil conservation, and erosion practices. These diverse activities are illustrated in tables 6.1 and 6.2. Women continue to engage in diverse practices to varying degrees, because their status and reputation as "good" Logoli wives depends on their ability to be "good" farmers. Moreover, the ability of farmers to carry out any combination of these activities depends on a number of factors, including personal preferences and motivation; access to information; and the ability to negotiate access to resources, such as money, labour, capital, credit, and other inputs. Another factor, which will be explored in the next chapter, has to do with the availability of time and energy, and the willingness to invest that time and energy in these activities, in the face of other competing priorities.

Table 6.1 The Diversity of Maragoli Farmers' Crops and Livestock.

Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Root Crops	Other	Cash Crops	Livestock
Maize	*Sukumawiki**	Bananas	Onions	Woodlots	Tea	*Kukus*
Sorghum	*Mito**	Guavas	Groundnuts	Flowers	Coffee	Grade cows
Millet	*Mutere**	Paw paws	Potatoes	Sugarcane	French beans	Crossbred cows
Lentils	Cowpeas*	Avocados	Sweet potatoes	Napier grass		Indigenous cows
	Cabbage	Mango	Cassava			Goats
	Beans	Tomatoes	Carrots			Turkeys
	Pumpkins	Berries	Arrowroot			Ducks/ Geese
	Squash	Loquats				Cats
	*Tsisaga**					Dogs
	Tisuza					Sheep

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, group interviews, and surveys. N = 46 participants.

* Indigenous green collards

Table 6.2 Diversity of Maragoli Farmers' Soil Management Practices.

Soil Fertility		Soil Erosion
Organic Fertilizers	**Mulching**	Trenches
Cow manure	Mulching with couch grass	Planting trees
Chicken droppings	Mulching with maize stalks/stover	Terraces
Other livestock manure	Mulching	Planting shrubs
Cow urine and run-off from shed	Compost pits	Planting hedges
Improved quality of cow manure through feed*	Rubbish collected from the yard	
Refuse from the household	Rubbish collected from the household	
Refuse from the farm		
Green manure		
Inorganic Fertilizers	**Use of Crops**	
Store-bought chemical fertilizers	Crop rotation	
Chemical fertilizers from cooperatives/companies	Intercropping	
Placing top dressing in planting holes	Rotational bush fallowing	
Combination		
Combination organic and inorganic fertilizers		

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group interviews and surveys. N = 46 participants.

* Cow feed consisting of spent barley bought from beer breweries

The reinforcement of gendered boundaries: planting trees and hedges

Trees and hedges have important functions for conserving the soils. They are an important source of fertilizer; they provide green manure for mulching and composting; and they constitute an important measure against soil erosion — for "holding the soils" — especially during the rains. Trees and hedges have multiple values and meanings in Maragoli. For instance, not only are they useful in providing shade, fodder, and as a means for tethering cows, they also act as material symbols that mark claims to land and demarcate boundaries.

Colonial policies encouraged the planting of trees within forestation initiatives in order to increase water infiltration and conserve water and soil in the 1930s and 1950s. Trees became an important cash crop that provided firewood for sale (Carter and Crowley 1997, pp. 9–10). Today, trees continue to be considered valuable cash crops that provide income through the sale of fruits, firewood, and construction materials. Other products from trees, such as fuelwood, and barks, berries, and other medicinal products, are also used in barter

Photo 26: This photograph was taken by a 43-year-old widowed farmer. She explains: "Trees are seen as being good. The way they are growing, they will help me tomorrow. I was having problems [because of the need to buy] firewood. If I want to cook, I had to buy firewood. Then I saw if I plant a tree of my own [it] is better. And I also saw that the food crops were not doing [well] there ... and only trees are the ones that are just doing [well] there ... The trees require less maintenance than food crops ... I put there cow dung from the yard. I mulch with maize stovers; when they decay, no grass grows. I bought the seedlings. My child planted them — the boy. This Maragoli place of ours, women are not allowed to plant trees." (L030)

Photo 27: "Bananas are very useful — like this one, if it gets ready, I sell at 200 shillings. And if I decide to cook it, it helps with my grandchildren. I take good care of them and they help me. I heap soils to surround the trunks, because bananas don't need fertilizer; their fertilizer comes from the leaves and bucks from cut stems. So by heaping the soil to hold onto them, they do better." (L008)

and exchange. For instance, one Logoli farmer in this study described how she negotiated the payment of her children's school fees with the local school by providing fuelwood from a large tree on her *shamba.* In addition, the number of hedges used for demarcating physical boundaries in Maragoli has increased over time, because of changes in land tenure and privatization of land (which encouraged ownership under the 'head' of household.)[56]

Given the multiple uses for trees and hedges, it is important to distinguish between the one-time activity of planting, and the ongoing labour involved in managing trees and harvesting their products. In Maragoli, in marked contrast to other Kenyan contexts, such as Machakos (Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997) and Kakamega (Bradley 1991), the planting of hedges for the purpose of demarcating boundaries is controlled by men. Planting trees also remains the exclusive domain of men, and is circumscribed by very strong cultural taboos. An elder in her eighties describes the taboo that keeps women from planting trees (in this case bananas, an important food crop that is also considered a tree in Maragoli):

> *Bananas, women never plant. No, no. Potatoes you plant, vegetables you plant. But a banana, that was prohibited. Even these days, women do not plant bananas. Period. In Avalogoli culture ... they believe that if a woman plants bananas, she will become barren. (L039)*

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[56] *The increase in hedge planting for demarcation in Mbale is confirmed by aerial photographs taken between 1963 and 1978 (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 11).*

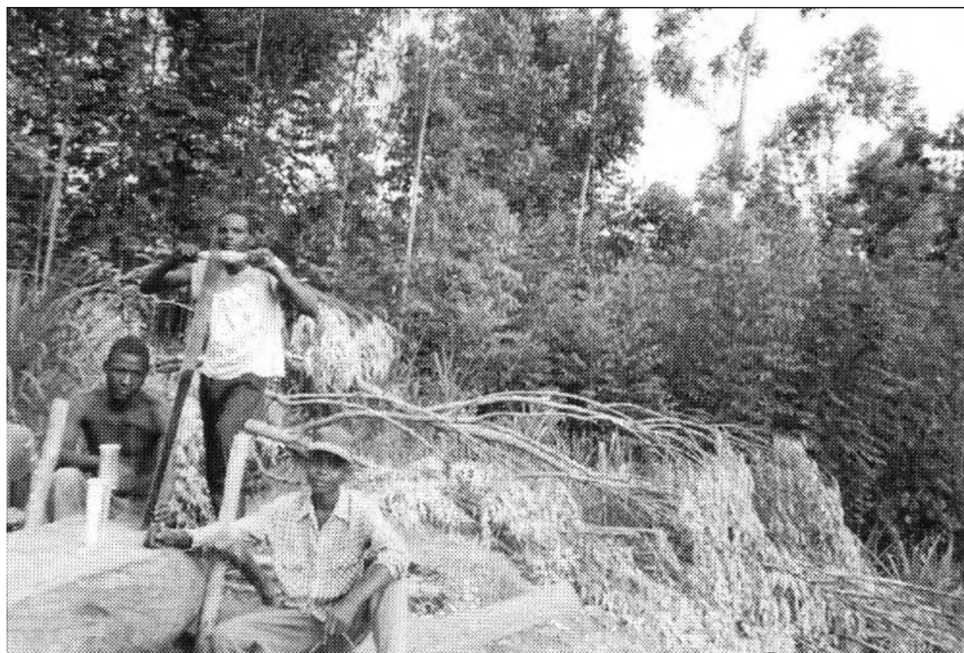

Photo 28: This photograph was taken by a 48-year-old farmer whose husband is a carpenter. She says: "It is a good thing. It shows that these boys are really hardworking, because they buy these trees and then split the timber into wood and then sell it. Instead of working on the shambas, they have decided to buy these trees from people, splitting it, and selling it to make furniture ... This tree comes from the soil and from the land ... if you weed, it seems really big ones grow really fast." (L026)

The location of a tree to be planted on the *shamba* has always been a point of struggle between husbands and wives, and may partially explain the "exceedingly strong opposition" that was encountered in the 1950s to colonial forestation programs (DCNN 1955, p. 12). In the contemporary situation, women complain that trees are sometimes planted in locations that do not meet their approval, and where they provide unwanted shade or drain water or nutrients away from crops. Although women carry out the day-to-day work and decision making in farming and soil management, the planting of trees is a symbolic gesture of power invoked by men. One Avalogoli woman explains:

> *You cannot plant trees on the compound and claim, "these are my trees," when your husband is alive. You cannot plant euphorbia and say, "this is the fence on my shamba," when your husband is alive. Those are the two customs ... they say that if you do these things when he is alive then you want him to die.*

However, this taboo may be negotiated, contested, and even sabotaged by women, as discussed below.

The taboos that restrict women from planting trees and hedges continue to hold sway in the absence of a husband. While men's roles and responsibilities have eroded in other labour enterprises, men continue to retain control over the activity of planting trees and hedges, in all circumstances. Men's control over this activity represents their power and

Photo 29: This photograph was taken by Patroba (see Chapter Six). She is a 34-year-old farmer whose husband has out-migrated to Nairobi. She explains: "It's my garden plot behind my house — it's a good picture because it is showing good farming ... I look at my bananas and see that they are really shining because I've put a lot of cow-dung manure ... Even the onions do better here. I've planted sugar cane and it does well. I applied some of the fertilizer that is meant for tea, to plant the bananas. On the rest of the plot, I also apply rubbish that remains from the cow feed and the rubbish I have been sweeping — it is supposed to go there." (L015)

authority over "property," and confirms their control over the material and symbolic demarcation of physical space and boundaries. Both the decision-making and the actual labour in planting trees reinforce men's roles as 'heads' of household and are symbolic of men's power. Women who are heads of household cannot simply hire men to plant trees and hedges, but must call upon male relatives or sons to do so. It is therefore important to understand the gendered rights and nested obligations around the control of trees and hedges when formulating soil erosion policies and research initiatives, in order to reflect farmers' realities better.

While trees and hedges remains the domain of men, maintenance and access to the products of trees are more often the domain of women. One woman explains:

> *Once a man has planted bananas, they really don't bother looking after bananas. ... It's the woman who manages the banana plantation and sells and cooks.*

This division of labour and roles indicates that both the control over trees and use rights to trees are based on multiple, nested, and overlapping rights that are mediated by different gender responsibilities. Bananas, in particular, provide a good example of the multiple use values of trees, as well as their cultural and gender meanings. In the past, both the planting and the use of bananas were a male activity. Today, bananas are planted in nearly all

Photo 30: This photograph was taken by Rina, a widowed farmer (see Chapter Four). It illustrates how produce from the banana plot can be used as exchange with neighbours and friends, not necessarily in the immediate term, but to ensure future reciprocal exchange. "These young boys [my neighbours] are carrying a banana stem for their cow to feed on. I cut it for them and gave it to them." (L028)

households, and, while women continue to be restricted in planting them, they actively harvest, maintain, and control the products from banana trees. Bananas can be used as food, sold, or exchanged, and the leaves and stalks act as green manure and livestock fodder. Women's control of the banana plot continues even after other parts of the *shamba* are allocated to their sons and daughters-in-law, as discussed in Chapter Four. The importance of this micro-niche to women's long term security helps to explain why they dedicate a great deal of labour and energy to this part of the *shamba*, and why this is the most fertile part of the *shamba*.

Digging trenches

Digging trenches is an important strategy by which farmers sustain their soils and farms. Not only do trenches prevent the erosion of soils and hold water, they are also a way of controlling pests, which are a common problem on some *shambas*. As one farmer explains, "the cassava can do well and the potatoes can do well; but the mole — the mole eats from beneath" (L016). Hence, trenches create a break in the burrows of moles by inundating these passages with rainwater. While taboos around constructing trenches and terraces dictate that "digging holes" is the role of men, practice suggests that there is some degree of blurring in terms of how this practice is actually carried out. This situation can be made clearer by distinguishing between processes of decision-making and practice.

Photo 31: This photograph was taken by a 37-year-old farmer. She describes it: "This boy is trying to dig for me a trench in my land. When we make a trench and plant on napier grass, the reason is to prevent soil erosion ... I learned about trenches one day I went to a seminar in Sabatia — that was an agricultural seminar in 1996, given by the district land management officer with his team. We were called, the organizers of the women's groups." (L038)

Women often decide to have trenches built on their *shambas* to prevent soil erosion. They do this by hiring or bartering men's labour or drawing on their adult sons' labour. While women do not actually dig trenches themselves because of social stigmas attached to this activity, they often make the decision to have them constructed.

Unlike trees and hedges, trenches do not necessarily represent the symbolic or material demarcation of property ownership, which may explain the 'blurring' of gender roles in terms of this activity. However, it is in the interest of women that this labour-intensive activity remains in the domain of men. As Queen explained in her narrative in the previous chapter, "women cannot manage to use the spade while removing soil." This discourse is not a claim that women see themselves as incapable of removing the soil. Rather, it is used by women as a strategy for ensuring that men contribute labour, and that labour, when available, is spread more equitably between wives and husbands. Cultural restrictions on digging trenches have important implications for conservation strategies and policies. Development researchers and agents should recognize that decision-making and the control of allocation of labour must be differentiated from the activity of "digging holes," and that this difference is highly gendered.

Photo 32: This photograph illustrates the importance of trenches. Rebeka (Chapter Four) explains: "We have a trench here — I was trying to get this trench. It is a good thing because all the water that comes from the house goes straight to the bananas. So this trench, the water that goes through, it also helps my bananas to keep them the way they are looking." (L003)

Managing livestock and using fertilizers

There are two aspects of livestock management that are important to sustainable soil management and agriculture. The first is the issue of managing different types of livestock and fodder, mentioned in Table 6.1. The second is the issue of using organic fertilizers produced from livestock, as well as chemical fertilizers purchased from the market or obtained from farming cooperatives.

Managing livestock

Livestock is an integral part of people's lives. They are an important resource, as well as a means of accumulating wealth in Maragoli. In the past, the number of livestock owned, in addition to the number of wives married, was the basis of measuring men's wealth and social status (Kitching 1980, p. 204). While livestock was used as a medium of exchange (in addition to land, millet, and other items), this part of the economy was totally dominated and controlled by men. Tending, herding, and grazing livestock were the responsibility of men and boys. Animals were grazed jointly on communal lands during the day and corralled in their respective homesteads by night (Crowley and Carter 2000). Colonial land alienation and distribution policies (motivated by the necessity to obtain money to pay colonial taxes, and later, to make purchases and pay for services) led to the disappearance of grazing land, decreased *shamba* sizes, and transformed the remaining grazing land available for agricultural production (Kitching 1980, p. 240). Decreased availability of grazing land diminished men's roles in grazing livestock. In addition to this, the unavailability of men's

labour (because of male out-migration) led to an increase in "zero-grazing" practices. This increased women's labour burdens, because it became the responsibility of women to find, cut, and carry fodder to tethered cows. After independence, European farmers sold exotic dairy cattle in large numbers, giving a boost to milk production and sale (Carter et. al 1998, p. 16). In the 1970s, government policies encouraged farmers to raise crossbred and grade cows, but these cows never supplanted indigenous cows, which were highly valued as bridewealth and were used as a reserve for wealth in difficult times (Crowley and Carter 2000). Crossbred cows required intense labour inputs such as cut-and-carry fodder management, an activity that also fell on the shoulders of women.

Today, livestock continues to be valued for its significance in social, cultural, and economic spheres of life, and is an important source of organic fertilizer for sustaining the soils. The ownership of livestock continues to be an important indigenous indicator of wealth and it is used for the payment of bridewealth. It also provides income from the sale of milk, meat, poultry, eggs, offspring, and surplus manure. The scale of these enterprises depends on the number of livestock owned, which in turn is contingent on a farmer's class. Enterprises range from the 'sale' of milk through bartering of small quantities to large volume selling.

Today, most cows are zero-grazed, although some are grazed along roadsides, usually by male children, hired *shamba*-boys, or women themselves. The labour-intensive activities of cultivating, searching for, cutting, collecting, and carrying fodder, as well as collecting cow manure, remain the responsibility of women. While the trading of livestock is considered the domain of men, this does not exclude women from engaging in trading by drawing upon men's assistance, especially in the absence of their husbands. Most Logoli farmers today opt for grade or crossbred grade cows, in addition to indigenous cows (which are used in the payment of bridewealth), if they can afford either or both. However, women trade and exchange poultry and eggs (although, until recently, women were not allowed to eat chicken or eggs because of strong social taboos).

Economically poor farmers may also enter into an agreement with a willing neighbour, friend or relative with inadequate land, fodder, or labour, in order to gain access to livestock, fertilizer, and its produce. The practice of using one's *shamba* to keep and maintain livestock for a neighbour, friend, or extended family member (in exchange for organic manure and a certain number of offspring from that livestock) was created by farmers as a strategy to "chase away the striga weed" on their *shambas*. In essence, a cow or goat is 'lent' to them, in exchange for which they can use the organic manure and other resources, such as milk, produced from the livestock (as discussed in Chapter 7).

Organic and inorganic fertilizers

Livestock, a vital source of organic fertilizer, plays a central role in soil conservation. Cow dung by itself, or in combination with chemical fertilizers or other types of organic input (such as ash or compost material), is used by a majority of farmers in Maragoli. The management and application of organic fertilizer is more labour-intensive than the application of chemical fertilizers. Yet, many farmers opt to use organic fertilizers, as they believe that chemical fertilizers "burn" crops and "dry" the soils. They feel that organic fertilizers are best in terms of maintaining the long-term sustainability of the soil, and cite examples of friends, relatives, and neighbours who use organic fertilizers and get good yields. The following farmer explains her preference for organic fertilizer, although she reverts to inorganic fertilizers because of monetary constraints:

I prefer cow manure; it is better for fertility. ... There is a mole which is really giving us problems. The things on my garden are not pleasing because the land there is not fertile. I only have one cow and it does not produce enough manure. So I revert to buying chemical fertilizer. Its name I do not know. (L040)

Another farmer describes her preference for using a mixture of both types of fertilizers:

Even though I have [a] cow [and its] dung manure, I mix with three kilos of commercial fertilizer. ... It's just a matter of using both because the plot is not big. There is no otherwise. ... Our soils are funny — if you want them to produce good yields, you have to use both. That way you harvest something good. If you use farm manure, the crops won't do well. ... The soils are now exhausted. ...

Economically wealthy farmers tend to have more organic manure available because they own large numbers of livestock, and are able to hire full-time labour to rear livestock and produce fodder and organic fertilizer. As such, they use labour-intensive methods, such as the application of slurry from cow bomas on crops such as napier grass to increase yields. Napier grass is commonly grown in Maragoli for fodder and erosion control, and is an important cash crop. It can be harvested four or more times a year. However, economically poor households sometimes harvest this crop before it has reached maturity. They rarely apply inputs because they cannot afford them and do not have the labour available to invest. Farmers also use manure from poultry, especially on non-indigenous vegetables such as onions, cabbages, and tomatoes.

An increase in prices for inputs such as chemical fertilizers prompted by political-economic processes such as SAPs also affects soil fertility practices in several ways. Farmers who prefer chemical fertilizers cite lack of money or high costs as one reason for choosing organic fertilizers (where they have access to livestock), or no fertilizers at all, rather than chemical fertilizers. Farmers' real earnings have decreased, while the cost of livestock and the number of livestock required for bridewealth payments have increased over time. Faced with this situation, economically poor farmers cannot access enough livestock to benefit adequately from organic fertilizer. Differential access to credit (as an avenue to purchase fertilizer), and lack of money only partially explains the limited use of inorganic fertilizer.

Indigenous cows have multiple values (bridewealth being one), which may partially explain farmers' preferences in the use of organic manure for maintaining soil fertility. Livestock are prized property that are indigenous indicators of wealth and status, and are considered security in the face of hard economic times. Livestock are also slaughtered for food during ceremonial functions such as funerals and weddings. They are important symbolic ceremonial gifts for male circumcision ceremonies, and the first visit by a woman to her daughter's married home upon the birth of her first-born grandchild. Poultry such as kukus (chickens) are presented to visitors of status, although this custom is on the decline among economically poor or middle-income farmers, and is being replaced by gifts of eggs and vegetables. Further, livestock are important income generators, as milk, eggs, meat, and cow-manure can be sold in exchange for money, or exchanged and bartered in return for other products and inputs.

Given the multiple cultural, monetary, and use values of livestock, it is not surprising that many farmers prefer to own livestock (such as cows) and use organic manure, rather than purchasing chemical fertilizers — although this does not discount the fact that many farmers prefer organic manure for technical reasons.

Photo 33: This photograph was taken by Frederika. She explains: "This is a good picture. The cows are the ones which have made my mother-in-law's shamba to be productive. Because of the manure she gets, even her bananas do so well." (L040)

While there are some trends in the types of fertilizers used by farmers on certain types of farming enterprises (such as French beans and tea), the decision to use chemical or organic fertilizer is varied and very much dependent on the farmers themselves. As their opinions and experiences with either type of fertilizer vary, it is not possible to draw direct and consistent correlations between specific crops and preferences towards certain types of fertilizer inputs. It is only possible to highlight trends which vary according to the subjective understanding of farmers. Even though economically wealthy farmers can afford to use chemical fertilizers, they do not always do so, preferring organic inputs for sustaining the soils. On the other hand, some farmers do not engage in the method they prefer because of resource constraints such as labour, money, and credit. Lastly, although men have authority over the ownership and sale of livestock, women carry out much of the work required to manage and tend livestock, including the labour-intensive work of collecting and applying organic manure, cultivating, harvesting and collecting fodder, and collecting produce from livestock. This situation once again demonstrates that the division of responsibility pertaining to ownership and labour is differentiated by gender. This is important to consider when formulating research and development policy and initiatives.

Digging and clearing land for planting

"Digging" refers to the labour-intensive work of clearing, breaking the ground, planting, and weeding. At the turn of the century, large gender-based rotating work groups did the bulk of this work in exchange for an evening of beer drinking and festivities, and with the expectation that the labour would be reciprocated on their own *shambas* in the future (Crowley and Carter 2000). This work, carried out using a wooden stick, was eventually replaced by the handheld iron hoe, or *jembe*, in the 1920s and 1930s (Carter and Crowley 1998, p. 10). While the use of the mouldboard plough spread in Kenya during this time, Marogoli's steep topography and small plot sizes prevented its widespread adoption (Carter and Crowley 1998, p. 10). Not all land was cleared simultaneously, and farmers practised the technique of rotational bush fallow, as an older Logoli woman recalls:

> Shambas *used to be tilled in turns. ... A plot would be chosen where tilling would be done, then the other portion lies fallow and remains to grow many bushes called* amasatsi *[a local bush which is an indigenous indicator for of soil fertility] on it and people used it as a toilet. When you move to that one, the other lies fallow. This is how food was plenty. (L041)*

As discussed earlier, historical and political changes led to a decrease in the size of individual landholdings in Maragoli, which prompted a decrease in the availability of fallow land for the practice of rotational bush fallow. Today, only economically wealthy farmers with large non-dispersed plots continue to practice rotational bush fallowing. For many farmers, decreased plot sizes have meant that the same plot is cleared and tilled continuously without the adequate input of fertilizers, leading to a decrease in soil fertility. One farmer remarks:

> *Actually, the farms we stay on have really changed. However big the* shamba *you are working on might be, it can never give you enough harvest, because the soils have become exhausted due to continuous cultivation. Long ago we could have [farmed] on this plot this year and interchanged the next year, so that when you come back to the first one it has restored its fertility. So today it's hard — even if you add fertilizer, we cannot get more yields like we used to before. It is because of the subdivisions that we have done on our farms. The sizes have decreased. (L019)*

In combination with diminished plot sizes, these changes in land use have also made men's allocation decisions pertaining to clearing and fallowing all but defunct. Women carry out most "digging," with men occasionally involved in the heavy work of breaking the ground. Land is cleared and broken twice a year, and, each time, the earth is broken and overturned two to three times. The first "digging" involves breaking the ground, while subsequent "digging" involves deeper over-turning of the soils and mixing of dried couch grass with the soils. A decrease in the availability of men's labour and the existence of de facto and de jure women-headed households have been central reasons for women's increased responsibility in "digging." Furthermore, diminished control and power over decision-making in "digging" (since the same plot is tilled repeatedly, decision-making is rendered all but defunct), has meant that this gendered taboo no longer exists and that women are 'free' to clear the land. This has further intensified women's labour on the *shamba*, without increasing their decision-making powers within conjugal relations.

Photo 34: This photograph was taken by a 20-year-old farmer. She explains: "I took this picture to show that, in order for the plants to do well, you have to till the land first before planting. This way the crops will do well. We will plant when the rains come because the earth is too dry. I will plant the usual crops, maize and beans ... I choose to intercrop because the beans get ready earlier than the maize, so it saves us the hunger as we wait for the maize. And also, the plot is too small, so it is better to mix it." (L011)

Photo 35: "This is a picture of my wife tilling. The goodness is that until you till the land you cannot be a farmer. I shall plant here some cassava and some guava and avocado trees ... You have to dig very carefully, making sure you uproot al the weeds so that, when you plant, the crops will grow nicely." (L007)

Growing cash and subsistence crops

Farming in Maragoli is rain-fed. The annual agricultural cycle is characterized by two rainy seasons: the short rains (September to November) and the long rains (March to June), with a high average rainfall of 1800 mm to 2000 mm (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 8). Crop harvesting is carried out by hand or with the use of machetes.

Logoli farmers use different cropping practices and patterns. Although regarded as 'unscientific' and 'backwards' during the colonial period (Odaga 1991, p. 75), the major cropping pattern involves intercropping with indigenous vegetables, cowpeas, beans, maize, and bananas. Given women's intense labour burdens, intercropping allows for efficient use of time, labour, and energy, as well as efficient use of small plots. In addition, it also yields better harvests, decreases splash from rain, is more reliable, and adds different nutrients to the soils. Another cropping pattern used to sustain the soils is crop rotation. This involves planting crops in sequence to take advantage of varying degrees of soil fertility over time.[57] This practice is on the decline. An Avalogoli woman, aged 78, explains that reduced *shamba* size has diminished the use of crop rotation, especially for many farmers with small landholdings:

> *Fertility has reduced in farms. Do you see, you always dig at the same place. People had bigger farms. They dug some of it and the other was left to preserve it for the next season and then they went to the part that they preserved and dug it. ... And in those days, they planted sorghum, maize, millet. ... If you finished maize, they also went on sorghum and millet. So there was not a lot of starvation. Nowadays we are just following maize alone — that's why you see starvation disturbing us very much, because we are not planting sorghum, we are not planting millet. Do you see that? (L039)*

Other soil management practices are intertwined with crop choice, because farmers carry out different soil management practices with respect to specific crops. These practices are further affected by variability in the microenvironment in terms of differing soils types and fertility within *shambas*. Conversely, labour inputs towards maintaining soil fertility are driven by crop type. As discussed earlier, women's willingness to invest in soil management is a function of security in tenure. Banana and vegetable plots strategically receive more inputs. This shows that variability in soil fertility is not just a characteristic of physical geography, but is actively shaped (literally constructed) by women themselves for strategic reasons.

In this manner, women also shape their environments through the types of crops and the interrelated soil management practices they undertake. However, these choices are affected by historical changes and broader political-economic processes. This section will focus on major cash crops such as tea, coffee, maize, and French beans, as well as several subsistence crops, highlighting the dynamics of gender relations in driving decisions with respect to crop abandonment or uptake. Such an analysis adds other dimensions (gender and other

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[57] *In the first year, crop rotation involved intercropping finger millet and maize during the long rains, followed by pulses such as beans and bambara nuts during the short rains. In the second year, sorghum and maize were intercropped, followed by sorghum in the short rains. In the third year, either millet was planted, or soils were allowed to rest, or the land was planted with sweet potatoes, followed by finger millet, before being left as livestock pasture for three to four years (Crowley and Carter 2000).*

axes of difference) to existing understandings of crop changes over time, including poor yields, high labour requirements, pests and diseases, land shortages, and preference for other crops (Carter et al. 1998, pp. 20–21).

It also brings into question the "hard and fast" assumption of African agriculture that within the gender division of labour men are responsible for and control cash crops, and women are responsible for subsistence crops. Upon hearing this assumption, one Logoli woman exclaimed: "Tell them that this is a lie." In fact, women in Maragoli actively cultivate both cash and subsistence crops, and are responsible for almost all activities pertaining to farming and soil management. Their degree of control of the proceeds from selling subsistence and cash crops is subject to several factors, including their personal relationships with their husbands and others in the household, their life-cycle and household positioning, their ability to negotiate control within conjugal and kinship relations, and the type of crop cultivated. As discussed, the few restrictions that remain within the gender division of labour pertain to planting trees and hedges, which affect the cultivation of crops such as bananas, tea, coffee, and fruit.

Before discussing the gendered dynamics of crop changes, it is useful to review the major shifts in the type of crop cultivated over time. The most significant of these involves the decline and abandonment of crops such as sesame, groundnuts, bambara nuts, finger millet, and sorghum (Carter et al. 1998, pp. 20–21). Table 6.3 presents an overview of the extent to which certain types of crops are grown today in Maragoli.

Table 6.3 Types and Instances of Crops grown in Maragoli.

Crop	Percentage of households cultivating the crop	Crop	Percentage of households cultivating the crop
Bananas	95	Tea	17
Common beans	68	Finger millet	17
Napier grass	67	Finger millet	17
Maize	63	Coffee	12
Sweet potatoes	51	Groundnuts	11
Cassava	44	Bambara nuts	1
Sorghum	31	Sesame	0
French beans	30		

Source: Reported by Carter et. al. through survey data collected from 105 households in Maragoli in 1995 (1998).

Tea and coffee

Tea and coffee are important export crops that were introduced in Kenya during the colonial period. However Kenyans were prohibited from cultivating tea and coffee until the enactment of the Swynnerton Plan in 1954. Logoli men were first to be forced to plant tea through government schemes. Later, women engaged in the cultivation of this crop. They established it as a source of monetary income and gained experience in the use of chemical fertilizers, sometimes applying them to other crops such as maize to compensate for declining soil fertility (Carter and Crowley 1997, p. 11).

Today, the government emphasizes the cultivation of both coffee and tea as a strategy to address the balance-of-payment problem in conjunction with SAPs (Mackenzie 1993, p. 80). Tea and coffee are two of the three top foreign exchange earners in Kenya (Staudt and Nzomo 1994, p. 425). In Maragoli, tea and coffee are cultivated on individual plots by farmers, but the desirability of growing these two crops is very different, with tea being more valued, especially by women. The valuing of tea over coffee relates to issues of monetary returns to labour input, frequency and method of remuneration, gendered control of the products from labour, and the importance of income generation from cash crops in today's economic environment.

In general, Logoli farmers prefer to grow tea, as it entails less work per kilogram of output than coffee. Tea is cultivated continuously throughout the year, and is brought to tea collection centres in baskets carried by women on predetermined days. One male farmer, with a large acreage of tea approximating four acres, explains the advantages of cultivating tea:

> *For coffee, you get nine shillings per kilogram. We are paid six shillings per kilogram for tea. But tea is better than coffee because, when you compare the time you work and how much they pay, coffee consumes so much and you don't get as many kilos as compared to tea. ... If you take good care of your tea, if you put enough fertilizer, you can pick about four times or three times a week. But for coffee, you spend all that time putting fertilizer, and you will only pick like four times a month. (L007)*

Because of their ability to make contact with and access free agents from Uganda, economically wealthy farmers continue to cultivate coffee. The agents buy the crop for a higher price (15 shillings per kilo, as compared to the price offered by Kenyan coffee cooperatives, which varies between two and six shillings per kilo). However, this is not a viable option for most farmers, and the advantage of tea over coffee remains its frequency of remuneration. A female farmer explains:

> *I chose tea because of its income: you are paid on a monthly basis. (L008)*

Women see monthly payments as one of the critical advantages of growing tea, because these payments allow them to meet numerous economic demands in their everyday lives. The cultivation of tea also brings with it a yearly bonus, which is an added benefit to farmers. Not only do women view tea as a "good cash earner," they also see it as advantageous in terms of the gender control over the products of their labour, a situation that is more precarious in the cultivation of coffee. The payments for coffee cultivation in Maragoli are made to shareholders of the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union, who, as landholders, are

Photo 36: "I like the tea very much. I've taken very good care of it. What I like most about the tea is that it gives me a very good income. At the end of the year it can give me a bonus of about 9,000 shillings. Every year it is different: sometimes it is high; sometimes it is low ... That is the reason that I love this tea ... I put the fertilizer from the tea authority — ammonia. They deduct it from your income. I also put here rubbish." (L008)

Photo 37: "I am applying fertilizer on the tea, and this other lady is weeding. I hire her for to work on my tea." (L007)

predominantly men. On the other hand, payments for tea are made to the holder of the tea registration number, who is not necessarily the owner of the title deed to the land. It is easier to control the payment for coffee for an absent male. Women consider tea a highly valued crop because they are better able to exert control over the proceeds of their own labour, even in the absence of their husbands. The control of monetary payments earned from labour inputs is of utmost importance to women in today's economic environment, as one Logoli woman explains:

> *This year I've been able to send one boy and a girl to Form One because of the tea. So I feel tea is a very good crop because it has helped me to educate my grandchildren. And it will help other grandchildren. That's why I like it. (L008)*

Women also exert control over the products of their labour by taking advantage of the taboos against men carrying baskets. Women's control over this end of the tea harvesting process gives them some degree of power, because they become familiar with officials at the collection centres, and, over time, and are recognized as the cultivators of tea.

Income generation is a high priority for farmers, because SAPs have created an erosion of real earnings, while escalating the costs of education and health care by shifting the costs of social services to local people. While women in other parts of Kenya may withdraw their labour from coffee and divert it to other income-generating activities, such as large tea estates (Mackenzie 1993), Logoli women do not have such options open to them. Participants in this study, however, spoke of farmers uprooting their coffee bushes in an illegal, and final, act of resistance. During the return trip for dissemination and feedback, this trend was more pronounced. Farmers spoke of how few women continued to cultivate coffee, many had uprooted their coffee plants altogether. This is seen as a powerful symbol of women's withdrawal of labour into activities where they have more control over the proceeds of their labour. Women opt to withdraw this labour and divert it to other food crops, off-farm income-generating activities, or the cultivation of tea or French beans (although to a lesser degree during the return trip). They justify these actions by pointing to men's failure to fulfill responsibilities for "providing" adequate income to meet their livelihood requirements. However, in order to cultivate of tea, women require land, capital, and the input of men's labour for planting bushes, as planting trees and hedges is a taboo for women. If women are able to negotiate men's labour for the planting of tea bushes, they may cultivate tea in a large portion of available land, at the expense of food crops. Economically poor farmers view tea as a highly valued crop, and aspire to grow it. However, the cultivation of tea is unattainable for many because it involves high start-up costs and requires land availability and access to seedlings, as well as the availability and co-operation of husbands or male relatives to plant tea bushes. Nonetheless, due to recent changes in Maragoli — including the uprooting of coffee and the declining cultivation of French beans — tea has become the cash crop that many farmers aspire to grow.

French beans

The cultivation of a relatively new crop in Maragoli, French beans, was prompted by the introduction of a new cannery run by a French export firm in the area (Carter et. al 1998, p. 27).[58] The firm not only provides chemical fertilizer inputs and guaranteed prices, but also controls production, including screening the beans, placing limits on area of cultivation,

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58 *According to Carter et. al, 30 percent of those in Maragoli grew French beans in 1995 — a figure that had increased by 11 percent over 10 years (Carter et. al 1998, p. 27).*

and asserting rigorous controls on weeding, mounding, and fertilizer use. The cultivation of French beans — because the crop is "just a vegetable" — remains the domain of women. Because French beans are harvested twice a year, require intensive labour inputs, and are limited by area under cultivation, they are normally cultivated by economically poor to middle-income women who rely on their own labour (Carter et. al 1998, p. 27), and those who do not have access to capital or large tracts of land to grow tea. For women who are able to enroll in the scheme, it provides an important avenue for generating income. Similar to tea, this cash crop allows women to exert control over the proceeds of their labour to some extent in order to meet their monetary requirements. However, women also complain bitterly that their husbands assume a "supervisory" role in the cultivation of this crop. It is easier for men to control the proceeds of French beans from afar than it is for them to control the proceeds of tea, given the infrequent, yet pre-set, harvesting schedule for beans.

Since the main research for this book was carried out, there has been a drastic shift in the cultivation of French beans. Simply put, very few farmers continue to grow this cash crop. This is because they find the monetary returns for their labour is not worth their efforts. According to farmers, the cannery now focuses on farmers in other areas, because many farmers in this study area are no longer willing to grow it. In addition to the ever-escalating costs of goods and services, the fact that women find it difficult to control the proceeds from growing French beans has made this cash crop no longer viable in Maragoli.

Maize

The cultivation of maize, at the expense of other staple crops, was expanded in Maragoli in order to meet the demands of the colonial hut and poll taxes (Crowley and Carter 2000). In response to high war-time prices for maize in the 1940s, farmers disposed of livestock en masse and transformed grazing land to agricultural land for the cultivation of maize (Kitching 1980, p. 236). Further incentives for cultivating maize included its larger yields per unit of land in flat and relatively fertile areas, and the potential for harvesting two crops per year (Crowley and Carter 2000). This transformation was most likely driven by women. The high levels of out-migration of men during the wartime effort led women to expand agriculture — as farming was women's domain — and focus on maize because of its high monetary returns for labour.

Today, maize is important as both a food and a cash crop in Maragoli. Only wealthy farmers with large areas of land are able to grow maize as a cash crop. Economically poorer farms are barely able to meet their own food requirements from maize and frequently have to supplement their requirements for maize through purchase. Harvested maize is taken to posho (maize meal) mills for grinding and is used to make ugali, a common Avalogoli meal. Both the making of ugali and the cultivation of maize are carried out by women. Given that economically poor farmers rarely produce enough maize for home consumption, women often sell maize through informal and non-formal petty trading, in effect, buying maize from wealthy households and traders in urban towns, and reselling it in their village markets or in Mbale for a small profit.

Maize is harvested twice a year. However, given the diminished availability of fallow land and the practice of crop rotation, double cropping has had deleterious effects on soil fertility (Crowley and Carter 2000). Although maize is commonly intercropped with beans, other soil fertility practices include the use of chemical fertilizers, organic manure, top-dressing, stover incorporation, and, in the case of wealthier farmers, crop rotation and fallowing.

Photo 38: This photograph was taken by a 65-year-old farmer and widower. He describes it: "This maize has just grown. It is good that we have planted maize on the soil, on the plot, and I just wanted to show the early stages of the maize. When it grew, I thought it wise to take it this high, so someone can see even the spacing and the lines." (L045)

The cultivation of maize produces an important soil fertility input, as maize stover is often incorporated into the *shamba* for mulching purposes.

Other crops

As outlined in Table 6.1 in the beginning of this chapter, many types of vegetables are grown in Maragoli. Indigenous vegetables include leafy greens such as *mito* and *mutere*. Exotic vegetables such as *sukumawiki*, cabbage, tomatoes, and onions were introduced in the 1920s and constitute both important food crops and cash crops sold in markets or roadside stands. Recent changes in Maragoli have prompted farmers to invest in "market-niche" crops. These include crops that have high cash potential in local and urban markets. During the return visit, farmers were experimenting with more marketable crops such as eggplant, garlic and leeks, and many farmers expressed interest in the marketing of, and access to seeds and information regarding such crops. Vegetable plots are located where residences were once located and constitute another micro-niche high in organic matter, which receives a concentration of nutrients, such as household and *shamba* refuse, ash, and manure.[59] Vegetable plots can potentially provide the sustenance needs of the household. Increasingly, and similar to banana plots, this is a part of the *shamba* that older

[59] *In Maragoli, after the death of both parents, the house in which they dwelled is destroyed. The area where the house lay is then used as a vegetable plot. It is often high in soil fertility because it has not been cultivated over a long period of time, and has benefited from the inputs of household refuse and rainwater around it. As such, it is an ideal location for vegetable plots.*

Photo 39: "Now these are vegetables — the reason I planted them is that vegetables mature in a short period and it gives money fast. I have put maize stalks because these maize stalks add manure to the soil. I put because of the sun [to protect the soil from direct sunshine], and also, when they decompose, they form manure." (L020)

Photo 40: "This is a good picture because it shows we use vegetables. We consume everything. I planted these cow peas in rows so that I can follow the lines when plucking." (L028)

women continue to control, even after other parts of the *shamba* may have been allocated to sons and daughters-in-law. Following the death of parents, this highly fertile part of the *shamba* is used to grow vegetable crops.

Root crops, such as cassava and sweet potatoes, can be grown in marginal conditions where soils may be infertile and which receive minimal inputs. Women increase the cultivation of root crops when their labour is scarce (Carter et. al 1998; Berry 1993; Odaga 1991). Root crops such as cassava can be left in the ground for a couple of years without deteriorating and can be harvested throughout the year, allowing women to allocate labour to other labour-intensive on-farm and off-farm activities. However, increased instances of theft have made this practice more difficult. Also, root crops are associated with low economic status, and therefore are often cultivated in economically poor households.

Conclusions

When on-farm labour is analyzed from the perspective of different soil management and farming practices, the picture that emerges illustrates that within the gender division of labour, many on-farm roles and responsibilities that were 'traditionally' the domain of men have been off-loaded on the shoulders of women. Colonial policies precipitated men's out-migration and prompted land alienation and the inequitable distribution of land. They explain to some extent the erosion of men's roles and responsibilities for clearing land and grazing livestock. They do not, however, explain why men continue to participate in other responsibilities, such as planting trees and hedges. It is these one-time labour inputs that have remained the exclusive domain of men. This chapter contends that these activities remain a taboo for women because they denote men's control over land — its physical demarcation and boundaries. These demarcations, however, are not just physical; they symbolize men's land ownership, authority, and control. Similarly, taboos exist against women trading and owning livestock — activities that also represent men's authority over the control and ownership of "property." Both of these practices signify who is the "commander" and the 'head' of household (Abwunza 1997). Even this representation is symbolic, as much of the day-to-day labour on the farm is carried out by women. Transformations in roles and responsibilities have been limited by the Avalogoli patriarchal 'order,' which centres on retaining control over "property," as well as the ideology, norms, idioms, and taboos that regulate that control. This situation maintains power relations in favour of men in an environment in which these same idioms and norms are increasingly being challenged because of broader historical and political-economic processes.

Moreover, in today's economic environment, a drive towards income generation has had major implications on the withdrawal of women's labour from certain on-farm labour enterprises. The case of tea and coffee clearly demonstrates a diversion of energy, time, and labour to cash crops that give women better control over the proceeds of their labour. Hence, less land is available for food crop production on small landholdings, and this has meant that poor and middle-class farmers must increasingly purchase their subsistence needs from the market. Faced with a simple "reproduction squeeze" (Bernstein 1979), women may opt to maximize short-term economic gain at the expense of labour-intensive soil management and farming practices such as mulching, green manuring, or the application of organic fertilizers.

Because women have had to assume men's on-farm labour responsibilities, men's 'traditional' roles and authority are increasingly being called into question. This challenge has also been substantiated by men's failure to fulfill their roles as "providers" of income, and has escalated gender conflict and discursive politics within the household. The discursive politics are especially heated around the issue of providing food and school fees. By focusing on the monetary requirements of children and grandchildren — the debate often centres on failure to meet school fees — women point to men's failure in "providing," thereby creating room to maneuver and to control the products of their labour. Women use men's failure to meet either set of responsibilities as grounds to argue that men should provide other means to carry out these activities and meet their obligations. In response, men draw upon 'tradition' as a way of re-establishing authority and power relations. While some gender roles and responsibilities have been transformed — skewing the gender division of labour to the detriment of women — it has also opened spaces for women. This new freedom of movement has created women's expansion in off-farm income-generating activities and other off-farm coping strategies. As the next two chapters demonstrate, these new spaces provide the discursive ground necessary for "walking where men walk." However, this freedom of movement has come at a cost, namely, the intensification of women's labour burdens and responsibilities in sustaining livelihoods.

The extent to which women engage in soil management efforts is not only contingent on their diverse life circumstances and their access to and control over resources within different on-farm labour enterprises, but also depends on the amount of time, energy, and labour they invest in other 'off-farm' livelihood strategies and opportunities. This situation is captured in a statement made by an older Logoli woman:

> *[Even though] we plant two times a year, I don't have food. My plot is small. We now depend on purchased food. ... Those days, almost all the food came from the shambas — unlike now, when you have to buy almost everything. If you want to eat, you have to buy. You even buy vegetables ... (L017)*

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PART V

Expanding the Terrain of Soils and Farming Analysis

. . . What emerges is a new respect for the whole 'full house' of different urban strategies — the copiously-branching 'bush' of coexisting variation — and correspondingly revaluation of forms of life that a more linear, progressive narration might consign to the past. ... A new way of conceptualizing urban life may be emerging in all of this, one which values multiplicity, variation, improvisation and opportunism, and distrusts fixed, unitary modes of practice and linear sequences of phrases. ... The realization that global modernity is characterized not by a simple, Eurocentric uniformity, but by coexisting and complex sociocultural alternatives, and that the successful negotiation of it may hinge less on mastering a unitary set of 'modern' social and cultural forms than on managing to negotiate a dense 'bush' of contemporary variants in the art and struggle of living (Ferguson for Zimbabwe 1999, p. 385).

"Walking Where Men Walk": The Increasing Importance of Providing Cash

Chapter Seven

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, Department of Economic Affairs, Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries May 1951, cited in Escobar 1984–1985)

In rural Maragoli, agriculture and soil management are but one set of livelihood strategies — one intertwined thread that runs through the complex web of other livelihood strategies in women's and men's lives. To better understand farmers' lived realities, as well as their priorities and constraints, it is important to examine the complex web of livelihood strategies that take place off the farm. While these off-farm livelihood concerns and coping strategies are increasingly centred around gaining access to cash, they nonetheless affect farmers' ability to engage in sustainable soil management and farming.

There are two important sets of relationships between off-farm livelihood strategies and sustainable soil management and farming practices. First, as discussed in previous chapters, farmers who have access to off-farm income are in a better position to gain access to resources critical for agricultural production and soil management. For instance, they can afford to pay for the escalating costs of farming and soil inputs, hire labour, and purchase land. Second, this chapter expands on the argument that while women continue to farm, they place their energies and efforts strategically into micro-niches where they have long-term security in tenure, and where they are better able to control their on-farm labour and its products. It further illustrates that, given the risky business of agriculture, women diversify their options by engaging in multiple off-farm coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods. This is especially the case for farmers who cannot depend on food and income from farming alone. In addition to being farmers, women often have multiple occupations and engage simultaneously in diverse activities that ultimately affect their ability to practice sustainable farming and soil management. The priority given to these off-farm activities is important in terms of the amount of labour, time, energy, and effort that is consequently allocated to sustaining the soils.

Women allocate their labour and energies toward activities that more directly meet the intense income needs of their families, effectively taking on roles as "providers" in an environment where there are no options to withdraw their labour onto large commercial estate farms or tracts of available empty land, as in other parts of Kenya, such as Central Province (Mackenzie 1995a). A combination of broader processes have intensified women's labour burdens and responsibilities in all spheres of life, including income

generation. The drive to a cash-based economy and changes in gender roles and responsibilities (as discussed in previous chapters) have recently been exacerbated by IMF–World Bank mandated 'austerity' measures, and by Maragoli's place in Kenya's political economy.

Given that "providing" is traditionally seen as the responsibility of men, women's increased engagement in this activity has led to the renegotiation of the conjugal contract, and constitutes a serious challenge to the material and symbolic basis of men's power. Women are able to "walk where men walk" by engaging in a bitter war of words, a heated discursive politics that points to men's failure to uphold their 'traditional' role as "providers."[60] Many men fail to fulfil this role because of the current political-economic environment of high unemployment, and the non-sanctioned obligations they may have outside of conjugal relations. They fail to remit cash and resources to their families, even in cases where they have access to waged employment. To cope with these stressful circumstances, women take matters into their own hands, engaging in multiple off-farm coping strategies, such as diverse income-generating activities and barter. They also engage in multiple social institutions, social organizations, and non-sanctioned social relations, a subject that is explored in the next chapter. Rather than engaging in overt acts of resistance to men's power and control, women often posture a symbolic deference to patriarchy, as a strategy designed to enable "back-door" decisions (Abwunza 1997) and, as in the case of Gambia, to secure freedom of movement and interaction (Schroeder 1996).

Drawing on women's and men's narratives, this chapter explores women's allocation of labour, energies, and efforts in various off-farm activities and coping strategies in light of changing priorities, and the implications of this allocation for sustainable soil management and farming. It contextualizes the complex demands that have been placed on women to generate income in the current stressful economic environment — conditions that have been exacerbated by structural adjustment programs and by Maragoli's place in Kenya's political economy. These multiple coping strategies highlight the fact that gender relations are not simply a reproduction of patriarchal privilege and prestige. As in Gambia, women negotiate spaces and carefully craft autonomy. These spaces carry with them both obligations and considerable social freedoms (Schroeder 1996, p. 84). This chapter argues that the competing demands on women's labour have led women to direct their labour, energies, and efforts into activities which they regard as priorities, never completely giving up soil management and farming, except in situations in which they divorce their husbands and "walk" from the *shambas*. At a minimum, they invest in soil management and farming in order to fulfill their roles as "good" farmers, while simultaneously focusing their energies on alternative means of fulfilling increasing demands for generating an income.

"Foolishness has got no medicine": changing priorities in economically precarious times

Blaikie has argued that land use decisions are only one "sub-sector" in a range of other opportunities, constraints, and priorities that must be explored in order to understand how land use decisions are in turn affected by these factors (1985, p. 83). Applying this argument to the Maragoli context: it is clear that women and men do not live their lives by "sectors,"

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[60] Men's roles as the family "providers" have been called into question. "Providing" took on new meanings (in addition to its traditional reference to providing land and livestock) beginning in the colonial period. These new meanings centred around income generation to pay colonial poll and hut taxes.

and that soil management is only one priority lived and grappled with in everyday life. In short, soil management is not necessarily a top priority for most farmers in today's economic environment. The decision of farmers to allocate labour and resources to soil management and farming is a strategic one, based on the availability of their labour and resources, as well as their security in tenure. It is also based on their need to meet other financial demands in an era of structural adjustment, and in a situation in which Maragoli has inequitable access to state and development resources.

The farmers involved in this research repeatedly articulated their priorities. The diverse range of priorities in their lives are presented below in Table 7.1. The purpose of this table is not to 'fix' or pinpoint, with any degree of accuracy, how different issues are ranked with respect to each other, nor is it meant to be a comprehensive or exhaustive list. It is rather a tool which demonstrates that, under the present conditions, which are characterized by other competing priorities and demands, soil management is no longer a top priority for Maragoli farmers. The table illustrates the increasing importance of income generation for making ends meet in the current economic environment, which is driven by SAPs and affected by the lack of political and economic resources allocated to Maragoli as compared to other regions in Kenya.

Table 7.1 Multiple Priorities of Maragoli Farmers.

Rank*	Priority	Description
1	Education	Lack of money to meet school expenses, including school fees, supplies, and uniforms.
2	Hunger and lack of food	Increased reliance on purchased food, low yields, and lack of agricultural land.
3	Health	Difficulty in meeting health-related costs such of those of medicines, health services, funerals, access to facilities, and transportation.
4	Shelter	Inadequate and damaged shelter.
5	Water	Difficult and labour-intensive access to water, due to long distances to piped sources.
6	Land issues	Insufficient land for inheritance, access, and use.
7	Soil management	Lack of resources such as extension services, lack of fertilizer, time, and other inputs; increased cost of inputs.
8	Access to waged employment	Issues of corruption and bribery in gaining access to waged employment.
9	Personal security	Theft of food crops and livestock; domestic violence.
10	Alcoholism	Increased alcoholism, especially among men.

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group discussions. N = 46 participants.

* In order to assess how multiple activities were ranked, a list was formulated and organized to reflect the emphasis that the women placed on different activities. It was then brought to the attention of the women's groups during feedback sessions. Women made modifications and verified the list.

The exacerbation of cash requirements and the consequent intensification of women's labour

The importance of income generation is best captured by a Logoli farmer who laments: "Everything nowadays, everything has to be purchased." This widely recurring statement made by farmers is significant. It highlights the increasing importance of cash for household survival, family welfare, agricultural production, and soil management. As cash-based transactions become increasingly critical in the struggle for survival, they inevitably impact the amount of labour, time, and energy people allocate to farming and soil management practices.

However, this drive towards income generation must be contextualized within broader political-economic and historical factors. While the need for cash was originally introduced by colonial policies which required households to pay poll and hut taxes, in the present context, it has recently been exacerbated by SAPs, which have affected Kenyan rural life adversely in a number of ways (Kinyinga and Ibutu 1994; Hegedus 1994). As discussed below, cuts in government spending and the devaluation of the Kenyan Shilling have increased women's responsibilities for meeting livelihood needs, which require more cash than before, especially in terms of meeting what farmers consider to be high-priority needs, such as school fees and health care. An erosion of farmers' earnings has intensified their off-farm labour burden, compounding this problem. It should also be noted that the high rate of unemployment in Kenya, and the differential access of people in Maragoli to employment, has made it difficult for men to fulfill their roles as "providers" (and for women to access waged employment). These factors have effectively increased women's off-farm labour burdens, as well as their roles as "providers," over time. The discussion below will examine the erosion of farmers' earnings and their declining returns to labour, before focusing on two priorities that are especially important to local farmers — namely, school fees and health care.

Erosion of earnings and declining returns to labour

The devaluation of the Kenyan Shilling is a direct result of SAPs. It has eroded farmers' earnings and has exacerbated the trend towards declining returns to labour. Money no longer buys the quantity of goods and services it used to buy. Farmers' accounts illustrate these escalating costs in all spheres of life. Day-to-day requirements, such as food, must increasingly be purchased and can no longer be provided through farming alone. The following three accounts contextualize these trends within historical perspective.

A Logoli woman in her early 80s complains about increased prices:

> *During the colonial days we could purchase beef for four shillings and fish for thirty cents, and a half-kilogram of sugar at five shillings. ... [Now] life is difficult, because we bought the plot I am living on at 100 shillings, which is not possible these days. Nowadays you cannot buy a plot at 100 shillings or even 1000 shillings. And we thought things would remain the same. Our children are now in problems; they have nothing to give to their young ones. (L032)*

In a similar vein, another Logoli woman in her late 70s complains bitterly:

> *The parents were there and they were wealthy on the side of cows and food. And also there was agreement between them. When a person had his brother, there was no disagreement like today's life, which is different a bit, less cooperation. ... Of old age, we used to buy sugar at three cents, and now days you can't buy sugar at three cents. Now days it's fifty shillings and above. Fifty and above! And if you go to see, there's a lot of school fees, and you are still giving birth and you are still being given burdens — children need to eat and drink. Food nowadays is scarce; it is not there — there's a lot of famine. ... It's because of self-government. When these people [*mzungus*; pointing at the interviewer] were there, it was of help. The white man did not raise things like nowadays. They used to help. They used to help, in that goods used to be down [in price]. ... They used to reduce* ugali *and sugar prices. We didn't have a lot of problems that we are in now. You see, we want* ugali *to eat and you don't get it. It's a must to buy. (L039)*

Another woman in her early 70s remembers the colonial period and laments:

> *There wasn't much hunger; everything was available. They would ask many people to go and work in tea and sisal plantations, and they would, in turn, support their people. But today, if it is you are employing, you employ [only] two. ... It's better to pay taxes because prices of commodities were affordable. Taxes were 6 shillings and then later became 12 shillings per head of household per year. The situation today just defeats me. When taxes were done away with, prices of commodities were hiked. We used to purchase items at 6 shillings. Ever since taxes ceased, schools, commodities, and everything became unaffordable. The Africans thought that [getting rid of] tax paying was a relief and yet it wasn't. [Today], school fees are so high that, to admit a student in a high school is so difficult, full fees are needed. During the colonial days, fees could be paid in installments and a student goes on with studies. It seems with current circumstances, the world is coming to an end. Were it not for the colonial masters we would not have gone to school. Education and school were a colonial idea. These are the people who enlightened Maragoli people. ... If all those good things went along with taxes, I'd rather have taxes than what is here now. (L041)*

Women contend that drastic livelihood changes have occurred over time, making life increasingly difficult in almost all spheres. They complain about the difficulty in providing adequate land, sufficient food, necessary health care, and formal education for their children. Given these changes, it is not surprising that older women remember colonial times as being "better," compared to current circumstances — to the point that they literally call for a return of the *mzungus* and accompanying colonial taxes. A historical understanding of these current changes and discourses is critical, as Comaroff argues:

> *A historical perspective reveals changing social relations of production and fundamental transformations in people's relationships to place; it also examines how social memories construct the past in the present. (cited in Moore 1993, p. 383)*

Historical consciousness is remembered, constructed, and invoked in the present, in light of transformations in social relations in production, state policy, and the international political economy, and also influences the cultural understanding of resource politics (Moore 1993, p. 382). In remembering the past, Logoli women and men seem to place *all* the blame for their current difficult circumstances on the post-independence government.

The past is remembered in a way that emphasizes "good things": when food prices were lower, waged work was available and school fees were minimal, despite burdens imposed by colonial taxes. This account of history brings into sharp focus two important points. First, women's emphasis on the escalating cost of food and school fees reflects a real and immediate problem in people's lives, and is also the basis for the escalation of gender politics within the household. This issue is discussed further below. Second, the reconstruction of the past demonstrates the powerful and pervasive nature of 'development' discourse. This discourse obscures the connections between people's present-day circumstances and the broader international political economy, which has helped to perpetuate and sustain the current economically difficult environment, and shifted the costs of SAPs to the unpaid economy through an intensification of women's labour (Mackenzie 1993, p. 85). By placing the blame for the current economic environment on local governments, Logoli women and men reproduce this discourse, and do not always connect the impact of structural adjustment policies to the difficulties they face in their everyday lives (Kanyinga and Ibutu 1994),[61] except to the extent they blame the Kenyan government for "cost-sharing" policies (negotiated under the pressure from the IMF and World Bank). This is not to say that the gravity of their problems is only a consequence of SAPs. As discussed in Chapter Three, the problems that Logoli people currently face are also a consequence of Maragoli's place in Kenya's national and regional political geography. For instance, one of the reasons that people may remember the past as being far easier and more equitable then it actually was, is because the present-day government is not impartial. Some people, usually those who are powerful or elite, have access to benefits through patronage or bribery, which, in turn, makes it difficult for those without access to view their current circumstances in a positive light. Considering the extent to which economic stress has increased in their day-to-day lives, farmers' call for a return to colonialism is not surprising.

Part of this stress can be explained by the effect of SAPs, which have increased the prices of goods and services, while real incomes have been reduced or remained fixed. Farmers are working harder and longer for decreased returns. These increased burdens and decreased returns in labour are parallel to those in other sub-Saharan African contexts (Mackenzie 1993; Gladwin 1991).

In particular, economically poor women face increased burdens in "providing" for multiple needs. They normally engage in casual labour (they lack access to capital to enter into trading activities, or formal education to compete for waged labour). They often have to hire out their own labour on other people's *shambas* before working on their own. This often leads to a situation in which they under-invest in soil management practices, thus suffering from poor yields, declining soil fertility, and soil erosion problems. Economically poor farmers also

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[61] *Women and men's resounding silence on the issue of SAPs was made clear by the fact that not one participant raised it as an issue of concern. People do not grasp the actual meaning and purposes of SAPs beyond the way it has been 'politicized' as both state and opposition parties "trade accusations at each other, on SAPs effects, while none have endeavoured to educate people on the meanings of SAPs" (Kanyinga and Ibutu 1994, p. 2).*

have differential access to capital, formal credit, and land. They find it difficult to purchase the inputs necessary for sustainable farming and soil management. For instance, they may own fewer livestock and therefore have inadequate organic manure for their *shambas*. The purchase of inputs (such as chemical fertilizers) is also extremely difficult for these farmers, resulting in a situation in which inadequate or no inputs are applied to the soils.

Another result of economic poverty is that escalating prices and increased financial obligations have increased food scarcity and hunger. This, in turn, has increased instances of crop theft from people's *shambas*. One farmer laments:

> *We used to plant* sukumawiki*. ... I like planting cabbages, but immediately they get ready, someone cuts all of them. ... Nowadays, even if the bananas are there, there is a lot of theft ... they don't even wait for it get ready, it's stolen. (L017)*

Theft is not only a serious social problem; it also has impacts on cropping patterns and time of planting, as farmers choose not to plant certain crops that are theft-prone, or avoid early planting in order to avoid the theft of early harvests. The following farmer explains:

> *I try to plant cassava and potatoes, but the bad thing [is], even before the cassava and potatoes are ready, the thieves are already stealing. What can I plant? ... This is a very big problem. Because if you plant your things ... the thief comes and steals ... because of the small* shambas *we have. You can have a tiny farm and one has five, ten children, and then you harvest some little maize, maybe only five two-kilogram tins, which you eat in just two days and that's all. Tomorrow, where will you go? The children start getting ways of getting food and that's by stealing from other people's* shambas *... There are no jobs. Then someone sees he has children and they are crying and he has nowhere to get a job. So what does he do and he has children? Then he thinks, "it is better I go and steal somebody's things." It's not only young people who steal. Even others, because most of them are jobless ... And ourselves, who are unemployed and have no business, you find it's burdensome, because whatever you were banking on, you find that someone has already taken ... It makes you give up. Like me, I have given up on planting vegetables. (L016)*

The stressful economic circumstances exacerbated by the economic policies of SAPs and the high rate of unemployment in Maragoli, in combination with the diminished sizes of *shambas*, have created a situation in which instances of theft are on the rise. The rise in theft affects farmers' choices of the kinds of crops they cultivate, for example.

The escalating costs of education and health care

As mentioned earlier, gaining access to health care and school fees is a top priority for farmers in Maragoli. Hence, they dedicate a great deal of time, energy, and labour towards meeting the escalating costs of these services. To understand the weight given to these priorities, and the effects this prioritization has on farming and soil management, it is important to consider farmers' everyday struggles in gaining access to health care and school fees. It is also useful to consider the way the they are affected by local factors such as cultural norms, and broader factors, including the political-economy and historical

influences. For instance, the shifting of the costs of social services onto local people through government cutbacks, combined with an increase in the price of these services, has placed an increased pressure on women to meet the costs for these services.

As a result of these cutbacks, formal health costs have increased, while farmers' incomes have remained fixed or declined. This situation is especially acute for economically poorer households, as the following account of an economically poor male farmer, aged 66, demonstrates. He explains how his poor eyesight has not only prevented him from earning an income through his occupation as an electrician, but also deters him from clearing the land:

> *It's the eyes that have really given me problems. ... On the shamba I work, but I don't see clearly what I am doing. You know I can dig where I have already dug. Or I can dig thinking I am in line, when I am just so far from the spot I am to be digging. (L019)*

Because he lacks access to cash, he cannot afford the proper health care required to allow him to engage in farming and soil management. Moreover, this situation is even worse for farmers living on extremely small landholdings who cannot meet their food requirements from farming alone and for whom good nutrition is inadequate. Women's health is compromised because they cannot meet their nutritional needs through purchase or cultivation of food, and because they often compromise their own nutritional needs in favour of those of their children or spouses. This malnutrition makes it hard for them to carry out the labour-intensive work required for sustainable farming and soil management. The following account of a 'de facto' woman head of household illustrates how, in many cases, women are left with the economic burden of meeting the health care requirements for themselves and for their children, even when they are married:

> *My husband lives in town and he's not bothered with us, so I have to take care of myself, and my children too. ... I have to struggle on my own. For instance, now all my children are unwell and I have no way out of it. ... So my mind gets worked up whenever I think of buying medicines. I feel so sad about it. ... It's because my husband does not send any money — that's why I'm facing all these problems. (L015)*

While local people have been responsible for paying some of the costs of health care over time, these accounts show how SAPs have exacerbated the inability of Logoli women and men to meet their health care needs in the present-day context. This, in turn, has adversely affected their ability to engage in farming and soil management, as well as off-farm income-generating activities.

Besides health care, the payment of school fees is a major priority for Logoli women. This prioritization is not only a function of the increased amount of cash required to meet the costs associated with formal education; it is also because of strong social norms that place a great deal of weight on education, and which are associated with social status. For instance, women often use money they earn through income-generating activities to pay for these costs first. They often allocate the money they receive from women's groups, through an investment in revolving funds and loans, towards these costs. As with health care, local people have always been responsible for paying some of the costs of school fees. However, in the present context, these fees have actually gone up, because of government cutbacks in this sector. Further, these increased costs are exacerbated because of the erosion

of earnings that local people experience in today's economic circumstances. Nonetheless, school fees remain a major priority in Maragoli because education is seen as a resource, an indicator of status, and a high-risk, yet potentially lucrative, avenue to wealth and status. School fees are also a focal point for material and symbolic struggles within gender relations, which, in turn, are key to understanding the spaces that women create in order to "walk where men walk."

Women and men continue to place a great deal of importance on formal education, despite the fact that education does not guarantee employment, even for university graduates, in an environment where unemployment has reached massive proportions (in Kenya in general, and in Maragoli in particular) (Abwunza 1997; Odaga 1991). Furthermore, strong social stigmas exist against unschooled children, which translate into lowered social status for them as men and women, as well as lowered brideprice (for women) (Abwunza 1997; Crowley et al 1996). This is evident in the following account from a woman in her 80s, who is able to consider the way attitudes towards education have changed over time and the increased importance of formal education in today's life circumstances:

> *Mostly it [formal schooling] was focused on boys. We really underrated this education. We thought it was for men who will go into town searching for jobs. And so they say "foolishness has got no medicine." And those girls who had interest really managed, and [we] see them reading bibles and other books. ... Education is the major thing in society now; girls who are educated get higher [paid] jobs. They are really respected by everybody. (L032)*

Photo 41: This photograph was taken by a farmer and health care worker. She explains: "This is a good picture. It shows that I am committed to the work I am doing here — to prevent people from illness. It shows that people stay very far from health centres, so, before they go to Mbale, I try to treat their illness." (L038)

Photo 42: "I became a Traditional Birth Attendant a long time ago. I just started by helping others. Then, I hadn't learned the course. There were people from Kakamega who brought us boxes, measuring equipment, a torch and a plastic mattress to lay the child on after it is born, a pack of soap and a box ... The only problem is gloves. When they get finished, because nowadays we are supposed to buy them. I need money and have to ask the expectant mothers to pay ... Most people make their payments. But some have problems with the payments." (L001)

She further explains that life in Maragoli has changed drastically, and the importance of education as a means of survival in the long term has heightened:

> *Life was good. We never lacked food. Today we try to make meals that are not sufficient for children. ... So the only thing is for children to work hard at school to omit these things. ... Those who have fees can manage to send their children to school, but the weak ones cannot ... their children come rushing home for a book or pen, and, when they can't find any, they are forced to stay at home. (L032)*

Another farmer, a 44-year-old senior co-wife, bitterly complains that her husband's contribution towards school fees has to be divided between herself and her co-wife, which does not leave enough money to educate her children fully. She explains the importance in women's lives of educating children:

> *If a man has many wives and his income is very high and he goes on and educates all his children, then the children go ahead and get jobs. We women get settled after our children have gotten jobs. Once they've cleared school and they get employed, we women feel really good. But, when they let them roam like this, it means if that man [the husband] happens to pass away, then your home is ruined. (L027)*

Education is only the first expense. Other 'hidden' costs associated with accessing employment are added expenses that most people contend with because of corruption and bribery. A woman in her 80s explains:

> *During the colonial days, we used to view life as difficult. If you had a problem, the* mzungus *could help freely. Nowadays you have to bribe. Nowadays, if I come looking for a job, you tell me to give 1000 shillings. Where do I get it from? What is happening? Our country has changed so much — it should have waited until we have passed away. ... People should change and note that some [people] never have anything to give as a bribe. (L044)*

Although a risky long-term strategy, and an expensive gamble that involves 'hidden' costs such as bribery, formal education remains a high priority for women, because it has the potential to transform their social and economic status. Women spoke of how the risk was worth taking because of the potential remittances they might gain from successfully employed children, even though access to these remittances depends on the nature and quality of their personal relationships with their children. In the colonial era, the economic success of the whole family was associated with formal education, because of the high level of employment and subsequent remittances that could be obtained.[62] In the present situation, the high rates of unemployment for the educated mean that these remittances are not assured, and that children are not necessarily viable and dependable channels for ensuring monetary remittances in the future. Moreover, the success of children in terms of gaining access to education and employment also carries a great deal of weight for women in another way. It is a symbol of their own success as "good" wives, and, as such, it increases their status and reputation in society.

Although women are aware that the link between education and improved socioeconomic status is a risky one, formal education is used as an important symbolic resource within gender relations and in struggles within the household. Women draw on the emotive images of uneducated and hungry children to serve an additional purpose: these images are powerful symbols of men's failure as "providers." School fees and food have become the crux of the heated discursive politics within the household that centre on men's failure to provide for the economic requirements of their families. Within this discourse, women's arguments are imbued with the poignant language of their children's welfare. This discourse enables them to justify their engagement in income-generating activities and their control over the products of their labour — areas that were "traditionally" considered the role of men. Wives wield these arguments to renegotiate the conjugal contract and to push the boundaries of what is considered men's domain, namely, providing and controlling income through diverse off-farm income-generating activities.

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[62] *The powerful symbolic status of education came into place during colonialism when those who were supported by the colonial government in gaining higher education not only went on to be politically powerful and wealthy, but also became powerful symbols of status and examples to which others aspired.*

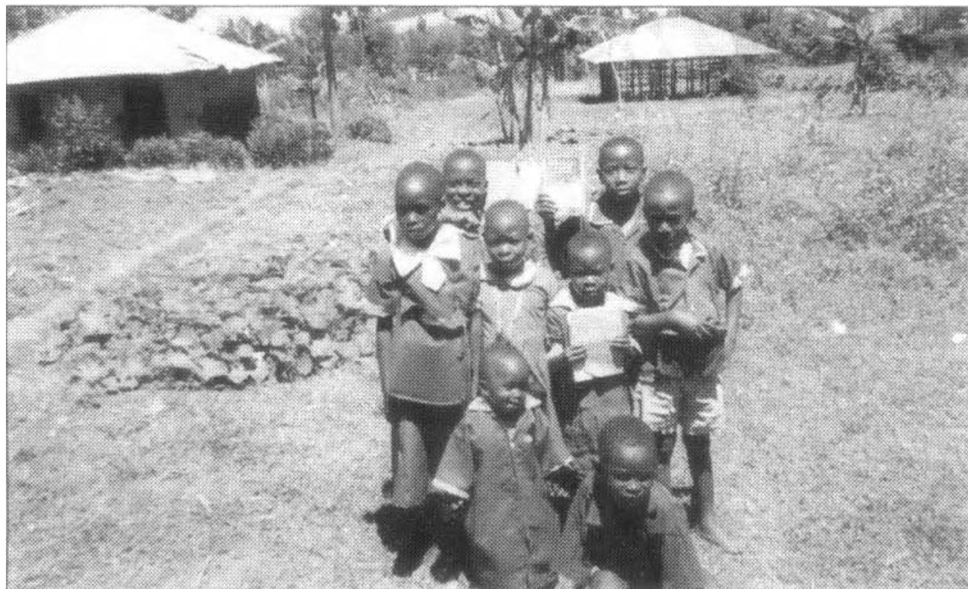

Photo 43: "This picture shows some of my children in school uniform. I took it to show that all the money I'm supposed to spend on tilling or buying fertilizer is used to purchase their school uniforms. So I end up with nothing to buy the fertilizer. Even if we were supposed to purchase a bigger plot, the whole amount goes to school. It is not time — I have enough time — but money is the problem. The load is lighter when they are on holiday, because they help with what they can ... they do household chores while I go to the shamba. But during school days they come home very late." (L011)

Photo 44: "I took this picture when I saw them [my grandchildren] coming home. Because now I am the caretaker of the children. I remain with the younger two, while the other ones go to school ... Because of my tea, I've helped all my children and grandchildren. Just now, I've taken two children to secondary school. So I feel that tea is a very good crop because it helps me educate even my grandchildren." (L008)

Photo 45: "This is my last-born son. He shows he was coming home from school. It was just lunch time — he is holding a pen and a geometry set. I have four children in school. Ah! I can't even explain and finish. Like now, I have a child in standard eight. One needs 1,400 shillings; the other one needs 1,420 shillings; and this one is in five, and another one in three, and I can't just explain it ... To get money is a problem. Like now, I have not taken anything and I'm supposed to register this week." (L033)

"Providing" through multiple income-generating activities and occupations

In an era of reduced purchasing power and escalating costs in all spheres of life, "providing" cash for their livelihood needs has become exceedingly important for women. Further, in a situation in which women are unable to depend on farming alone and on men's monetary contributions to household expenses, women opt to take things into their own hands. They allocate their labour, energies, and time to activities that more directly meet their current needs and priorities. These activities revolve around "providing" — that is, income generation — an activity that was "traditionally" men's responsibility. While this constitutes a serious challenge to the material and symbolic basis of men's power, women are able to "walk where men walk" by pointing to men's failure to uphold the conjugal contract. The result is a highly gendered and bitter 'war of words' that centres around money, as one man explains:

Nowadays milk is money, sugar is money, any other foodstuff is money. They are not available in the shambas, *so that is why money has brought misunderstandings. ... I don't know if it's because money has become something precious that people fight over it. Since the relationship between the man and woman is [that] if a man doesn't have much money — like the other man and he has a wife — the wife demands to be done for the same things like the ones other women are being done for. Yet she doesn't know how the other man gets money. So money has become the big issue today. That is why there are many cases of divorce — because people are comparing their spouses with others, therefore [they say], "I should be done for what so and so's husband does." Then it causes fights; that leads to divorce. (L019)*

Unable to "provide" for their family's needs, men feel that they are backed into a corner, asserting that women's claims are "unreasonable" and are based on "inapplicable and unfounded" comparisons to economically successful households. Women counter that "they cannot wait for men." They need to provide for their families themselves in order to meet immediate livelihood requirements. Typically, they claim:

Men leave everything to women. And when they do get money, they use it on alcohol, and don't assist their wives. Neither do they buy food in the house. They depend on their wives to even buy them clothes! (L005)

Hence, in Maragoli, men's words are only "final" as long as they "provide" for their families and wives. Men's failure to provide allows women to legitimate their autonomy to engage in "providing" themselves. However their engagement in income-generating activities must be coupled with soil management and farming in order to maintain their status as "good" wives.

In today's economic environment, women often have more than one occupation — sometimes two or three simultaneous occupations. Though far from being an exhaustive list, Table 7.2 illustrates the diverse range of income-generating activities in which women engage in order to meet their monetary requirements. It also challenges simplistic conceptualizations, so commonly found in conventional approaches, which assume that farmers are dedicated solely to 'farming.' Clearly, most women are not just 'farmers.' Most engage in some form of off-farm income generation — from informal petty trading to waged labour. This not only affects how they allocate labour in other spheres of life, including soil management and farming, but also leads to intense struggles over the proceeds of labour and an escalation of gender politics. It is essential to bear this reality in mind in the formulation of soil management and agricultural policies and projects.

Table 7.2 Maragoli Women's Multiple Income-generating Activities.

Non-formal licensed petty trading	Informal petty trading	Formal, waged, and salaried labour
Second-hand clothing	*Changaa* [63]	Tailoring
Dried fish	Vegetables	Domestic work
Seeds	Fruits	Traditional Birth Attendant
Fruits	Firewood	Community health worker
Vegetables	Milk	Community-based distributor
Maize	Eggs	Nursing
Spices	Livestock	Teaching
Consumable items [64]	Napier grass	Bar maids
Food	Consumables	Housekeeper
Crafts	Sex work	Ministers
Cloth	Land rental	Farm labour
Non-consumable items [65]	Crafts	Government employee
Pottery	Braiding hair	Other professions
Tailoring		**Formal Enterprises**
Porters		*Posho* mills
Bicycle taxis		Dukas
		Beauty salons
		Tailoring shops
		Rental housing

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, survey, group interviews. N = 46 participants.

63 Changaa *is home-brewed beer or alcohol.*

64 *Consumable items include sugar, tea, bread, scones, and other foodstuffs. This category also includes kersone, matches, soap, laundry detergent, and other items.*

65 *Non-consumable items include cooking pots, utensils, plastic tubs, mattresses, farm implements, baskets, and other items.*

Trading

The daily buzz of activity in both licensed markets and makeshift stands in Maragoli attests to the prevalence and importance of trading in farm and non-farm products. Different forms of trading, such as formal, non-formal, and informal trading, all exist side-by-side.

Licensed trading is the most desired and valued form of trading. Its popularity is reflected by the many permanent licensed *dukas* (shops) and outdoor market stands, which swell with throngs of sellers and customers, especially during official market days. Many types of produce and other items are purchased by market-trade women in large urban markets, such as the one in Kissumu, and re-sold in smaller rural markets, such as the one in Mbale. Some market-trade women expressed a preference for selling non-perishable items, such as used clothing, spices, or dried fish, rather than farm produce, because it gave them more freedom in terms of selling (the items have a longer "shelf-life"). For the same reason, farm produce such as onions, chillies and root crops were also preferred over other types of more perishable farm produce. Although root crops do not earn as much money as other types of crops, they are also preferred because they can be harvested throughout the year, giving farmers more flexibility.

Women often cited trading as a desirable form of income generation. However, licensed market trading is not viable for most economically poor women. This is because there are several barriers to their entry, including the need for start-up capital, a trading license, and a permanent stand in the market. If women who want to trade cannot gain access to licensed trading, they revert to 'hawking' or informal petty trading in their villages or along roadsides, using makeshift stands or cloth spread on the ground. This activity is also popular among economically poor women.

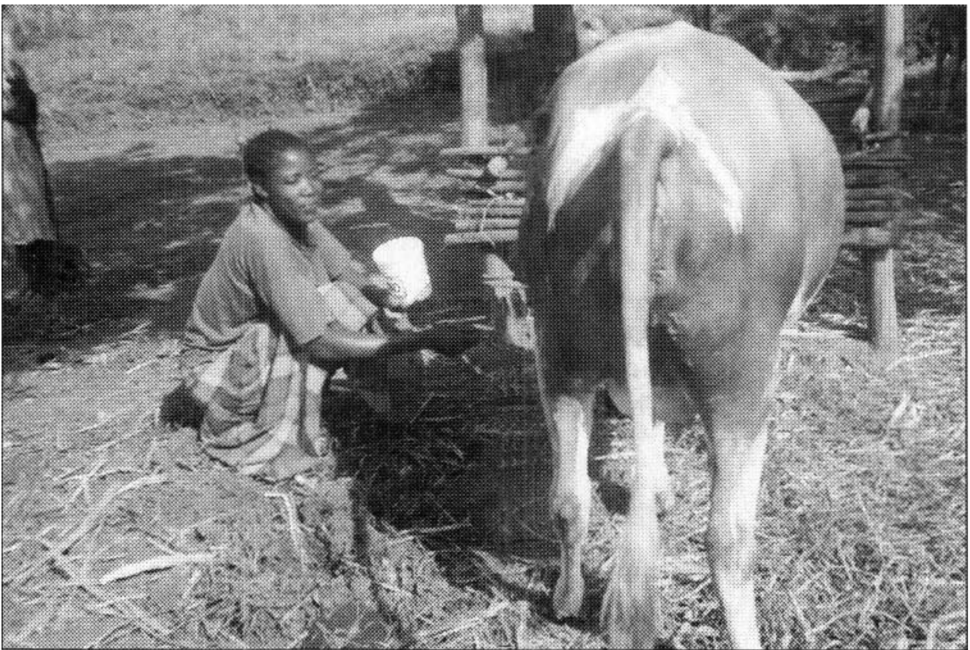

Photo 46: This photograph illustrates an example of informal petty trading. A 68-year-old woman explains: "Here, I had gone to buy milk from this woman. So when I found her milking [this crossbred cow] I decided to take a picture of her to show how we here in Maragoli do it." (L008)

Photo 47: "These people sitting with wheelbarrows, they are waiting for someone to alight from a bus or someone to give them a job of carrying a load so they can get an income and can buy some soap and maize meal. Some of the people have children in secondary school: if he hasn't pushed this wheelbarrow, he hasn't earned any money to go towards school fees and uniforms. And some have very tiny plots, and the shamba doesn't give you enough income." (L016)

Photo 48: "This is the same as the previous picture, but different in a sense. This is a picture of young men on a bicycle. They act as bicycle taxis and carry people or goods in order to make some money and pay for school fees." (L016)

Waged labour

Waged labour is an important part of women's livelihood strategies. Many women engage in some type of waged labour, ranging from casual farm labour to salaried work in the civil service. The type of waged labour they engage in influences the amount of remuneration received, and the social status associated with it. On one end of the spectrum is casual farm labour. This type of labour is an important source of income, especially for economically poor women who may lack access to resources, education, and capital to engage in other forms of more lucrative waged labour. They commonly engage in casual farm labour on other people's *shambas*, as discussed earlier. This type of labour is sporadic, often temporary in nature, and most often carried out during digging and tilling season, when farmers might be better tending to their own *shambas*. However, some farmers may be hired as casual labourers to pick tea, an activity that occurs year-round. Although casual labour earns the lowest pay, at a going rate of 40–50 shillings per day, women engage in it because they can better control the proceeds of their own labour, as one woman explains:

> *You may want development, but you lack money, or the husband objects. So you must hire labour out to someone to be able to help oneself and push ahead. If not, development would be non-existent. (L011)*

Further, there is a lower status associated with casual labour, and many farmers themselves don't consider it "employment" per se (Crowley et al. 1996, p. 28). Women choose to engage in it because they earn income which they can better control and use toward their immediate needs. However, a woman's ability to withdraw her non-remunerated domestic and farming labour and redirect it into casual farm labour and other income-generating activities depends on her life-cycle positioning. Young wives in the early stages of domestic

Photo 49: "These mamas help me till this shamba, *and when it is time to weed, they also help me, because I cannot do this alone. I pay them 40 shilling a day." (L020)*

life are less able to invest their labour in these activities and are vulnerable during their child-bearing years, when they encounter critical labour bottlenecks because of their intense labour burdens, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Although women's casual labour on other people's *shambas* is not considered 'professional' farm labour, it requires a great deal of energy, strength, and knowledge. On the other hand, a form of more permanent agricultural labour, which is considered 'professional' labour, is the work of *shamba*-boys. This category of labour has an inherent gender bias, as permanent farm labour is considered the role of men. Although considered low-status (but not as low-status as casual farm labour), this form of waged farm labour provides a regular income, whereas casual labour is often seasonal and dependent on availability. While women work as hired casual labourers on other people's *shambas*, as well as on a day-to-day basis on their own *shambas*, they are not considered 'professional' farmers. The 'professionalization' of waged agricultural labour is based on a Eurocentric model dating back to colonial policies that considered only men to be 'farmers.' As *shamba*-boys, men receive regular advice and resources from extension workers, who also tend to recognize them as 'professional' farmers. Men who become *shamba*-boys often lack access to resources such as land. For instance, Benjamin, whose account was discussed in Chapter Four, became a *shamba*-boy when he was young. He now farms his landlord's *shamba*. He explains:

> *So it is due to difficulties that I learned to work, because my father had deserted me. He never bought me anything, not even clothing. So I was forced to learn how to fend for myself. I know you have to till and plant in order to get food. So I'd rather work instead of walking around on the roads. I can sit at home and do my own work, which will in turn benefit me. (L020)*

Photo 50: This photograph illustrates the amount of labour-intensive work that has been undertaken to cultivate this tomato plot. Benjamin, a shamba*-boy (Chapter Four), explains: "I use maize stalks and grass for mulching. I use fertilizer, D.A.P., when planting, and ammonia for top-dressing. I plant tomatoes because I like development." (L020)*

Extension workers see Benjamin as a "model" farmer who engages in many soil management techniques and practices. Although he does not own the land on which he farms, as a single man, he faces no other competing responsibilities or labour obligations, and has few income expenditures. He is able to devote large amounts of time, labour, and energy to farming and soil management. This is in stark contrast to most women, who have heavy burdens in domestic work, as well as in terms of on-farm and off-farm labour.

Depending on their education, qualifications, and success in accessing employment, women may work as professionals in other fields, such as teaching and nursing (see Table 7.2). These occupations are considered high-status, are associated with economic success, and are highly regarded because of their regular wages. They are also highly valued because the wages earned from this type of work far outweigh those earned from other forms of work. People who work as professionals have access to money, which puts them in a better position to meet household expenses such as school fees, healthcare, food requirements, and kinship obligations. They might also invest in farming, soil management, and capital for other types of trading activities. They can often afford to invest larger amounts of money in revolving funds and loans in their women's groups. Those who work in the civil service also benefit from pensions.

Negotiating the allocation of the proceeds from off-farm labour

It is important to consider how earned income is used, distributed, allocated, and negotiated, and how this affects farming and soil management. Some writers argue that remittances from employment are invested in farming:

> *There is indeed a link between off-farm income and on-farm productivity. Farmers with greater access to off-farm income obtain larger harvests and receive more income from farm produce sales. ... Off-farm income is a critical means to pay for farm inputs and other farm investments, and its importance to smallholder livelihood is growing. (Crowley et al. 1996, p. viii)*

However, this relationship depends not only on economic class, but also on gender. It depends on women's abilities, as farmers, to control household income and allocate it to farming and soil management in the face of other competing priorities. Off-farm income has the *potential* to be used for inputs and investments in the farm. But given other demands on women's budgets, such as the costs of food, school fees, and health services, this may be a lower priority in today's economic environment. The situation is best summed up in this farmer's statement:

> *The money we could have used to buy manure, we spent it to buy clothes for these children and pay fees, and also to buy food for them which they will use. (L005)*

Economically wealthy farmers are potentially in a better position to access inputs, such as chemical fertilizers and livestock, to invest on their farms. However, as discussed in Chapter Five, women's ability to negotiate the control of their income depends on their personal circumstances and their personal relationships with their husbands (and others in the household), and is not necessarily a given. A Logoli woman explains:

> *We have some [men] who usually give you some [money] or just leave it to you to plan how to spend, but we have some who usually grab all the money and leave you with nothing. (L017)*

The right to engage in off-farm activities and to control the proceeds of their labour is fiercely defended by women. In some cases, women do this by highlighting men's failure to "provide" income; in others, they withdraw their labour from the farm at critical times and hire out their labour in return for low wages as casual workers.

Men's response to the charges made by women is to harness the 'traditional' discourse of women as "helpers" and argue that women have forgotten their farming and domestic obligations to their husbands. Furthermore, when women are successful in earning income from off-farm labour, it is assumed that they should pool their income with their husbands. As Etta describes in Chapter Five, while her husband had never provided any remittances when he was employed, he now turns to her when he requires money. This situation has led women to hide money and to be extremely evasive about their earnings, often downplaying the amounts they earn. When women succeed in controlling their income, their autonomy sometimes comes at a high price. Men often re-establish power and authority through physical violence, or by appropriating income at the pay point, when they are in powerful enough positions to do so (in terms of status and class). For instance, as discussed in Chapter Five, one economically elite farmer described a situation in which her husband — a powerful and economically wealthy elder — appropriated her pay from the school where she worked, using his status and power to override her rights.

In the face of increased responsibilities and labour burdens, women not only invest in diverse income-generating activities, they also increasingly turn to the non-cash economy to make ends meet.

"Kugurana": the strategy of barter and exchange

When women and men are faced with increasingly precarious economic circumstances, they diversify their activities to meet their livelihood needs. Pushing this argument to what is outside the realm of monetization, Logoli women and men revert to barter and exchange as long-known modes of meeting their day-to-day needs. This non-cash based economy is thriving, despite government and international efforts to quash it and bring such "underground" activities into the formal and monetary sector. In effect, what was once old has become new again, and is vital for sustaining livelihoods. In the following account, Suzanna, a farmer, explains the situation.

Suzanna

Suzanna, in her 80s, describes how, in the past, grains such as millet, sorghum, and "even maize if the harvest was good," were a means of exchange used exclusively by men. Women, on the other hand, used beans as a means of exchange:

> *Some grains after harvest were put separately for the man. And nobody would dare touch it. That grain would be used for his own deals, to loan to someone who had a poor harvest and it will be repaid back during the next season. Then he will use it to purchase other things, like land. Those days, land could be purchased with only three chickens. ... He would use it to buy other things, like land, goat, and sheep. ... Women had beans. ... It's where the cows for dowry were got from. The Avalogolis say kuchunga [Kiswahili word for barter and exchange]: somebody got cows from kuchunga for her dowry. ... It is like [now] you can sell this tree and buy a cow. (L032)*

Farm produce is increasingly being used by women and men as legal tender. While produce such as beans and grains were once used to exchange resources, now they are used in more direct modes of exchange. Suzanna's account corroborates the historical evidence that, in Maragoli, control over the end use of crops was determined by gender, despite the fact that women carried out the bulk of farming (Kitching 1980; Humphrey 1947). Men controlled the use of crops that could be traded for livestock and land, while women controlled crops used for 'home consumption' and other forms of trading. Today, the exchange of on-farm produce continues, but in a different form, and in parallel to the monetary economy.

An economically poor Logoli man, in his mid-60s, explains the need for people today to be "multi-directional":

> *People nowadays cannot just depend on cash. People nowadays need different sources of deriving a livelihood. Like now, I sell milk from my* ngombe *in exchange for napier grass for my* ngombe *to feed on. Before my* kukus *died of illness, I sold eggs and chickens in exchange for other things. This is barter. There is no exchange of money. We do this with members of the local church-group. They are like extended family. So you see, we don't need cash to get items like flour and bananas. It works well because people don't have definite sources of income. (L019)*[66]

This type of exchange is increasingly being used as a diversification strategy, especially by economically poor farmers with unsteady or irregular incomes.

This practice also takes other creative forms. For example, in order to meet day-to-day needs, including those for maintaining soil fertility, people are reverting to the old custom of "*kwegeka*" — a form of "kugurana." As discussed in Chapter Five, economically poor farmers sometimes agree to keep and maintain livestock on their *shambas* for a neighbour, friend, or extended family member in exchange for resources. By agreeing to look after livestock, economically poor farmers are able to gain access to organic fertilizer for maintaining soil fertility. In effect, they use older practices and non-market forms of exchange, such as "*kwegeka*," to gain access to resources, such as manure, that can improve the fertility of their soils. In addition, they also keep a certain number of offspring (usually the third offspring, while the first and second go to the owner) and receive a small cash compensation of about 200 shillings. Although less common in Maragoli, similar arrangements sometimes exist to 'loan' land to a farmer in exchange for a portion of the harvest. However, such arrangements prompt farmers to cultivate loaned land with root crops, which are easier to manage from a distance and do not require labour-intensive inputs. Much of what is understood as being 'backward' and disappearing within 'development' discourse, seems better suited to meet contemporary conditions (Ferguson 1999, pp. 382–3). As these and the following cases show, people draw on long-standing ways of coping, often invoking "custom" to maneuver in the stifling economic situation created by SAPs and by Maragoli's place in Kenya's political geography.

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[66] *This personal narrative is reconstructed from my personal field notes.*

Photo 51: An older woman displays goats she is "keeping" for neighbours. (L032)

Conclusions

Given the multiple coping strategies described in this chapter,[67] it is easier to see the complexity of the factors that lead to soil degradation and declining soil fertility. They are not necessarily the result of 'ignorance,' 'poor practices,' 'population growth,' and 'haphazard and uncontrolled ecological destruction.' Rather, farmers in Maragoli engage in soil management and intensive farming activities, and have extensive knowledge in these activities — but they also have multiple occupations and diverse livelihood strategies, which are often prioritized above soil management. In an economic environment driven by SAPs, in which the costs of goods and services have increased and incomes have decreased, soil management has become less pressing than income-generating activities. For Maragoli women, ensuring the formal education of children is a top priority. Although it is a high-risk strategy, it has potentially lucrative returns in the long term, and is important for ensuring status and reputation, both of which are powerful cultural forces. Faced with these multiple priorities and concerns, including a particularly pressing need for providing income, women compromise their knowledge as farmers and managers of the soil in order to meet their most immediate and pressing demands. Women may choose to maximize short-term economic gain through unsustainable agricultural practices (Mackenzie 1995a, p. 21), and

[67] *However, Ferguson argues that it is necessary "not to join in the tendency ... of unreservedly celebrating 'coping' abilities of the ... poor and the vitality of the so-called informal sector; such a move can too easily end up whitewashing or romanticizing poverty and unemployment." (1999, p. 384).*

focus their energies on off-farm income generation to meet immediate and more pressing priorities. In doing so, they are compromising the long-term sustainability of their soils. Furthermore, as the next chapter illustrates, women not only invest their energies in off-farm income-generating activities as a means of accessing cash and other resources, they also diversify their options in multiple extra-household social institutions in order to expand their freedom of movement. Social institutions provide women with important channels of access to resources that are outside the control of their husbands, give women the opportunity to control the proceeds of their efforts, and "provide" for their farming, soil management, and broader livelihood requirements.

Social Institutions: Invoking Elements of Custom, Creating space to Maneuver

Chapter Eight

Central to women's agricultural and overall livelihood responsibilities are the roles of women in managing resources in rural communities. Water, soils, grasslands, forests, livestock, and wildlife are at the heart of Africa's rural production systems. The effectiveness of their management affects local livelihood systems profoundly. Modes of co-operation and conflict over resource access and use provide a lens for understanding social institutions at the local level. They also facilitate exploration of fundamental social alliances as well as cleavages in the social fabric within local communities or between such communities and the outside world. These alliances and cleavages originate in connections of family, class, ethnicity, race, gender and religion. Evidence suggests that consideration of local resource management, as it bears on food production and rural livelihood systems, must incorporate all these variables into the analytical framework. Rural households are vulnerable in crosscutting systems of power relations, particularly those of class and gender. Women bear the responsibility for the viability of these households. (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995, p. 40)

Throughout this case study, farmers' narratives have demonstrated that marital relations often do not provide a secure or reliable channel for women to access resources such as land, labour, cash and other material inputs necessary for farming, soil management, and off-farm priorities. In fact, because women are sometimes unable to control parts of the *shamba*, their own labour, or the proceeds of that labour, they face inequities within the household. And, for the reasons described earlier, they are unable to withdraw their labour totally from their *shamba*s as in other parts of Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa. This situation is compounded by the fact that they face many competing priorities in a stressful economic situation exacerbated by SAPs, high rates of unemployment, and Maragoli's place in Kenya's regional and national political geography. These factors, combined together, lead to increased stresses and pressures for women in their everyday struggles for survival.

In response to this increased stress and their increased responsibilities as "providers," women look for opportunities to diversify their sources of income and resources outside of marriage, where they have more autonomy and control. They increasingly diversify and proliferate their options through multiple extra-household channels of access to resources, thereby investing in what is long known and viable, in contrast to today's unstable political-economic circumstances. They invest their energies in a variety of social institutions — kinship relations, social organizations and social relations — as a way of diversifying their options, opportunities, and channels of access, and as a way of creating space to maneuver.

Although central to farmers' survival strategies, social institutions are often overlooked within conventional approaches. The household is often considered an autonomous, unitary, and neatly bounded unit within these approaches, with either a focus on the male household 'head,' or with marriage as the defining relation between genders. Conjugal relations are privileged over other types of interlocking, overlapping, and nested social institutions, relations, organizations, and coping strategies. Not only do the complex, variable, and dynamic characteristics of social institutions challenge the reductionist tendencies within these approaches, but also, they are considered 'intangible' (Crowley 1994, pp. 6–7). In cases where social institutions are considered, they are often portrayed as rigid and unchanging, as Berry explains:

> *A number of scholars have questioned the paradigm which represents African societies as 'responding' en bloc to 'exogenous' shocks. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, changes in climate, population density, economic conditions or patterns of conquest and domination have often led people to question established practices, experiment with new ideas, and contest or renegotiate rules and boundaries which they find inadequate or unacceptable in new circumstances. In the process, social identities and institutions have multiplied and/or been reshaped so often that they appear to take on permanent qualities of fluidity, ambiguity and creativity. (1997, p. 1228)*

Arguing against structuralist and ahistorical conceptualizations that portray social as static and fixed, Berry contends that they must be considered evolving and ongoing processes (Berry 1997). Hence, to better reflect the complexity, diversity, and fluidity of local realities, the analytical focus must shift from structures to processes, from rules to negotiation (Berry 1997, p. 1229). Moreover, although social institutions provide people with opportunities to negotiate resources, they do not necessarily guarantee outcomes or reproduce stable and consistent social relations (Berry 1997, p. 1228). They are dynamic and often unstable. Within these processes, resources flow and social relations change (often from day-to-day) over an individual's progression through a life cycle, and in historical time frame (Leach 1995a). Nonetheless, through the manipulation of rights and meaning, women individually and collectively harness and reinterpret elements of customs pertaining to social institutions in order to access and negotiate resources. In doing so, they transform them to meet their current needs and interests, create space to maneuver, and stake out rights to resources outside inequitable marital relations.

This chapter examines the diversity, flexibility, and negotiability of social institutions (kinship relations, in addition to marriage), social organizations (women's groups and informal social networks), and non-sanctioned social relations (extramarital affairs and sex work) as important channels of access to resources necessary for farming, soil management, and other livelihood requirements. Each social institution has its own sets of norms, idioms, and meanings, creating yet another intertwined thread that runs through the complex web of livelihood strategies and options in women's and men's everyday lives. Drawing on farmers' personal narratives and photographs, this chapter argues that social institutions provide important channels of access, for women in particular, to negotiate and mobilize local and state resources. Membership in social institutions creates opportunities for women to engage in negotiation and struggle for resources. The negotiability and the processual nature of these struggles makes it possible, in both material and ideological terms, for women to "walk where men walk."

Kinship relations: investing in reciprocal rights and obligations

Since pre-colonial times, Logoli women and men have gained access to land, labour, and other resources for agriculture and soil management through membership in various interlocked, overlapping, and nested social institutions, such as conjugal contracts, farming compounds, and clan-based descent groups (Crowley 1994). Social institutions — including marriage, clientage, clan lineage and kinship — continue to be important channels of access to resources. As discussed in previous chapters, marital relations are an important channel of access to resources such as land and money. However, conjugal relations are not the only type of social institution in which farmers actively invest in order to gain access to and control over resources. Women and men draw on kinship relations to gain or defend property rights; to recruit labour at low wages; to gain access to livestock and cash payments through bridewealth; and, increasingly, to gain access to land, capital, cash, employment opportunities,[68] farming and soil management inputs, and other livelihood requirements. This section focuses on people's membership, negotiation, and struggles within kinship relations. And, as there are a variety of different kinship relations that provide important channels of access to resources, it explores women's and men's non-conjugal relations within the nuclear family, with siblings, and with the extended family.

Non-conjugal relations within the nuclear family

Western conceptualizations of the nuclear family are very different from the lived realities of Logoli men and women. In Maragoli, the nuclear family is locally defined and includes husbands, wives, co-wives, mothers, fathers, mothers-in-law ("mothers"), fathers-in-law ("fathers"), step-parents, children, and stepchildren (in the case of co-wives and women who care for their husbands' children from previous marriages). Because marital relations have been discussed at length in preceding chapters, this section focuses on non-conjugal relations within the nuclear family (that is, relations within the nuclear family that are other than those among husbands and wives). Non-conjugal relations within the nuclear family provide important channels of access to resources through reciprocal rights and obligations that last a lifetime.

The relations between parents and children are extended reciprocally and provide a framework for the process of distribution, as well as production (Abwunza 1997, p. 100). Parents and children must both give and receive, and such reciprocal rights provide the basis for clan affiliation, lineage continuity, and individual security.

Parents are expected to provide care, including the material and livelihood requirements for their children. However, this care is not always equitable, because patriarchal preferences in favour of boys give them differential access to resources such as education, clothing, and food. Further, household and on-farm labour is inequitably distributed among sons and daughters, with girls normally carrying heavier workloads in addition to their own school work. As discussed in earlier chapters, land is passed transgenerationally from father to son. Girls normally gain access to land through marriage,

[68] *People who out-migrate often draw upon kinship relations to access resources, and to help them find work, borrow money, and otherwise establish themselves.*

except in circumstances where they are unable to marry or are divorced. However, even under these exceptional circumstances, they are not likely to gain access to land. The fierce social taboos and stressful political-economic environment make their rights to land vulnerable.[69]

Unmarried women who have children out-of-wedlock, or divorced women who have children from previous marriages, may draw on reciprocal relations with their parents in order to leave their children in their parents care, if their parents are still alive or live nearby. For instance, one participant in this study who had six children out-of-wedlock explained that these children lived on her parent's large *shamba*, which was located in a village outside Maragoli. Unable to marry for a number of years, she married a divorced man and supported her children through remittances she sent to her parents. This arrangement was based on a set of reciprocal rights and obligations negotiated with her parents in exchange for monetary gifts, the labour of her children on their *shamba*, and the promise of future potential remittances from grandchildren to grandparents.

Co-wives sometimes choose to pool their labour as parents and provide care for each other's children, with the understanding that the provision of care sets up reciprocal rights and obligations in the future. A woman can also negotiate her stepchildren's labour on her *shamba* in exchange for resources such as food. In certain circumstances where she is responsible for allocating productive resources, such as land, she may decide to invest in the relationship that best suits her interests in her old age. As the case of Rina illustrates in Chapter Four, this may not necessarily mean that Rina allocates her land to her only child, her daughter. Instead, she may choose to allocate land to her stepson, with the expectation that he will be better positioned to care for her in old age.

Children gain a sense of identity, affiliation, and status through their parents. Children who are born out-of-wedlock (or children born to mothers who have divorced and forfeited their rights to land, and who continue to remain in their father's homes) are subject to intense discrimination. These children are more likely to have their rights rendered vulnerable, as the case of Benjamin, in Chapter Four, illustrates. On the other hand, there are strong expectations for children to support their parents, and parents expect to gain access to resources from their children in later stages of life. For instance, daughters bring wealth to their parents in the form of brideprice, but may also draw on their parents' assistance after marriage, depending on their personal relations with them. In particular, educated children are viewed as investments in the future and represent a potential channel of access to future resources through remittances from employment. A Logoli man explains:

> *I told my sons, "I have educated you and now it's up to you to find jobs. ...*
> *When they grow up, they can in turn take care of me." (L019)*

Older women draw on their status to negotiate access to resources such as labour, food, clothing, cash, and farming and soil management inputs. They see themselves as dependent on their sons, daughters, and daughter-in-laws for their survival needs. One older woman

[69] *Women who gained access to land in this manner tended to be extremely paranoid and anxious, and were not interested in being involved in research that would have drawn attention to them. During the course of this research, I met a woman who had inherited a very small portion of land from her father after a failed marriage, and another women who had inherited land because she was unable to marry. However, both these women refused to participate in the research, because of the great deal of anxiety and stress that they were experiencing, and, I believe, because they did not wish to have any more attention drawn to their situation than already existed.*

in her 80s explained that she sometimes brings her daughter, who lives in another village in Maragoli, a kuku as a way of opening channels for negotiating and accessing much-needed food and cash for her day-to-day livelihood needs.

Sibling relations

Sibling relations provide another important channel of access to resources. In Maragoli, siblings encompass a broad set of relations, including brothers, sisters, cousins ("brothers" and "sisters"), sisters-in-law ("sisters"), and brothers-in-law ("brothers"). These types of relations are especially important to economically poor farmers, who often turn to economically wealthier siblings for cash remittances or gifts. Although more irregular than cash remittances, gifts provide an avenue of access to resources such as food, seeds, fuelwood, manure, livestock, capital, and cash. Remittances and gifts are sometimes not reciprocal in material terms, and are considered charitable obligations between more and less economically advantaged kin relatives, as the following farmer explains:

> *The relationship is supposed to be good because if there is someone who is able [economically], she is supposed to help the needy ... You have to assist those who don't have. You help the less advantaged if you are in a position of wealth ... it is not written ... [but] it is Avalogoli custom ... the elders actually advise that people should help each other you know. Someone in a [powerful] position should go ahead and help. (L004)*

However, such acts of charity and obligation are reciprocal in symbolic terms. Assistance to economically poor kin (as well as any other kin, neighbour, or friend) enhances a woman's self-image and reputation as her gifts and remittances circulate the network of reciprocal relations (Abwunza 1997, p. 101). A woman's ability to enhance her reputation as a "good" wife inevitably affects her ability to influence men and to negotiate control over resources and over her position within the household and community.

Economically poorer farmers can gain access to regular remittances from wealthier siblings. These remittances can be significant if they come from siblings who earn a regular salaried income. For instance, a market woman in her 40s explained how she supports her sister and her children on their *shamba*. She provides for all their cash requirements, including the costs of school fees, health care, and food, as well as farming and soil management inputs.

Brothers may also provide resources to their sisters in various ways. For instance, a woman who is unable to marry may depend on her brother to survive, sometimes living in his household in exchange for her labour. However, such arrangements depend on personal relationships between sisters and brothers, and on the extent to which a brother believes that his unmarried sister may inadvertently "curse" his children to remain unmarried. Such an arrangement is further based on reciprocal rights and obligations in which sisters provide labour on the farm and in the household in exchange for the basic necessities. Nonetheless, women in these circumstances are extremely vulnerable, as they totally depend on their brothers' charity and may also have to rely on the charity of neighbours to provide access to supplementary food and other resources. Brothers may also be called upon to assist in providing for the cost of brideprice which families of educated women demand.

Economically poor farmers may also depend on sibling relations in order to sustain their livelihoods. For example, through a combination of kin-based obligations and rights involving her sisters, brothers, and sister-in-law, a widowed farmer in her 50s, who is unable to work on her *shamba* (because of poor health), carves out a livelihood for herself and her only daughter. She explains that she relies on regular remittances from her siblings to meet cash needs, including the cost of food, school fees, health care, clothing, casual on-farm labour, farming and soil management inputs, and other livelihood expenses:

> *My plot is too small ... and there is no source of income since my business collapsed. Because every time I borrowed money to invest in my business I made a loss. I had to find means of repaying the money. I gave up. Now I am just here ... My sisters and brothers help me ... and sometimes she [my sister] assists me with food and clothing because one has a farm in Kitale. (L028)*

She also depends on gifts from her sister-in-law, the wife of her deceased husband's brother (who is a well-known member of the village community and has access to a regular salaried income), to pay school fees.

These examples illustrate the importance of sibling relations as channels of access and support, especially for economically poor and vulnerable women who cannot make ends meet on their own. However, sibling relations are not always reliable or dependable. When economically poor farmers find themselves "in a tight spot," they turn to siblings for access to resources, although this does not guarantee a successful outcome, as the following account demonstrates:

> *My brother came to tell me he had lost his son ... he must have thought that he would get me as his brother in a position to help him and even go and carry the body back home for burial. Unfortunately I had nothing, not even food. So what my sister in-law did was to look for the people who wanted to hire my brother's farm and get some money from them as an advance payment. To some people, such an incident may happen when they have 2000 or even 5000 shillings at least. But for me, I had not even 10 shillings. So that is how life is: the less fortunate are so poor that they can't afford anything. (L019)*

Like other kinship relations, sibling relations are based on reciprocal rights and obligations, and are not always secure or stable sources of money or resources. People's personal economic circumstances at any given time might make them unable to assist siblings and other kin, causing them much grief. Their ability to assist may vary from day to day, through their life cycle, and during a historical time frame (Leach 1991b). People can, however, turn to other types of relations as channels of access to resources, such as extended family relations.

Extended family relations

Extended family relations are extremely important in Maragoli. Grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces sometimes live on the same extended-family compound. They provide a viable network of support and channels of access to resources for kin relatives. To understand the weight given to these relationships, it is important to recognize that the extended family plays a key role in terms of defining family obligations and responsibilities as well as accessing resources.

Photo 52: "These are my sisters [-in-law]. We are helping my mother-in-law to pick tea. Because when she takes it to the factory, she'll earn some money." (L006)

Photo 53: This photograph, taken by Suzanna, illustrates the importance of kin relationships (in this case, grandmother-granddaughter relationships) in transferring knowledge from generation to generation. Suzanna explains: "This is my great-grandchild holding a basket. We were going to the posho *mill. You can see I was holding her hand — I am showing her where to bring the maize so that I will be sending her. I am [also] teaching her to collect firewood and [to go] to the river to fetch water. She can pick pieces of wood around compound and in the neighourhood or pick on the* shamba *dried up maize stocks." (L032)*

For example, grandparent–grandchild relations are the basis for important reciprocal channels of access to resources. Because grandparents consider their grandchildren their "dependents," they may agree to assist in providing school fees and other monetary needs for their grandchildren if they can afford to do so. In doing so, they may be in a stronger position to negotiate the continued control of their daughter-in-law's labour and land (i.e. hold off allocating the most lucrative parts of the *shamba* to their sons and daughters-in-law). The grandparents may also exercise control by paying their grandchildren's (the children of their daughters-in-law) monetary expenses (such as school fees, clothing, and food). Grandmothers also provide care for smaller grandchildren, preparing their meals and watching over them as their mothers work on the *shamba* and trade in the markets. They may also agree to care for grandchildren born out-of-wedlock. In return, older women are able to negotiate their grandchildren's and daughter-in-law's labour on their banana and vegetable plots in exchange for gifts of livestock, organic fertilizer, and produce from the plot (such as bananas, vegetables, and green manure). Uncles, aunts and grandparents are not only able to provide important material resources, they also provide invaluable symbolic resources. The case of Benjamin illustrates the importance of uncles, as senior male elders, in allocating land to their nephews. Grandmothers also play an important symbolic role in recognizing their grandsons in the family lineage through initiation ceremonies.

Non-conjugal relations within the nuclear family, sibling relations, and extended family relations provide a network of nested and interlocked kinship relations, which in turn provide a framework for the process of production and the distribution of resources. These types of social institutions are indigenous and locally defined, yet dynamic and sometimes unstable. However, women's ability to mobilize resources, to expand freedom of move-

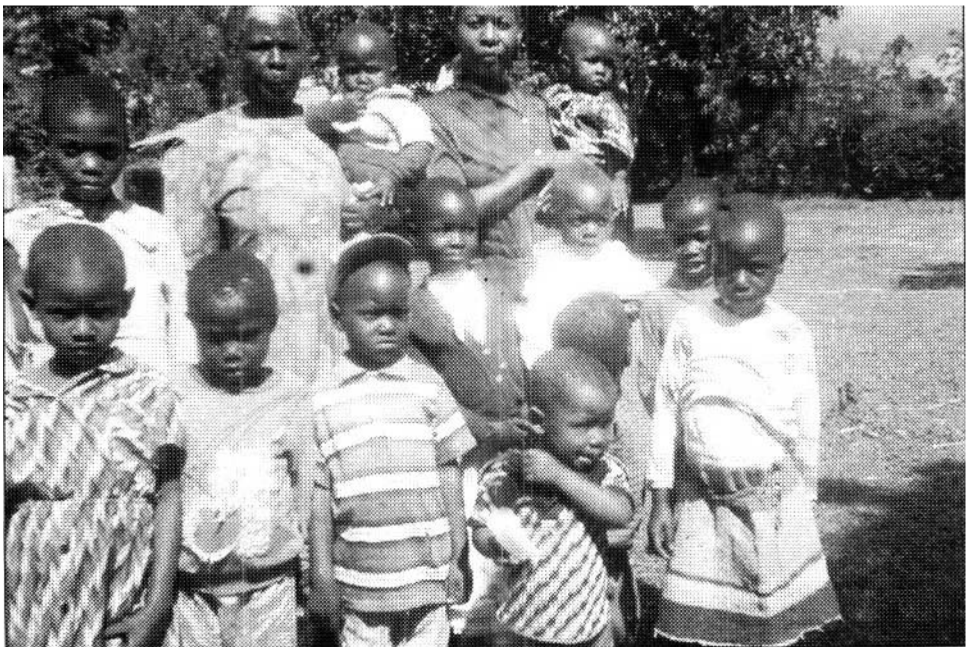

Photo 54: "This picture is good. I wanted to show my family, all my grandchildren ... I wanted to show my dependents — the people I take care of for the whole year ... In Maragoli culture, it is okay for someone to help with grandchildren's expenses, like school fees." (L008)

ment and autonomy, and to carve out a livelihood for themselves depends on their ability to participate in a variety of kinship relations. As discussed earlier, the ability of women to share resources within the network of kinship relations is an important investment in their reputation as "good" Logoli women — a powerful symbolic resource in Maragoli. In addition to kinship relations, social organizations are also part of the network of social institutions that play an important role in people's ability to negotiate both material and symbolic resources.

Social organizations

In Maragoli, there are many different types of social organization, including those where membership is determined according to: principles of descent (including clans and lineages); seniority or age (elders or youth groups); territorial residence (villages and informal neighbourhood social networks); religion (church groups); gender (women's groups and informal social networks); sector or market-based (marketing cooperatives); and some combination of principals (households, initiation groups, farming compounds, and ad-hoc labour groups) (Crowley 1994, pp. 17–19). This section focuses on women's groups and informal social networks as increasingly important channels of access to cash and other resources outside of marital and kinship relations.

Women's groups

Membership in women's groups is highly valued and desired by Logoli women. It provides women with a collective avenue and an important opportunity to access state and development resources. It allows them to represent themselves and solidify their power within and outside their neighbourhoods and villages, to establish their solidarity and support for each other, and to secure access to productive resources through various group schemes. Women's groups also provide women with an avenue to substantiate, negotiate, and expand their autonomy. The dynamics within women's groups reveals a great deal about gender and social relations, as well as farming and soil management. Before looking at these intertwined sets of issues, it is useful to begin by contextualizing women's groups in terms of their raison d'être.

The efforts of Logoli women to organize themselves into groups must be placed within an international and national context, as discussed in Chapter Three. These efforts must also be placed within a local context. In Maragoli, women's groups can be traced back to indigenous gender-based labour groups that banded together to carry out labour, which was reciprocated on each other's *shambas*. Although today's women's groups are different from "traditional" women's groups, the current emphasis placed on women's groups coincides with elements of Avalogoli custom, and allows women autonomy and freedom to engage in their own projects, as well as to exert control over their own labour and earnings emanating from these groups.

The growing popularity of women's groups is substantiated by the fact that the number of women's groups has increased in Maragoli. In Vihiga, in 1997, 948 women's groups were registered with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, with a total membership of 28,440 — a number that increased from 732 (total membership: 21,960) in 1994 (Republic of Kenya 1997, p. 114). It is more than likely that this number has continued to increase. Women's groups have various and multiple purposes, are as diverse as women

themselves, and have vast differences in profiles and affiliations (based on village, neighbourhood, church, occupation, activity, class, and age).[70] This diversity also extends to the diverse range of activities undertaken by each group, as illustrated below in Table 8.3. However, as discussed below, the stated activities that appear on official registry forms are not always the activities that groups actually carry out.

Table 8.3 Women's Groups' Activities in Maragoli.

Agricultural activities	Non-agricultural activities
Farming	Crafts
Soil management	Embroidery
Poultry	Knitting
Horticulture	Basketry
Dairy farming	Pottery making
Zero-grazing	*Posho* mills
Goats	Tailoring
Firewood	Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA)
Charcoal	Choirs
Maize	Brick making
Beans	Sugar
Milk	Uniforms
Napier grass	Fish
Beekeeping	Trading
Vegetables	Small business
	Village shop
	Cooking stores
	Water spring
	Revolving funds
	Merry-go-rounds
	Revolving loans

Source: Women's groups' activities as stated on formal registry forms, Vihiga and Sabatia Divisions, Ministry of Culture and Social Services, Vihiga. N = 319.

[70] *One criterion used for establishing whether a women's group was made of economically elite or poor women was the amount of money contributed monthly by the women. This was later supplemented by information collected during individual and group interviews.*

Photo 55: Wamarande Women's Group. "It is a good picture. To be with others in a group is good — you can share view[s] and find resolutions. You can learn a lot from a group. Because of shortage of food, we can't prosper. You find that things are very expensive ... This maize is for the group. We purchase from traders and put it into our group. We also sell firewood ... I make a monthly contribution, and, after receiving my round, I do clear my debts and some I spend on other things ..." (L034)

Photo 56: Viyalo Village Choir Womens' Group. "This picture is showing a good thing. It's our choir — we entertain people. We uplift people's souls in that, when they are feeling low, they get encouraged." The group hires itself out as a strategy to earn income. (L018)

Women join women's groups for diverse reasons. One central reason is that women's groups provide a channel of access to resources such as cash, informal credit, labour (through rotating work groups), knowledge, information, contacts, networks, sociability, and moral support. In particular, women regard women's groups as "good and helpful" channels of gaining access to much-needed cash and informal credit. Women's groups are sometimes able to channel much-needed formal government and 'development' monetary assistance. This potential draws many women to join women's groups, as the following account of an 80-year-old women, who is an active member of several women's groups, illustrates:

> *Women have [now] become clever and learned the importance of joining women's groups in order to benefit from them in terms of generating income. ... I am a member of three groups ... because I like development. And when I don't have any money, I can easily borrow from any of the three. ... The main advantage is the financial assistance we get. Especially the businesswomen, we can improve our stock. Recently we were in Vihiga [town] and we received 24 700 shillings for each group. ... I purchased more [dried] fish for trading. ... It was a must. (L003)*

As a collective, women benefit from increased visibility to government institutions, and, hence, increased power and prestige. Most importantly, they can potentially benefit from money that is channeled to women's groups by the government. The above account illustrates that, when money is channeled in this way, it is divided among group members for their individual use. This particular woman received 1,200 shillings. This income was critical as capital to help her increase her stock of dried fish, which she trades daily in the Mbale market, and which, in turn, will generate income for her in the future.

While the Kenyan government occasionally channels cash to women's groups, not all groups receive these lump sums ot cash. The distribution of these sums is politically motivated during politically opportune times, and is often distributed to partisan and elite groups. For instance, during the fieldwork for this book (which coincided with the national elections in Kenya), only women's groups that were influential or partisan to the elected government received money and other benefits (such as *kangas* (cloth) and headscarves) from the government. These presents were given as part of the election campaign.

Resources channelled to women's groups are also provided by international donors, research organizations, and NGOs. These types of development organizations are encouraged to go through the Women's Bureau, in order to identify "developmentally conscientious" groups to benefit from the resources or to be involved in development projects. In this way, women's groups may be selected to take part in on-farm experiments and projects, through which they may gain access to seeds, seedlings, fertilizers, and other valuable farming and soil management inputs. Women's groups also receive money for projects or infrastructure such as water wells. However, the types of groups that are often targeted to receive resources tend to be "model" women's groups, which in turn have greater visibility, power, and ability to access resources — characteristics that enable them to be considered "progressive" in the first place.

Despite the development organizations' bias towards "progressive" groups, women regard membership in women's groups as an important coping strategy for accessing money through informal and individually determined group schemes such as revolving funds, or "merry-go-rounds." Each member is expected to contribute an amount ranging from 20 to 1,000 shillings per month, depending on the economic status and ability of its members and the group as a whole. This reliable source of income allows women to acquire lump sums of money or informal credit that can be used either as start-up capital for income-generating activities or to meet immediate day-to-day expenses. Another variation on this theme is the revolving loan, in which members contribute money towards a central pot of informal credit, from which individual members in need draw loans, which must be repaid with interest. Members at large are paid the interest accrued through this lending activity. While there are often defaulters and conflicts over non-payment, many women in this study stated that revolving loans provide important channels of access to informal credit, as one women explains:

> *The good thing about being in a group is that when you are financially hard up, you can go there and they can help you. ... It creates oneness and togetherness among the members. And you help one another. (L025)*

Photo 57: This photograph shows members of the Wamayingu Women's Group. A young farmer and member describes it: "This picture is showing a good thing. It shows that each member was cooperative and was bringing in his or her contribution. We have a committee and members were contributing their money to put in our group. This money we used to buy books. We use record books to write the payments and important agendas." (L005)

Photo 58: Upangaji Women's Group. An older woman aescribes the advantages of being a member of a women's group: "Belonging to a women's group — it's a good thing. The strength will go around. I've been a member of several women's group[s], but when my income deceased, I had to quit some ... [When I was young] we only had communal work groups. Then, when we got married, we started this idea of merry-go-rounds because it helped us to pay for school fees." (L032)

Photo 59: Luduguyiu Women's Group. "The goodness of our group is that there are no gossips, we do things as one. ... Women know that women's groups help when they are experiencing financial problems like school fees. This is a good picture — it shows our group uniforms."

Photo 60: Zariza Women's Group. "Being in a group is a good thing. Being together, you help each other with ideas and other things. If we get money when we are together [in the future], we can try hard and get a common plot [in our names]." (L024)

Women's groups are formed through various avenues, including church, neighbourhood, occupation, or kinship affiliations. They may also be formed within a village because of common interests associated with a certain activity such as poultry-raising, cattle raising, or soil management. Normally, membership in a women's group is limited to 25 people, according to the rules established by the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. However, in reality, there are anywhere from 10 to 45 members. Membership can also be limited and regulated by age, gender, social status, marital status, occupation, neighbourhood residence, or interest, or at the discretion of group leaders.

Groups may last for many years, fold, or break up into new groups, depending on group dynamics and the success of the group in accessing resources, generating income, and meeting its goals. This dynamic was much more obvious during the return dissemination and feedback trip, two-and-a-half years after the main research. During this time period, some groups had become dormant, some continued to be active, some split up, and new groups had formed based on break-away sub-groupings (as discussed in Chapter Two). The second trip was marked by a very different dynamic among the members of women's groups. This can be explained by the continued exacerbation of erosion of earnings and drive towards a cash-based economy. Many conflicts arose within the groups, and mostly centred around issues of money. More specifically, women mentioned the "bankrupt" status of the groups collective funds, conflicts over lack of transparency regarding finances, the collapse of the revolving fund schemes (some members were unable to pay back loaned amounts), and, in one case, an outright theft of the groups savings by the treasurer, who "walked" from her marriage (and used the money to support herself).

Women's ability to gain membership to women's groups is limited by economic status. Not all women can afford to join a women's group. Economically poor women participate in groups to a lesser extent. The Kenyan Ministry of Culture and Social Services requires an initial registration fee of approximately 200 shillings and the opening of a bank account, which, in turn, requires an initial minimum deposit of 3,000–5,000 shillings. These start-up expenses prohibit economically poor and younger women from forming groups. Moreover, economically poor and younger women participate less than older women in formally registered groups because they cannot afford the start-up costs and find it difficult to keep up with the monthly contributions to revolving funds and loans. Sometimes women with multiple memberships scale down their involvement in the face of growing economic insecurity. Young wives, who face critical time and labour constraints, close monitoring by husbands and mothers-in-law, and a lack control over their labour and income, participate less than older women. These women may, however, join unregistered groups.

Unregistered women's groups have certain advantages. They provide a greater amount of freedom to their members and involve fewer constraints, and, therefore, are a more viable option for economically poor and younger women. They often do not have the requirements and rules of registered groups — for example, opening bank accounts, selecting "chairladies," secretaries and treasurers, and receiving training in group dynamics and management — which often discourage less privileged women. However, unregistered groups do not benefit from the visibility and resources from government and development institutions in the way registered groups do.

As collectives, women's groups give women spaces where they can establish solidarity and provide moral support to one another. A woman invests time and energy in a group not only for immediate outcomes or rewards, but also in order to strengthen her position within the group. Hence, she has the ability to draw on its support or assistance, especially for future cash needs or in difficult circumstances, as in the case in Ghana discussed by Berry (1989, p. 48). These groups are also significant because they provide a focal point for women's exchange of ideas and knowledge, ranging from income generation to soil management. Given the importance of women's groups as an avenue of access to resources (however unstable and sporadic that access may be), as support groups, and as focal points for knowledge, it is not surprising that they have proliferated over time. It is also not surprising that women are often members of multiple groups, and that, as a way to diversify options, their membership to different groups shifts over time.

As in the case of income from other sources, when money is obtained from women's groups, soil management sometimes loses out to other competing monetary demands and priorities. When women in this study were asked how they spent money obtained from women's groups, they listed school fees, food, increasing stock for trading, household repairs, health requirements, funeral expenses, and household implements. Soil management was rarely cited.

Along with the "goodness" of women's groups, women also spoke of their "badness," which sometimes arises from intra-group conflicts, as one Logoli women describes:

> *A group is good — the goodness is that you can discuss and come up with a project that will help you. Also, you have women's issues which you help each other with ideas either good or bad. It's through such discussions that we get to know that, when I do this, it is wrong, when I do this, it is right. Then*

when you contribute money one day, it really helps you. That is what I see being good about the group. ... A group is usually good — and if it is bad, then it is the members. Sometimes, some contribute what you agree on and others don't. So, when the day for distributing comes, those who didn't contribute start blaming the ones who have gotten their share. That is when the group is messed up. But if you all agree and contribute what is required, even if it is five shillings, and everyone gives, then you easily get along. ... Also, rumours among members, after a group meeting when you get out, the members start backbiting the officials — that is not the way a group should be. (L027)

These are not apolitical organizations. Their members have competing interests and ideas. Further, there are micropolitics, not only within groups, but also between different groups, as discussed in Chapter Two. For instance, economically wealthier women's groups are often made up of women with formal education and some degree of status and power. They can mobilize contacts, networks, and ties, and access resources collectively as a group. Like "progressive farmers," they are often considered "model" women's groups and tend to be the target of 'development' initiatives as well as extension workers. The distribution of gifts received through government campaigns can likely become the source of conflict, as they are not always equitably distributed among members.

While women regard women's groups as important livelihood strategies and channels for acquiring resources by women, men's views are different, and contribute to an escalation of gender conflicts. Some men feel that women's groups help men inadvertently. Others feel that women's groups divert women from their day-to-day duties as wives:

We shall benefit by understanding modern way of life, and she will buy views from other members that she hasn't got, and, even if NGOs come in with new ideas, then we can borrow for our own benefit. ... I don't feel bad, but the problem is we have not been used to these things for so long, you know, we are grown ups from childhood in this other style of life. Now, when at the age of 55 you start changing, it becomes a bit complicated. ... The reason I can get is, like now, if we had no house help left to cook and we get visitors it would be difficult for me because I would not know where to assemble everything in the kitchen. And also in the rural areas there is no electricity so it would be hard for me to prepare fire to cook and since I'm not used because I've been staying mostly in urban centres. It becomes complicated. (L013)

Further, men also contend that women's involvement in these groups is too focused on the potential for income generation:

This element of money ... You know, most women think that, when you form a group, then you've opened a door of getting more money, or more easy money, without knowing that you got to sweat, to work hard, in order to improve on your standard of living. ... It has not been good; it has been bad. Because it's a Western way of life. It's not African, so it's a Western style. You know, people want to get money for a short time and then it disappears. It's not good. The old tradition says that people must live on the land, must be able to plant enough crops, able to feed you. So if you're keeping animals, it's good. But then there are groups who are not doing things relevant to the African traditions by forming these groups. (L013)

Although this account illustrates that men are aware of the potential benefits of women's groups, especially in accessing state and 'development' resources, they express concern about women's withdrawal of labour from domestic and on-farm labour. They draw on elements of "tradition" to try to curtail women's involvement in these groups, stating that such income-generating activities are not "African." However, within this discourse, men obscure the fact that women's groups in Maragoli are local and long-standing indigenous social organizations.

Using the same idiom, women also draw on "tradition." They argue that women's groups are based on customary practice, and further emphasize the government's and international donors' focus on women's issues and groups to justify their involvement. A Logoli women who is involved simultaneously in two groups explains:

> *They [women] realized they could help themselves through the groups, especially when there is some aid from the government — this is the only way it can get to them. ... The things that make women join these groups is because they are development conscious and they want to develop. Like me, now I am a member of two groups. ... You see how I am in two groups? ... There are no restrictions as to how many groups one should belong to. These groups have also enlightened us, because it you just sit at home idle you can't even think. Many women now have a positive attitude towards life because of the groups. Our leaders are also encouraging us to be active and not just sit home. ... You know, nowadays things have changed. Women are in the forefront of everything. It's not like long ago, when all they did was sit at home. Women nowadays attend seminars and they are involved in different professions, so there has to be women's groups where the elite teach their fellow women how things are so that they can be enlightened. ... During those days, men were so strict, they thought that if a women left home then she was out for her own missions. But today [laughs], today's women do what they like. You can't restrict them.*

In addition to emphasizing the Avalogoli tradition of gender-based groups, women build autonomy by both invoking the powerful discourse of 'development' and stressing the government's emphasis on income-generating activities for women's groups. In this way, the government's and international donors' support for women's income-generating activities is strategically harnessed by women, in order to exert control over labour and earnings from these activities. This strategy is combined with the arguments about the "tradition" of women's groups, which allow women to expand their freedom of movement and give them room to maneuver.

Informal social networks

Although informal social networks may seem even more 'intangible' than kinship relations, they are, nonetheless, important coping strategies that provide local women and men with channels of access to resources, knowledge, and moral support. Informal social networks are formed through neighbourhood, village, church, market, and gender-based affiliations. They are based on informal reciprocal rights and obligations, which may include the exchange of resources such as fodder (for example, banana stems or napier grass), food, cash, informal credit, manure, seeds, information, contacts, transportation, and labour.

While these may not be stable or guaranteed channels of access, they are a viable diversification strategy that women draw upon during tough economic times. They are especially important for economically poor and young women. For example, because of their position and status in society, unmarried women who continue to live on their parent's *shambas* often lack food, cash, and access to land. As a result, they depend heavily on relationships with their siblings, extended family, and friends and neighbours as channels of access to resources and avenues for helping them make ends meet.

Informal networks are also an important source of knowledge, and, more specifically, soil management and farming information. An economically elite woman describes:

> *[My friend] she came and told me, "you're having problems of napier grass, why can't you try the* mechicha*" [brewer's waste]. So since that time is when I started. ... I have seen an improvement in the milk of the* ngombes*. And they don't eat as much napier grass. (L003)*

Throughout the fieldwork for this book, women often explained that certain farming and soil management techniques, crops, or practices were learned through word-of-mouth — through a network of friends, neighbours, church members, and fellow market traders. Through these networks, women also learn coping strategies and "tricks," and gain information about their rights, obligations, and options in the face of inequitable gender power relations. Nevertheless, these networks are not always accessible to all women. For instance, young women in the early stages of marital life may not be able to enjoy the benefits of these networks because of the intense degree of monitoring and the heavy amount of labour expected from them in the household and *shamba*. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, these young women may be expected to carry out the day-to-day labour in the household and *shamba*, while their sisters-in-law, mother-in-law, and other people on the compound have more freedom of movement. These people can attend important and potentially information-rich social gatherings, such as political meetings or funerals.[71]

Informal social networks are socially sanctioned, and therefore provide legitimate space for women to expand their autonomy, invest in friendships and social relations, and engage in their own projects. But, not all informal relations fall into this category. Although, as discussed below, non-sanctioned social relations (such as extramarital affairs and sex work) are considered "taboo," they provide women with access to resources, and opportunities to help them sustain their livelihoods in the face of extremely inequitable circumstances.

Non-sanctioned social relations

As in other parts of East Africa, struggles over resources take place within a context of highly charged gendered politics, where the language of public morality is used as a weapon to control women's behaviour and maintain the patriarchal 'order' (Jefremovas for Rwanda 1991a, 1991b). In addition to men's attempts to regulate women's behaviour and autonomy through cultural idioms and taboos that invoke weighty norms about "good" wives, women themselves use these constructs to negotiate control over resources.

[71] *For example, one day during the fieldwork for this book, Elizabeth (whose narrative is discussed in Chapters Four and Five) was left alone on the compound, carrying out household tasks such as laundry and cooking, while her sisters-in-law and mother-in-law were attending a political meeting at a local school.*

Photo 61: Members of Tamu Women's Group. A group of young women, who have formed their own informal social network outside their group based on compound and neighbourhood affiliation, share refreshments after attending a women's group meeting, where they have just made their monthly contributions. "We are taking a refreshment as a reward and to celebrate. This is a good picture because we are happy." Through informal social networks, women gain a sense of solidarity, as well as important resources and knowledge for their survival. (L011)

Previous chapters illustrated the importance of a woman's reputation. They also demonstrated that, regardless of class and status, women's livelihood choices and control over resources such as land and labour are limited by the patriarchal 'order,' and that men have the upper hand in recreating and perpetuating elements of custom (see also Mackenzie 1993, 1995a). This section focuses on women who 'deviate' from patriarchal norms in a situation where the conjugal contract does not sustain their day-to-day needs. In particular, women who fall outside of, and are treated inequitably by the norms set by the patriarchal 'order' sometimes invest in non-sanctioned social relations (extramarital affairs and sex work). For instance, women as de facto and de jure heads of women-headed households may engage in extramarital affairs as an alternative channel of access to resources. In addition, women who chose to forfeit rights to land through divorce, or are driven from their land for being unable to live within the narrowly defined confines of Avalogoli norms, face stark livelihood options. In some cases, they revert to sex work to sustain their livelihoods. In both these circumstances, women leave or are driven from their land and homes and turn to relationships that are not socially sanctioned and are highly stigmatized.

Faced with few livelihood options and channels of access to resources, women may decide to engage in extramarital relationships or engage in sex work as risky and last ditch efforts, thereby drawing on men's patronage as a survival strategy. However critical to women's survival, these types of relationships are rarely discussed in agricultural, soil management, and natural resource management research — even though they are critical channels of access to resources for some women. This is because they are perhaps the

most 'intangible' type of social institution and are often hidden from 'outsiders,' because they carry with them heavy social stigmas. Further, they fall outside of the 'accepted' norms and rules of society, and, as such, are unstable and not always dependable. But, as Jefremovas argues in the case of Rwanda, women who gain access to resources through these non-sanctioned social relationships with men are nonetheless on similar ground as women who "persevere":

> *Both are treacherous routes. Wives can lose their resources to rivals, widows to the husband's lineage, daughters to marriage, and single women to lovers or to their families. (1991a, p. 391)*

This points to the instability inherent for women within different types of gender relations, whether they are socially sanctioned or not. Hence, women's access to productive resources is insecure no matter what their position or status, because of men's privileged positions within power relations and the reproduction of patriarchal norms. Nonetheless, "roaming" wives (those engaging in extramarital affairs) and "loose" women (those engaging in sex work) face a difficult and complex situation. Because they are no longer seen as "persevering" within the norms of conjugal relations, they are construed as "bold" women who are breaking 'tradition.' They are subject to intense scrutiny as well as fierce social stigmas and harassment in the community, but with varying degrees of tolerance by women and men. Nonetheless, such social relations give women a viable channel of access to productive resources for sustaining their soils, farms, and livelihoods.

"Roaming" wives

While the issue of "roaming" wives came up during a handful of interviews, women rarely discussed their extramarital relationships openly. These types of social relations remained hidden until the end of the fieldwork, when certain types of discrepancy in the analysis of interviews or participant observation surfaced, and it became apparent that women some engaged in extramarital affairs. For instance: women were extremely reluctant or even nervous in describing household income; or their stated sources or incomes did not match their expenditures; or they could not explain how they met everyday expenses. But it should also be recognized that, because of the heavy social stigmas attached to these relationships, women were not likely to state openly — especially to 'development' practitioners with potential connections to resources — that they were getting money or resources from extramarital affairs (or through sex work). In most cases, it was possible to confirm suspicions about the existence of these relationships by talking to other women in the group, and by spending time in the community and participant observation. Over time, it became clear that when women spoke of male "friends" during interviews, the meaning was not literal — they were in fact speaking of their lovers.

The potential for women to engage in extramarital affairs is heightened where male out-migration is common. A wife might not see her husband for years, and may not receive monetary remittances for great lengths of time. One woman explains:

> *There are some whose husbands have disappeared into town and they don't assist them [their wives] at all. They don't have enough money to buy food or fertilizer or seeds or whatever. They may disappear for as long as two years. She stays on the* shamba *tilling and planting maize and selling vegetables for so long without meeting a man. Then she says, I got married here as a wife, not just to eat food, and that's when she decides to go and find other men who she makes friends with while her husband is still gone. ... (L047)*

Another woman further explains:

> *This man [the husband] is not there; he's there in name but not in action. So we have no way out. Because you cannot make these women to divorce when she has children there. You just persevere. ... This kind of treatment [when there is no monetary support], has promoted some women to start roaming. There is no way out. How can you maintain a life? And there is somebody, somewhere, who wants to help you. So that man somewhere in a corner is interested in you. Automatically, he won't refuse you. Because financially you know he'll sponsor you. He can give you money on a monthly or weekly basis. He does shopping; it becomes so automatic. But now she becomes too loose, roaming with men. ... We have some men this way who monitor homes, watching to see who is miserable. Scavengers, they are. So now you have a married woman but she has given birth with someone else. It's commonly done here. Frustrations bring such things, because you have no way out. How will you survive? (L002)*

While there may be other reasons why women and men engage in extramarital relationships, the focus of this case study is to examine the importance of these relationships as channels of resources, and their prevalence in situations of extreme inequity in the household. Because men are the owners of "property," women "persevere" even in the most uncertain economic circumstances, for fear of forfeiting their own and their children's rights to land should they "walk." Faced with this stark situation, extramarital relationships constitute a viable and sometimes lucrative alternative for gaining income and other resources. But they also come with fierce social stigmas and other problems. Some farmers believe that this practice is common among wives whose husbands have out-migrated and are not sending cash remittances. Other farmers believe that the practice is on the decline because of the increase in STDs, especially AIDS. One woman attempts to explain:

> *Roaming nowadays is not there. Even if you leave here, diseases are there, where will you go? There is no roaming these days. (L015)*

Despite this, perception five women interviewed in this case study were known to be engaging in extramarital affairs or spoke of having male "friends." There were probably more instances, but either the subject did not come up or the clues given were too subtle. However, some women spoke of how these relationships provided important channels of access to income, as well as inputs for farming such as fodder and labour. For example, one day, a farmer who was participating in interviews and participant observation abruptly indicated, without warning or explanation, that she wanted to stop for the day. Later, she was observed collecting fodder with her male "friend." Upon realizing that they were being observed, they quickly turned the bend in the road, out of sight. Later corroboration with other members of her group confirmed that their relationship was not simply a "friendship." The existence of extramarital affairs also corroborates the bitter complaints of wives who argue that they do not benefit from their husbands' remittances because they are "diverted" to their husbands' lovers.

"Loose" women

The existence of "loose" women — women who engage in sex work — is common in villages and rural towns. Sex work is both a non-sanctioned social relation that carries fierce social stigmas, and an informal income-generating activity. Because of the heavy social stigmas

associated with it, and because it gives many women a viable, yet risky, opportunity to sustain their livelihoods, it is useful here to discuss sex work as a non-sanctioned social relation. Often it is women who are in extremely vulnerable situations who ultimately engage in sex work. These include women who are effectively divorced from their husbands when they are "chased" from their marital homes or when they choose to divorce by "walking." The latter situation is easier if there are no children and where little or no brideprice payments have been paid (which would be owed back after a bride "walks"). In both these cases, these women cannot be found on the farm. Except for spouses who have out-migrated and women who either access resources from kin relations or support kin relations outside of Maragoli, the focus of this book has been on the diversity of women found on the farm. However, it is also important to focus on women off the farm. These include women, now engaged in sex work, who were often involved in farming and soil management before engaging in sex work. In these cases, their extensive farming and soil management knowledge, accumulated over time and pertaining to specific microenvironments, is subsequently lost. When women engage in a final act of resistance — when they divorce their husbands by "walking" from their marital homes — they forfeit their rights to land and "property." These women have few options open to them: they can remarry as second wives, search for scarce jobs, or go to "town" (engage in sex work).

Women who have "persevered" all their lives tend to take a strong stance against "walking." This is clearly evident in the account of a widow in her 80s, who "persevered" through many hardships throughout life, including living with an alcoholic husband, having four co-wives, experiencing domestic violence, receiving no remittances from her husband, facing economic poverty, facing the death of her husband, and dealing with the deaths of all her sons (who were the very reason that she "persevered" in the first place). She reflects on her life and exclaims, "if it was now, I would have gone to look for a job in town or married elsewhere." However, while she insists that she would not "persevere" if she had to relive the same circumstances today, she maintains:

> *Women these days have no respect. Women of those days were very much respectful. Nowadays they don't know what is good or bad. That's why they are all defeated in marriages and that's why there's a lot of prostitution. ... Nowadays, women don't have a lot of patience where they are married. They just say, "if a man plays [has affairs] or disturbs with me, I'll go and work in town." And they don't know there's a lot of diseases. They don't know that patience pays and builds, and impatience destroys. And men, especially the men, are very much mobile. ... Not all women have become bold. There are those that are quite persevering, and those ones, their marriages have survived. It's the bold ones who always end up in trouble. (L022)*

The emphasis placed on "persevering" must be contextualized within Avalogoli patriarchal norms that attempt to control women's behaviour through cultural norms and taboos. However, these patriarchal norms are reproduced by women themselves, especially those who have continued to "persevere" despite the most precarious and inequitable circumstances. It is therefore in the interests of "good" wives to enforce strongly the norms of "persevering," because if the behaviour of "loose" women were accepted, then their own sacrifices and reputations would be devalued. However, the argument for "persevering" even in the most difficult circumstances is not supported by all women. The following

account of an economically elite woman actively involved in the community and her women's group describes the contemporary gender relations in Maragoli and the considerations that women take into account before deciding to "walk":

> *At this time, both a man and the wife are working. It's not like the old days where you can mistreat a wife beyond capacity. This these times, when things are too much, a woman can leave anytime. People cannot persevere the way they use to persevere long time ago. If you decide to be cruel to a wife, she can decide anytime to go off. Leave the child and go off. ... However, it is not easy for women who have children to leave them behind. That is the thing that has retained women more, and made them suffer on the capacity of the children. If you don't have a child, I don't think you can resist to have a lot of problems at that place. You just decide to go away. But if you have children, you decide the children might be worse off and the woman who comes in [after your husband remarries] might mistreat them. They might not get an education. You think only of the children all of the time. You have no peace. You don't think of the man. You say, let me persevere, and later you are the one to go nowhere.*

These accounts demonstrate a central dilemma faced by Logoli women. On the one hand, faced with economically difficult circumstances, physical violence, and inequitable gender power relations, women have few alternative livelihood options available in terms of supporting themselves in a tough economic environment. If they leave, they lose all claims to their husbands' "property," including the land and their children (especially if a brideprice, even in part, has been paid). Women speak of how they fear leaving their children in unknown circumstances. They fear that these children may be mistreated, hungry, and unschooled, and, in the case of sons, lose their rights to land inheritance (as Benjamin's account in Chapter Four demonstrates). Further, they are aware that they themselves will face fierce social stigmas and will be blamed for their failure to "persevere" as "good" Logoli wives. However, women who have no children, and are considered more "free" to "walk," face uncertain futures and stark livelihood options as well.

Faced with these harsh choices, women sometimes do "walk," sometimes engaging in sex work to survive. Two Logoli women explain the reasons that women engage in sex work:

> *There are some who have hot blood ... and the other ones ask for something and her family cannot provide money for a dress or soap or oil, then she finds someone who cheats her by providing these things. She follows him. Then slowly she gets used to it. ... Others get problems in the home like being battered by the husband [or] lack of food. They can't even get a dress. Then she decides, I'd rather go wherever other women are. Then she ends in the trade. (L028)*

> *It's problems that make people do such things. ... Like there are those who can give birth [out-of-wedlock] and are chased from [their parent's] home. ... Others include those who once got married and divorced, or even widows and they decide that instead of being inherited they prefer working at the bar. ... She may get a friend. And they go steady. When she suggests marriage, the men start changing and the relationship ends. ... Then she decides it's better if she moves into the market and get daily affairs than those permanent*

affairs when you don't get anything out of it. Those men cannot even start for you a business. ... And others, it's just their life-style ... because they believe it's a smart place. Others, it's just problems. ... (L047)

One participant in this study was a sex worker who worked in Mbale. Her personal narrative, below, highlights the reasons that she turned to sex work as a way of surviving, and the types of constraints and problems she faces. Although she works "in town" and no longer engages in farming or soil management herself, her narrative explains the manner in which she supports members of her family and acts as channel for resources.

Rachel

Rachel is in her late 30s. She turned to sex work as a result of difficult circumstances, including a situation in which she was left by her mother, was brought-up by her abusive stepmother, and "walked" from two failed marriages. She explains:

My life has been problematic. Mother got mentally sick and left. ... I used to go home and my stepmother would chase me away and abuse me. ... I was still very young, but another woman convinced me to get married. ... I was there for one month, but the man was too aged for me. ... so I quit. ... That is when I went to Kakamega and worked as a maid for one year. I really suffered, and the person I worked for as a housegirl never used to pay me. So I was forced to stay with other girls in their houses and they really punished me because I had to sell my body to survive ... but then I was still young, so I couldn't manage. Then I went to Nairobi with the hopes of getting a better job. ... I remained in problems. ... And then got married to a Luo man. He always quarrelled and beat me because he wanted a baby. ... but I couldn't give birth. ... When he gave me money, I took a quarter of it. ... That is when I decided to leave and use the money for transport. ... I went home. ... and found my father there, and he told me "my daughter, I have no job that can solve your problems. Go and stay with a relative who sells maize in Mbale." That's when I came to Mbale and started working in bars.

I had many male friends. ... when I got problems, like when my father died, they helped me. Even when my brother-in-law died, they assisted me with money. ... but most of them told me lies; few could tell me the truth. ... Some would even beat me. ... [Now] I have only one friend, who works in a matatu *on this [main] road. He has a wife. ... They are always quarrelling. ... So he feels he'd better stay with another woman somewhere than stay with his wife. He has helped me a lot. He is the one who started for me this second-hand clothes business. This man tells me that we can buy a plot and construct and stay there. And I feel, even if he buys the plot and he has a wife and children, then it is useless. I'm not willing to follow him. ... I always wish to get married to my own husband. ... If I don't succeed in marriage, then I would like to have a small piece of plot and construct [a house] and settle in. So long as there is enough for my grave alone.*

My [widowed] sister and [her] children have a lot of problems. I am the one who assists all of them, because it's a home full of problems, so I feel there is no need of [her] getting married. I'd rather help them with their problems. ... Even my sister wanted to go and work in a bar. ... but I told her, "no, it's problems. I will assist you... It's better I try to, and get you food — so long as your children eat, even if the money is not enough. I won't till for you; you will do it yourself, because I don't have enough money". ... I'd rather stay in the market and support them, because the problems are many. I am the one who supports all those children. ... (L047)

Rachel's narrative demonstrates several points. First, economically poor and young women lack access to resources and have few livelihood alternatives open to them. They turn to sex work as a source of income when they lack access to education or a socially accepted means of supporting themselves. Rachel's account illustrates that male "friends" are not only important channels for money to sustain women's livelihoods, but are also a critical means of accessing start-up capital for income-generating activities, such as trading in second-hand clothing.[72] Sex workers not only access resources through male patronage, they themselves act as important channels of access to resources. For instance, Rachel's earnings from her multiple occupations of sex work and trading are used to support her "dependents," which include her sister and children. This is critical, because it demonstrates that women support their kin and extended families in meeting their day-to-day needs, such as food, health care, school fees, clothing, and inputs for farming and soil management. Therefore, kinship and extended family ties are important to farmers in terms of gaining access to productive resources, even if the resources gained from kin relations come from activities that are not socially sanctioned activities, such as sex work.

Conclusions

Faced with increasingly stressful economic circumstances and pressures in all spheres of life, women diversify their opportunities and enhance their capacity to cope by investing in a combination of diverse social institutions, social organizations, and non-sanctioned social relations. Kinship relations, women's groups, informal social networks, friendships, and other social organizations are important aspects of farmers' complex economic and social lives. They provide women with an invaluable means of negotiating and accessing resources such as land, labour, credit, cash, capital, and knowledge.

To cope with new priorities, constraints, and conditions in their lives, women carefully invoke and manipulate elements of custom. They also harness state and development programs that focus on gender issues, thus creating room to maneuver, contest, and renegotiate patriarchal ideology and structures. Women's success in pushing patriarchal boundaries and gaining autonomy and freedom of movement nonetheless centres on their reputations as "good" wives. The more they invest in reciprocal social institutions, the more they enhance their reputation, power, and position, both individually and collectively, within social and political relations. Moreover, in diversifying their options through membership in multiple social institutions, women also improve their access to local, state, and development resources.

Women who engage in non-sanctioned social relations, such as extramarital affairs or sex work, also gain and can provide access to important resources, such as labour, capital, and income. These women, in turn, contribute in significant ways within their own capacities, as farmers and sustainers of the soil, as well as towards the capacity of other farmers — their sisters, mothers, and children — to improve their lives and invest in sustainable soil and farming practices. However, such non-sanctioned relations come at a price. These women not only face fierce social stigmas, discrimination, and monitoring within the community, which weigh heavily in their lives; they also forfeit rights to resources such as land and "property." If they choose to "walk" from precarious or inequitable marital

[72] *Her discussion of physical abuse shows the risks she faces.*

relations, they also forfeit their right to maintain a livelihood through farming. Although these women are often not recognized by researchers, development agents, or local community groups, they are nonetheless extremely vulnerable in their personal circumstances — despite the fact that they play a critical role in both accessing and providing important resources for farming and soil management.

Social institutions nuance our understanding of the complex local processes that are involved in mobilizing resources. Many of these processes and activities compete with soil management and farming in terms of the invested amount of time and energy. Within these institutions, women also share resources and information that can improve the sustainability of their soils, farms, and livelihoods. By understanding the constraints, dilemmas, options, and opportunities that Maragoli women face in the many aspects of their lives (including those 'off' the farm), one can begin to formulate policies and future research that better reflect their priorities and realities, and ultimately serve the people whom 'development' is meant to serve.

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Conclusion: Rethinking the 'Problem' of Soil Degradation and Sustainable Farming

Chapter Nine

In my research, I have 'happened' upon ... Zimbabwean women who insist on the mobilities of their subjectivities as they negotiate daily existences with more powerful people. In each case, the happenings were not scheduled into my research plan, and I initially refused to travel these "extraneous" and annoying "things" the women wanted to "chat about" in defiance of my reasons for travelling to see them. But the politics of ironic and playful mobility encountered among Zimbabwean working-class women took my research self where it did not expect to go. ... I had to restrain myself from seeking a conclusion to the story, learning to be content merely to point out to farm managers the ironies in their policies and to women the possibilities of identity empathies in the new situation facing them. (Sylvester 1995 pp. 962–965)

Personal narratives of Maragoli women and men are powerful. They give voice to many complex issues and realities that were silenced before. Likewise, women's and men's photographs illuminate what was hidden and provide an important window into people's everyday realities. Together, these powerful words and images 'bring to life' the diverse experiences of differently positioned individuals, and focus the attention their livelihood strategies, options, dilemmas, and aspirations.

When local women's and men's lived experiences are placed at the centre of research and analysis, it becomes evident that farmers are knowledgeable, thinking actors who may compromise their capacity to sustain their soils and farms in the face of a complex web of constraints and priorities. When these factors and realities are seriously explored and recognized, it also becomes clear that local people are not acting out of 'ignorance' or 'lack' of knowledge and expertise — and that local soil degradation and unsustainable farming practices cannot be blamed on population pressure and land scarcity alone. Rather, what emerges is a complex picture that demonstrates the existence of other critical factors, competing priorities, and broader processes that play a role in determining the extent to which farmers invest their energies in sustainable soil management and farming. In fact, there is a whole set of incentives and constraints which enables farmers' investment or non-investment in sustainable soil management and farming. These incentives and constrains include the intersection and interplay of factors such as: inequitable gender relations; different axes of difference; patriarchal ideology and structures; cultural norms; broader political-economic policies and processes; ongoing historical processes; ethnoregional biases; land tenure; the gender division of labour, roles, and responsibilities; the increased importance of income generation; and the proliferation of channels of access to resources through various social institutions.

This chapter begins by exploring the intersection and interplay of these factors by reviewing and recapping the major findings of this case study and linkages between them, and noting, where appropriate, specific implications for future research and policy. Following this, the chapter concludes by identifying lessons learned from this case study that might be useful for future development, policy, and research initiatives — with a view to enriching the interfaces between researchers and local farmers, providing food for thought for other contexts, and mobilizing action.

Enriching our understanding of the complexity of farmers' lives

Reflecting on the complex realities and struggles of Maragoli farmers, this section reviews and recaps the complex web of constraints and opportunities that farmers face in their everyday lives, which inevitably influence their ability to invest in sustainable soil management and farming. In this case study, the micropolitics of gendered struggles over resources (such as land, labour, income, etc.) demonstrate the importance of incorporating gender as a critical dimension of research and analysis, and expanding the boundaries of the local to include broader processes. The reflection on the micropolitics of gendered struggles also helps in identifying areas of policy consideration and possible avenues for future research.

When the micropolitics of gender struggles are viewed through farmers' eyes, it becomes obvious that 'farmers' are not an undifferentiated and gender-neutral category. Women — who are predominantly the farmers, sustainers of the soil, and "providers" for their family's livelihoods — are diverse, dynamic, and knowledgeable actors who have a great deal of expertise regarding their environments and in negotiating a complex web of livelihood constraints and opportunities. However, they carry out these roles within inequitable power relations in the household, where men have the upper hand in creating, invoking, and harnessing patriarchal cultural norms, idioms, and taboos that consolidate men's power. Women also carry out these roles and responsibilities within an increasingly stressful local environment shaped by long-term historical, economic, and political processes. Although some of these processes originated from colonial rule and are ongoing in today's context, they have recently been exacerbated by economic policies under SAPs, and by the ethnoregional bias that exists within Kenya's national political landscape. In Maragoli, these economic policies and political circumstances have led to an emphasis on export cash crop production, the devaluation of the Kenyan Shilling, cutbacks in government spending, high rates of male out-migration, unemployment, and differential access to state and development resources. While women are not powerless in the face of these policies, and can negotiate space to maneuver in many creative ways, they also bear the costs disproportionately.

Historical and political-economic policies and ethnoregional biases within Kenya's political-geography have increased stress in the context of everyday life in Maragoli, and have intensified struggles over productive resources such as land, labour, and income, as well as struggles over meaning mediated by cultural norms, taboos, and idioms. These struggles take place within the highly charged context of the household, leading to the renegotiation of the conjugal contract. This has not only created freedom of movement and room to maneuver for women; it has also increased their roles and responsibilities, all within the real limits established by patriarchal ideology.

In particular, women bear the brunt of the shifting of costs to the unpaid economy, because of the intensification of on-farm labour burdens, a heightened need for 'off-farm' income generation, and an increased need to invest in multiple social institutions as channels of access to resources. This situation is more acute for women who are economically poor, in the early stages of marital life, and adult and unmarried. In addition to these problems and constraints, they also face fierce social stigmatization and taboos, which increase the stress in their lives and act to restrict their access to resources and mobility. Under these circumstances, women may compromise their roles as farmers and engage in unsustainable farming and soil management practices because they lack access to resources such as land, labour, and the products of that labour. In addition, women prioritize and channel their time, energies, and resources away from labour-intensive farming and soil management practices, especially when they do not have long-term security in land tenure and do not control the proceeds of their labour. They invest their energies, time, and labour in activities which allow them more control over their labour and its products, and more autonomy and freedom.

As demonstrated throughout this case study, the politics of these struggles are inseparable from the symbolic contestations that constitute them. The active negotiation, contestation, transformation, and reproduction of cultural idioms, norms, and taboos around women's and men's roles and responsibilities have real effects in constructing people's environments, both materially and ideologically. Therefore, researchers and development practitioners should consider and take into account culture as an important factor that influences and affects natural resource management in specific locations.

Gendered struggles over land in a context of legal plurality

Women's security in tenure is a crucial factor for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the soils. As the special case of the banana and vegetable micro-niche within the *shamba* clearly demonstrates, when women have long-term security in tenure, they are more likely to invest in labour-intensive soil management and farming practices. However, due to decreasing plot sizes, women's ownership of land — a major threat to men's power — is bitterly contested, and manifests itself in men's outright threat to women's security in tenure, through the harnessing of elements of customary law and associated cultural norms. Women have few options in the face of these threats, because there is little individual land available, and there are few large estate commercial farms in Maragoli to which women can withdraw their labour, or from which women can derive alternative farming livelihoods. Women engage in fierce struggles over land in creative ways, using both customary and statutory laws (in a situation of legal plurality) to defend their rights — but operating, nonetheless, in legal domains that privilege men's authority.

Future research and policy should consider women's security in land tenure to be a key motivating factor for whether women invest in sustaining their soils and engage in labour-intensive farming practices. Because the successful engagement of both statutory and customary laws invariably involves money, time, and energy, these laws are differentially accessed and used by women. In effect, economically elite women are in a better position to defend themselves against threats to security in tenure than economically poor women. While customary law is often considered 'backwards,' 'traditional,' and an impediment to women's security in tenure, the case study presented in this book demonstrates that it is actively engaged by women to defend their rights, often as a "first line of defence."

Further, while development and research initiatives currently focus on statutory law as the best avenue of improving equitable rights to land, future policy and research should consider that it is not always accessible to all women and may entail 'hidden' monetary costs that are not always evident (i.e. bribes). The practice of statutory law is also inseparable from patriarchal ideology, and allows men to override and manipulate legal systems using their privileged positions as elders and 'heads' of household. Further in-depth research is required to determine the detailed mechanisms that allow men to override and manipulate legal codes and structures. Keeping in mind that women's success in these processes requires access to information, knowledge, and the legal codes and structures themselves, future research should also identify areas of collaboration and systems of support to help women defend their rights to land — because their very livelihoods and their ability to continue to apply farming and soil management expertise over time depend on it.

Issues of land tenure are inseparable from issues of access to formal credit (a form of credit that is different from the informal credit that women access through their membership in women's groups). Accessing and acquiring formal credit generally requires collateral such as property, and women experience difficulties in gaining access to this type of credit, [ed. missing footnote] as they don't have title deed themselves. Women also experience difficulties in opening bank accounts without the support of husbands who own title deeds to land. However, it is important for future research and policy to recognize that, even if women do gain access to formal credit, they are likely to use it for other pressing priorities, such as investments in off-farm income-generating activities, the payment of school fees and health care, and cash crop agricultural production. It would be useful for future research to use this finding as a point of departure. In addition, future research might also consider supplementing the evidence regarding women's prioritization of income-generating activities presented in this case study through quantitative methods, especially for the sake of those researchers who require "more persuasive evidence" than farmers' own words.

The diversity of farmers' gendered experiences, labour roles, and responsibilities

Women's on-farm labour has increased over time. As a result of a combination of factors, including high levels of male out-migration (especially where migrant men do not or cannot remit income), the economic environment driven by SAPs, and Maragoli's place in Kenya's political geography, women have taken over roles and responsibilities that were considered the domain of men. As Mackenzie has demonstrated in the case of Central Province, relative to returns to women's labour, land and labour are exhausted as production costs increase, because of the commodification of production exacerbated by SAPs (Mackenzie 1995a, p. 21). To make economic ends meet, women may opt to maximize short-term gains through unsustainable soil management and farming practices, at the expense of more labour-intensive practices (Mackenzie 1995a, p. 21). Future researchers and development practitioners should also be aware that labour-intensive on-farm experiments and soil management and farming innovations may not be successfully adopted by women, because they increase women's already intense labour burdens, and because women prefer to direct their energies towards income-generating activities that meet their more immediate and pressing requirements. Furthermore, this case study illustrates that young women in the early stages of marital life, economically poor women, and unmarried adult women face especially acute labour burdens, few livelihood options, and intense social scrutiny and monitoring. Policymakers and researchers should recognize the importance

of acknowledging differences among women, and targeting the most "vulnerable" in future research and development initiatives (but not to the exclusion of other members of the household and community).

While women face intense labour burdens and increased responsibilities on the farm, men continue to describe themselves as 'farmers' and 'heads' of household, despite their decreased on-farm labour inputs and cash contributions. This contradiction between what is publicly stated and what occurs in practice may be explained by the struggle for potentially lucrative 'development' resources that are channeled to 'farmers,' and as a reassertion of men's authority. Extension workers and 'development' practitioners view economically elite men, and *shamba*-boys (who have fewer labour burdens in terms of household obligations and off-farm responsibilities than women), as "progressive farmers," and channel information and resources to them. It is important for policymakers to recognize that women are the ones who make most decisions regarding agricultural production and soil management, and that research and development initiatives and agricultural extension should target them especially. However, it is also important to recognize that agricultural extension, a valued yet scarce source of information and resources which has been inequitably and inadequately distributed to Maragoli to begin with, is shrinking in light of government cutbacks, leaving gaps in the sharing and dissemination of information about agriculture and soil management. Further research is required to identify how these gaps in knowledge can be filled (perhaps through the utilization of determined social institutions and initiatives), while being sensitive to the importance of women's equitable access to these resources.

The intensification of women's labour in farming and soil management practices

While women's responsibilities and labour burdens have increased in farming and soil management practices, men continue to provide one-time labour inputs that are associated with the ownership of "property," and, therefore, with power. These centre on a few select on-farm practices, such as building trenches, planting trees, and owning and trading in livestock. The intense taboos against women planting trees and men's control over where trees are planted on the *shamba*, for instance, have implications for future agroforestry, farming, and soil erosion initiatives. This is an insight that must be incorporated into project, policy, and research design.

Many women also opt to grow cash crops such as tea, which give them more control over the proceeds of their labour. They cultivate cash crops in order meet demands for cash, at the expense of food crops, so more of their subsistence needs must be purchased from the market. In a situation in which livelihood requirements are often not met from farming alone, women engage in multiple occupations in order to generate income. However, women may be more willing to invest their energies in sustainable soil management and farming practices relating to cash crops that earn them money, and where they can more directly control the proceeds of their labour. This is an important insight for future policy and research. Hence, future initiatives might focus attention on providing access to cash crops such as French Beans and tea, where the structure and conditions exist for women to negotiate control over the proceeds of their own labour. Future political action and development support might also focus on ameliorating the structures and conditions for farmers to control their own labour and the proceeds of that labour, which exist for other cash crops as well. Such action and support would therefore give women opportunities and options to forge for themselves some autonomy and self-sufficiency, as well as empowering women to address some of the inequities within relations in the household.

The drive towards cash and the diversification of income-generating activities

In addition to the shrinking role of the state, the drive toward cash-based transactions and economy has intensified women's requirements for cash, in a situation in which they face an erosion of real earnings and an escalation in real costs. This situation has worsened recently, as evidence from the return dissemination and feedback trip has suggested. No longer able to meet food requirements from *shambas*, women take on roles that, in the past, were considered the domain of men, namely, those related to "providing" cash. By highlighting men's failure in "providing" for household income requirements, and invoking customs such as gender-based work groups, women create room to maneuver and space for "walking where men walk." In prioritizing and investing their energies in income generation, many women compromise their knowledge as farmers and sustainers of the soil. They place a higher priority on meeting household requirements through 'off-farm' income generation and the diversification of coping strategies (which may involve the negotiation of both sanctioned and non-sanctioned social institutions in order to access resources).

Future research might further investigate the impacts of men's inability to meet the cash requirements of their families because of factors such as lack of employment, changes in land use, transformation in the political economy, and land scarcity. These impacts may also include increases in alcoholism and violence, which ultimately affect, in adverse ways, women's lives, their personal security, and their ability to sustain their soils and farms.

Recognizing the growing importance of cash income for sustaining livelihoods, research and 'development' initiatives have tended to focus on formal employment and income-generating activities. However, the danger of this approach is that non-formal and informal income-generating activities, through which many women gain access to cash, do not get the recognition they deserve. Further research and support of these activities is required in order to support women in their struggles to sustain their soils, farms, and livelihoods. Research initiatives must recognize that, while employment and income generation are a top priority for women in the short term, SAPs have exacerbated this situation by off-loading the costs of social services onto local people, eroding people' real incomes, and devaluing Kenyan currency. As many scholars and researchers have argued, SAPs ignore women's concerns. This lack of recognition limits (rather than empowering) policy achievements and burdens women further (Abwunza 1997; Berry 1997; Gitubu and Kamau 1994; Ngugi 1994; Nzomo and Staudt 1994; Ongile 1994; Ikaria et al. 1993; Mackenzie 1993; Nzomo 1992; Gladwin 1991). Hence, future policy initiatives must focus on renegotiating SAPs in a way that takes women's constraints and concerns into consideration more centrally, and ultimately reverses some of the negative trends emphasized by these policies.

Kinship relations, social organizations and non-sanctioned social relations as channels for access

While income generation is centrally important to women, future research needs to broaden its scope to include other 'hidden' and 'intangible' coping strategies in order to understand the full range of strategies that women use to access resources. These include social institutions, sanctioned and non-sanctioned relationships, and networks outside of kinship and marital relations. These provide women with flexible and ever-changing channels of access to different types of resources such as labour, capital, informal credit, cash, information,

and agricultural and soil management inputs. Channels of access that involve non-sanctioned social relations are especially important livelihood strategies for women who are de facto or de jure heads of household and those who are "chased" from their marital homes or "walk" in a final act of resistance. Women that "walk" or are "chased" have often withdrawn their labour and forfeited their rights to land and "property," making them extremely 'vulnerable' and lowering their status within society.

Membership in women's groups is both valued and sought after by many women. It has made it possible for women to invoke 'traditional' cultural idioms pertaining to gender-based groups (that are also government-sanctioned institutions), providing them with freedom of movement and a means of accessing material resources. However, access to and membership in these groups involves the contribution of cash towards revolving funds and loans and the opening of a bank account, requirements that present special constraints for young and economically poor women, who are less likely to join. This is often because they lack access to information regarding these processes, as well as money to engage in these activities. Moreover, NGO's and 'development' agencies that identify women's groups as entry points or recipients of resources for projects and research must recognize that women's groups are not homogenous or apolitical structures. To date, extension workers and 'development' agents have been more likely to focus on more "successful" and "progressive" groups, whose membership tends to include economically wealthier and older women. This leads to a host of unintended effects that are likely to be left largely invisible, unless concerted efforts are made to address them. However, despite these challenges, it is worth taking into account that women's groups are highly regarded and valued by women themselves. They provide women with an avenue for mobilizing local, state, and 'development' resources, such as cash and informal credit. They also create space in which women can engage in social relations, friendships, work groups, and legitimate income-generating activities and control the proceeds from them.

Women's groups are also important channels for creating solidarity and enhancing women's power. Logoli women expressed interest in the creation of a collective women's centre, where they could potentially access information and resources important to their livelihoods. Such a centre may also act as an important conduit and source of information regarding: land tenure rights; opportunities to generate income; sustainable farming and soil management practices; opportunities to join women's groups; procedures for opening bank accounts (in order to benefit from development initiatives and credit); access to formal credit; and counselling and moral support. Also important to consider is Sikana's suggestion regarding the provision of a "miscellaneous" fund attached to every 'development' initiative, as a potential avenue for ensuring that, no matter what the aims or results of a project, local people are left with concrete resources for their own allocation and use (1995).

Peoples' lived realities and the complex web of constraints and opportunities they face in their everyday live reveal a great deal to social scientists, physical scientists, and development practitioners about the micropolitics and interconnectedness of gender, land, labour, soils issues, and diverse off-farm coping strategies. This complexity of circumstances tells us that we, as researchers and development practitioners, cannot generalize human experience. However, these findings also raise important questions for interdisciplinary organizations and teams involved in natural resource management in sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, physical scientists grapple with issues of complexity. They ask what the personal narratives and photographs in this study mean in terms of broader research and policy pertaining to

farming and soil management (besides being a valuable case study which elaborates on the micropolitics of a particular sociocultural context) How can these particular context-specific and site-specific findings be effectively operationalized in practical terms and in other contexts without stretching 'the particulars' too thin and far? The next section addresses these issues, as well as others that have been raised in the course of carrying out this case study.

Enriching the interface between researchers and farmers through policy, research, and action

This book has argued that focusing on the local dimension of people's lives allows for a deeper and richer understanding of the complex micropolitics of their struggles over resources that are critical for sustaining the soils, farms, and livelihoods. The book has also illustrated that gender relations are increasingly contested in light of broader political-economic policies such as SAPs. In effect, such a focus allowed for a rethinking of soils and farming analysis. It demonstrated that soil management and farming is embedded in social and gender relations at the household level, *as well as* broader historical and political-economic processes at the local, regional, national levels, and at the level of North-South relations.

Going beyond conventional assumptions about the 'problem' of soil degradation that focus solely on population pressure and land scarcity, this case study highlights the way 'development' policies (such as SAPs) adversely impact the sustainability of people's natural resources. This recognition leads to a fundamental conundrum for 'development' practitioners, who must grapple with searching questions about the negative affects of 'development' policies on local people. Given the existence of gender-neutral assumptions and the unintended negative effects of 'development' policies (on women in particular), should 'development' practitioners consider whether they have anything to offer in terms of collaborating with local people and affecting positive and transformative change? Can 'development' initiatives provide possibilities for common linkages and alliances between local people, academics, and 'development' practitioners? What would these initiatives look like? The discussion below begins by addressing these broader conundrums and challenges, before making more specific research and policy recommendations.[73]

Beyond the conundrum of 'development'

Critics of 'development' have pointed to its failure to deliver on promises of economic growth and modernization. They have put forward questions about the viability and attainability of 'modernization' (involving the whole planet consuming at 'First' World levels) and standardized gender-neutral 'solutions' to deliver the promised 'progress' and prosperity (Ferguson 1999, 1994; Escobar 1996, 1995; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Peet and Watts 1996; Crush 1995; Watts 1995; Williams 1995; Esteva 1992; Sachs 1992). They argue that the Eurocentric "colonizing monoculture" of 'development' discourse hides from view and silences complex, dynamic, and diverse local modes of life (Ferguson

[73] *Some of the policy and research recommendations put forward in this section are the result of personal communications between myself and members of the PLaW team at IDRC, including Luis Navarro, Eva Rathgeber, Don Peden, Susan Joekes, and Simon Carter (ex-officio, TSBF). Credit for their input is given where appropriate.*

1999; Watts 1995), and, in their place, privileges western values, ideals, interventions, and discourses. When combined with evidence from other case studies — that document the adverse effects of 'development,' especially on the lives of women (Gardner and Lewis 1996; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Staudt and Nzomo 1994; Mbilinyi 1992; Mohanty 1991a) — these critiques mount a formidable argument for getting rid of 'development' once and for all. Some enthusiastically argue that "the epoch of 'development' is coming to an end, and therefore the time is ripe to write its obituary" (Sachs 1992, p. 1).

Indeed, the rolling back of the state through SAPs, the shrinking 'development' budgets are making it seem like this may be happening after all:

> *For Africa, at least, as for some other parts of the world, there is a real break with the certainties and expectations that made a 'development era' possible. The 'rolling back' of the state, the abandonment of the goal of industrialization, the commitment to what are euphemistically called 'market forces' and 'private enterprise', and the shattering of expectations for economic convergence with the West, all come together to create a very real end, at least at the level of perceptions and expectations, of at least the grander versions of the 'development' project in Africa. (Ferguson 1999, p. 378)*

Ferguson argues that, as 'development' budgets shrink and the strategic interests of the West change over time, what is left behind are failed promises of modernization (1999). Local people increasingly feel that 'development' has left them disconnected and abjected from a place they once occupied in the contemporary global political economy (Ferguson 1999, p. 371). For instance, Kenya was once considered a 'model' African country. But, as people in countries such as Zambia and Kenya know all too well, "the upending of the project of modernity is not a playful intellectual choice, but a shattering, compulsory economic event" (Ferguson 1999, p. 387). Like colonialism before it, 'development' and 'modernity' are real forces embedded within larger North-South relations of power which continue to order and re-order women's and men's lives in very real, and sometimes harsh, ways, increasing the pressure in their struggle for survival. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, in addition to inequitable North-South relations of power, there also exist other inequitable power relations that must be taken into consideration in order to account for people's constraints, problems, and dilemmas, and their feelings of abjection and disconnectedness from development resources. There are inequitable power relations within the South as well. For example, Kenya's political structures play a hand in the inequitable distribution of development resources, inadequate support of rural development, and women's access to state resources in Maragoli. There are also inequitable gender power relations at the level of the household, which perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and discourses, often succeeding in diverting development resources to men as 'farmers,' thereby obscuring from view the actual sustainers of the soils, farms, and livelihoods.

Further, while development's critics celebrate its demise, there is reason to be doubtful, or even enthusiastic, about sweeping claims suggesting the "end of development." It is clear that the ideas of 'development' policies and discourse continue to hold sway in many parts of the world today (Ferguson 1999; Sikana 1995; Van der Zaag 1998), and that some development initiatives do indeed affect positive and collaborative change. Indeed, participants in this research would be greatly disappointed if this book argued for an end to 'development,' because 'development' represents a shrinking, but potentially lucrative, channel for gaining access to resources. In fact, in Chapter Eight, participants express

their desire to access the resources that development brings. Similar to Ferguson's study of the Zambian Copperbelt, this study has illustrated that for Kenyans (Maragoli women in particular) the rolling back of the state through SAP policies has been more of a betrayal than a liberation, and has not made its 'withdrawal' any easier to take (Ferguson 1999, p. 380). This seemed to be even more pronounced two-and-a-half years after the main research (during the return trip to Maragoli), when the Maragoli people felt even more alienated from the benefits of 'development' and state resources. Ferguson argues that the heralding of the 'end of development' is neither intellectually nor politically adequate, and that critics of 'development' tend to forget that:

> *The post-World War II conceptual apparatus of 'development' did not create global inequality at a stroke, but only provided a new means of organizing and legitimating an only too real inequality that was already very well-established. ... 'Development' was laid on top of already-existing geopolitical hierarchies; it neither created North-South inequality, nor undid it, but instead provided a set of conceptual and organizational devices for managing it, legitimating it, and sometimes contesting and negotiating its terms. The subordinate position ascribed to 'the third world' in 'development' discourse was therefore not a figment of the imagination or a mere Eurocentric illusion, but reflected an intractable political-economic reality that could not, and cannot, be wished or re-labelled away. ... Nor is there any reason to link the forecast 'end' of development with any general liberation or new autonomy, as many critics have tended to do. For if development did not inaugurate the inequalities it organized, neither can its demise be expected to make them suddenly disappear. (Ferguson 1999, pp. 379–380)*

Local people continue to recognize the importance of soil management for sustaining their lives in the long run, and they attempt to engage strategically in a multitude of activities to sustain their soils, but they do so under severe constraints. The real challenge is to reconfigure North-South relations (as well as development and research policy and initiatives) in such a way as to effect positive and collaborative transformation, and to address global inequality "without reintroducing the teleologies and ethnocentrisms of the development metanarratives" (Ferguson 1999, p. 382). This must be done without re-entrenching existing patriarchal gender relations that privilege men's power, authority, and control over women's access to the means of production.

Focusing on collaborative research

Critics of 'development' also overlook the fact that 'development' organizations and institutions are not homogenous or static. There are organizations and spaces within which counter-narratives and movements exist. Within these organizational spaces there are those who are interested in recovering gendered voices and local perspectives and in working collaboratively with local women and men. Some organizations have changed in major ways in the past few years, forging collaborative research initiatives and centres that incorporate participatory methods, including gender, and local perspectives. Other organizations and centres are willing to change. For instance, organizations such as TSBF and numerous research centres have recognized the importance of gender and human dimensions. They have supported the work of anthropologists, geographers, and gender specialists who are interested in incorporating local complexities, knowledge, and con-

straints into their programs of work. There is evidence that physical scientists, soil scientists, and biologists are beginning to recognize the need for change and for greater consideration and incorporation of gender research analysis and local perspectives and knowledge.

The challenge is to recognize and focus on these organizations and these spaces. It is also important to engage in collaborative research with organizations such as TSBF. These organizations have invested in local communities over the long term; have forged links with academics who have put forward conceptual innovations as well as 'practical' outputs; are driven by the needs of women and men at the local level; and have encouraged and supported links between Northern and Southern researchers, organizations, and academics. Future development research, policy, and initiatives should also work actively with officially registered and non-registered women's groups, and, through these groups, identify and collaborate with the most 'vulnerable' individuals within local communities, as discussed below.

Further, a focus on the micropolitics of people's struggles — including an examination of local perspectives, local realities, and local experiences through the prism of gender — is one way of addressing inequities, and may be the avenue required for constructing new North–South relations. In such an approach, local knowledge can coexist with other forms of knowledge. The political task, then, is not about 'sharing' knowledge with those who 'lack' it, as has been posited by 'development' discourse in the past, but about forging links between different forms of knowledge and experience that "are possible from different locations and tracing lines of possible alliance and common purpose between them" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 39). Central to such a project is the need to recognize local people's agency, knowledge, and expertise, and include their input and continual evaluation as defining principles.

Encouraging collaboration within and across disciplines

Another challenge facing soils and farming research is to encourage collaboration and understanding across disciplines. This entails finding congruent and meaningful ways to hash out the sometimes diametrically opposed ideologies and conceptualizations within different disciplines. For instance, the consideration of heterogeneity, complexity, and variability is central to gender-based research. However, this is in direct conflict with "scientific" approaches that perpetuate simplified and reductionist understandings of local realities, and favor replicable research approaches across different contexts and localities. The main challenge is to address this tension without compromising the integrity of participatory processes. By doing so, research will better reflect the needs and the lived realities of farmers. Future research needs to explore ways, both in conceptual and practical terms, of reconciling the tendency of the physical sciences to bring 'order' to reality, to reduce and homogenize, and the tendency of the social sciences — and especially feminist poststructuralism — to focus on heterogeneity, diversity, and variability.

Such exploration might begin by reviewing and problematizing what is privileged and accepted as 'science' within mainstream approaches to soil management and farming, and what is deemed 'unscientific.' Similarly, the disqualification of indigenous knowledge, practices, and what are considered by physical scientists as 'soft' research methods (methods that strive for complexity, variability, and heterogeneity) must also be problematized.

Similarly, physical scientists might also consider, in the future, the idea that complex human experience cannot be generalized. For instance, this case study is site-specific, context-specific, and culture-specific, as well as author-specific.[74] This may cause some physical scientists to ask how human experience can be documented in a way that fits the 'scientific method,' which posits that, if one returns to the same site and uses the same methods, one should come up with the same results. This case study, for instance, engaged in qualitative research that presents people's voices, experiences, and photographs as its evidence. This way of doing research is scientific, though perhaps not in the conventional sense of 'scientific'. Understandably, some physical scientists will be uncomfortable with this reconceptualization of 'science' because it challenges and turns upside down everything that they have learned (what 'facts' are, what counts as 'science' and what is 'reality'). Extending this argument further, if we reconceptualize 'science', then the replicability argument fails to apply. Once we expand the 'scientific' to include social sciences as evidence, it becomes evident that we can no longer ignore the existence of complexity, variability, and diversity. Physical scientists need to problematize the assumption that projects can be 'replicable' (and keep in mind that 'development' locations are not labolaroties where 'variables' can be controlled, manipulated, and reduced — in fact, human experience is too complex to be replicable). Evidence has demonstrated that standardized and gender-neutral projects fail to meet their intended objectives precisely because they work on the assumption that technologies can be exported anywhere, regardless of cultural-specificity, local realities and complexities. Hence, the conventional 'scientific' method that overlooks human dimension — complexity, variability and the dynamic nature of local contexts — needs to be reconsidered, problematized and expanded.

Another point that future research and development initiatives should consider and explore is the extent to which donors and development organizations increasingly co-opt the knowledge of local farmers. This is especially true for women who, as farmers and sustainers of the soils, face inequitable situations, and validate such knowledge under the rubric of 'traditional' or 'indigenous.' Keeping this in mind, donors and organizations may position themselves strategically so that traditional knowledge becomes legitimate only when it is recognized by Western donors and organizations, regardless of the fact that local people, and women in particular, have farmed their land for centuries (Rathgeber 2000, personal communication).

In-depth social science research

Gender and social analysis is critical for understanding local complexities and countering generalizations in soil management and agricultural research. However, gender analysts, anthropologists, geographers, and sociologists are often hired as the 'token' social scientists on research projects and initiatives. Their analysis is rarely mainstreamed into 'development' projects or institutional frameworks, and they are often discouraged from critically analyzing problematic concepts and underlying assumptions of projects or policies (Pottier 1993b, p. 22). This is a major oversight, as policies and projects may prove to be inappropriate or miss out on important local realities. To counter this, continual and rigorous ethnography is crucial, as:

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[74] *It is important to be transparent about the use of any one or any set of 'author-specific' conceptual tools for analysing a problem. It is sometimes difficult to use multiple conceptual frameworks that do not coincide in terms of their central beleifs. Perhaps researchers tend to use the conceptual framework that coincides with their politics and their understanding of the world.*

... social worlds within which development efforts take shape are essentially fluid. Production patterns, access to or control over resources, the make-up of residential units, the allocation of responsibility within units, patterns of social stratification, and so on, are all liable to some form of ongoing change. (Pottier 1993, p.7)

Long-term, sustained commitment and study of these dynamic and complex realities is important. For donors, this may mean concentrating on certain regions and areas, rather than having broad and far-reaching programs. To avoid project failures and to better understand local realties in different cultural, political-economic, and environmental contexts, in-depth qualitative research over time may be required before initiating projects. Further, social scientists and development practitioners should consider expanding the boundaries of the 'local' to include broader historical, political, and economic processes that are central to farmers' gendered struggles over resources.

As discussed above, physical scientists may be concerned that social science research is not always replicable from one context to another. For instance, this study is probably not 'replicable' in the sense that another researcher will arrive at exactly the same ethnography, conclusions or findings. However, it is important to note that this research does in fact corroborate what other researchers and scholars have said about the impacts of broader processes on people's lives (and women's ability as farmers to manage their soils and farms in particular). Hence, the triangulation of context-specific case studies with historical evidence, secondary literature, other research findings, quantitative evidence, photographic evidence, and other sources of information is an important technique for further substantiating qualitative evidence, especially for those researchers and scholars who are not convinced that local people's words count as "persuasive" evidence. In this regard, future research might begin by using this case study as a point of departure, taking farmers' accounts and photographs seriously.

The task of future research should be to document the types of changes demonstrated in this study. For instance, the increased prioritization of income-generating activities, the increased instances of economic poverty in the face of increased prices and costs of education, women's increased engagement in the cash economy, and women's increased labour burdens. Other types of evidence to substantiate future research might include quantitative methods such as time series data on household cash expenditures versus income generated (Joekes 2000, personal communication), and detailed labour-time data.

It is possible to design a gender-based methodology that is sensitive not only to issues of complexity, variability, and diversity, but also to placing farmers in a position of power — in terms of both research relationships and articulating their own constraints and problems (Abu-Lughod 1993; Cotterill 1992; Goebel 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b; Harding 1987; Kirkby and McKenna 1989; Martin 1995; Mbilinyi 1992, 1989; Long 1992a; Long 1992b; Sollis and Moser 1991; Villareal 1992, Wolf 1996). For instance, this case study demonstrates that methods such as photo appraisals and farmer feedback sessions enabled farmers to better control the types of issues they brought up, and provided an invaluable avenue for articulating their feedback in terms of research design and issues. The use of personal narratives and photographs also allowed farmers an avenue to articulate a wide range of issues, constraints, and problems related to soil management and farming.

In addition, in-depth social sciences research should take into account the problems inherent in conventional approaches, and consider using more complex conceptual frameworks to better understand local realities. For instance, this case study calls into question conventional approaches that place *all the blame* for soil degradation and unsustainable farming practices on population pressure and land scarcity. It also calls into question problematic assumptions within conventional approaches that devalue or ignore local people's knowledge and expertise. It has demonstrated that farmers' ability to invest in sustainable soil management and farming is not only embedded in social and gender relations at the local level, but is mediated by broader processes, such as SAPs, that themselves are embedded in North–South relations and 'development.' These broader processes have, in fact, escalated gender politics and contestations of local gender relations and have intensified women's struggles over access to and control of resources. Most importantly, future research must consider the fact that gender-based research and analysis provide a great deal of critical insight that challenges the hidden assumptions, voices, and experiences of conventional approaches. Gender-based research provides a richer and more complete picture of the local dynamics of soil management and farming, and helps in identifying the most 'vulnerable' sectors of local communities for future research and policy.

Focusing on the "most vulnerable"

During the course of this research, physical scientists working in the field of natural resource management in sub-Saharan Africa raised an important concern. They suggested that some major elements of this case study appeared more concerned with women then with gender. They further suggested that the case study's strength was that it brought out the complexity of farmers' everyday lives, as well as the human dimension that is so often missing from soil management and farming analysis and research. However, they remarked that it had the tendency to convey the idea that only women have complex lives, even though both women and men have complex lives, even if their lives and constraints are different. These are valid concerns.

There are several reasons for supporting gender-based research that focuses more on women in agriculture and soil management. The most important reason is the serious imbalance in the way that research and development initiatives have treated women's realities and life-worlds in the past. An agenda to give voice to what was silenced before has led to an intentional methodological focus on women. Furthermore, many studies of sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, have documented that in the majority of cases, women are in charge of agricultural production and soil management (Adamo 1999; Berry 1997, 1989; Carney 1996; Huntington 1998; Mackenzie 1998, 1995a, 1995b, 1993, 1991, 1990; Carney and Watts 1990; Leach 1991a, 1991b; Odaga 1991; Nzomo 1997, 1992; Nzomo and Staudt 1994; Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995). However, women carry out these roles within inequitable power relations at the level of the household, as well as within broader political structures that marginalize their concerns and realities. As this case study has substantiated, women are often the most 'vulnerable' strata of the local community in terms of access to resources vital for sustaining the soils, their farms, and their livelihoods. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that, in certain cases, men are also 'vulnerable' (as Chapter Four illustrates); neither does it contradict what has been argued and illustrated throughout this case study — that women are not passive or powerless. They are not passive victims of patriarchal relations, ideologies, and structures that limit and narrowly define their rights, opportunities, and options to access resources, to shape local social and political relations, and to be recognized and legitimated by the state and development institutions.

This book has attempted to be transparent about the components of this case study, which focus on the real detrimental effects of patriarchal relations and gendered inequities for women as farmers and as "providers." Evidence from this case study shows that women, in the majority of cases, are the 'most vulnerable' within local power relations. Future research and policy must focus on women's needs, especially since they have been left mostly invisible in the past — a trend that sometimes continues in the present. Nonetheless, if researchers want to better understand gender relations in the future, men must be included in gender-based research process. As the book documents, men are part of the problem, for historical, cultural, and political reasons — they perpetuate patriarchal norms, idioms, and taboos that have real and detrimental effects on women's lives. However, wherever possible, they must also be included as solutions are constructed, especially in order to prevent them from feeling alienated and abjected from state and development initiatives to the extent that they revert to re-establishing patriarchal "order" in often detrimental and violent ways. In future research, I would increase men's participation in gender-based research to about one-third. But not 50 percent. Because, simply, men are more powerfully positioned in terms of local gender power relations. In the end, I support the mandates of organizations such as IDRC, which focus on the most 'vulnerable' strata of local communities.

Furthermore, this research has documented instances where women are part of the 'problem' in terms of their willingness to perpetuate the patriarchal relations that undermine them, despite their 'vulnerable' circumstances within local power relations. However, the perpetuation of this discourse must be placed into context. As this case study has illustrated, women's deference to patriarchal ideology is a conscious strategy as an investment in symbolic resources that substantiate their "goodness." These symbolic investments buy women more freedom of movement through "back-door decisions" (Abwunza 1997), customary practices, and institutions that allow women to invest more autonomously in their own projects, access resources, and control the proceeds of their efforts. For instance, women's membership in women's groups — an indigenous and socially sanctioned type of social organization endorsed by both development and state programs and policies — gives them the opportunity to access potential informal credit, through locally determined loans set up within women's groups which have a revolving loan scheme. As discussed in Chapter Eight, this allows women to "walk where men walk," in effect, expanding their freedom of movement, autonomy, and self-sufficiency.

Having identified women as the most 'vulnerable,' certain other questions inevitably arise. This chapter has attempted to answer some of the following questions: What would future initiatives that assist and support women and other groups be like? What would they involve? What can be done to support women in their struggles? How can the patriarchy that dominates access to resources be addressed, so that women are not bound to social relations that impoverish and sometimes even kill them? What are the alternatives? Who should define the parameters of these interventions?

I kept these questions in mind when I met with the women's groups again two-and-a-half years after the main research for dissemination and feedback sessions. Women had very clear ideas about what type of support they required, and articulated their needs in terms of where they felt 'development' initiatives, policy and research should focus its attention in the future. The biggest concern was the desire to find lucrative avenues to generate incomes. This was not surprising, especially in light of the fact that costs of goods and

services has escalated, while their real incomes had remained the same (a process that was quite noticeable, even in the two-and-a-half years since the main field work). Most women expressed their desire to access capital so they could start up income generating businesses (such as rental houses, butcher shops, posho mills, tailoring shops, trading, etc.) Accessing general and marketing information about these types of businesses was also important. There were also collective initiatives that women's groups were interested in. One popular example was being given a zero-grazing cow (that could produce milk which could be sold as an income generating activity) and whose offspring would then be distributed to each member of the group in turn — by the end of the exercise, every member would have their own cow. This activity also gives women access to organic manure vital for sustaining their soils and farms. This activity could also be carried out using grade hens (eggs, poultry and offspring could then generate income). Many women wanted access to land. Interestingly, most women said they would construct rental houses on these plots, rather than use these additional plots to grow cash crops (the monetary returns from rental houses was perceived as being more lucrative.

Another area of concern was the escalating costs of goods and services. Women wanted to convey to the government that it should eliminate "cost-sharing" measures which have made their lives more difficult in recent years (as discussed earlier, farmers blame the Kenyan government for those measures, rather than noting the connections to the IMF and the World Bank). They expressed their concerns about the escalating costs of education and health care, and expressed their desire to have educational costs subsidized (not only tuition, but also the costs of books, stationary, materials, etc.) and the introduction of educational bursaries for economically poor house holds. Women also stated their concerns about access to health services, and the groups form Viyalo were especially concerned with the fact that clinics and hospitals were a great distance from their villages. Other problems raised by women included: lack of electricity, lack of access to affordable transportation services, and their desire to have manual posho mills introduced in their areas (most posho mills introduced in the region work with electricity, and therefore cannot be counted on, because of power shortages and load sharing).

Farmers also wanted researchers to focus on finding solutions to farming problems such as striga weed and the moles that routinely cause damage to their crops. Women were interested in acquiring their own grade cows, which would then provide them with organic manure. To a lesser degree, they were also interested in accessing cheaper and subsidized chemical fertilizers, along with information about its purposes, uses, and long-term side-effects, so they could mix them together. Women's groups were specifically asked about whether they would be interested in carrying out improved fallows on their *shamba*s. The response was generally negative. Except for a few farmers who had large enough parcels of land, improved fallows was not a viable option for farmers with practically a "point" of land. They asked, "what would we do for foood" during the time when their land was under fallow. This type of response indicates that farm size and an in-depth understanding of local practices and knowledge if crucial for effective research, policy and initiatives. The desire to own grade cows through women's groups is a positive solution — that not only addressed some soil management concerns, but also addresses women's pressing needs to generate an income, and other cultural concerns (as noted earlier). And most importantly, entry through women's groups allows women to control this enterprise, as well as the proceeds from their labour.

Future development policy and initiatives should further support indigenous and locally determined efforts, such as the provision of loans and cash resources aimed directly at local women's groups, keeping in mind the need to include economically poor and unregistered groups. They should further support the ability of both men and women to generate an income, while simultaneously directing state and development policy to ease the intense pressures local people face for cash to make ends meet. Further, patriarchal norms must be transformed from within. In other words, such changes must be locally determined. However, development initiatives can support women's political empowerment by supporting women's involvement in local, regional, and state political structures, which will ultimately push the boundaries of patriarchy. For instance, an economically wealthy woman was elected as a local councillor during the course of the fieldwork for this book. Despite this political gain, she faced many constraints and instances of discrimination within meetings, including being excluded from important meetings, being relegated to 'secretarial' duties, and having her voice ignored and suppressed in relation to important issues. Along with other women in Maragoli, she put forward the idea of development initiatives that would support the creation of a women's centre, for the purposes discussed earlier. Development initiatives must also support local and indigenous institutions — such as women's groups, kinship relations, and church groups — which provide women with socially sanctioned ways of creating room to maneuver, all the while recognizing that the most 'vulnerable' women are often found engaging in non-sanctioned social institutions. Future research should focus on the reasons that lead women to engage in such heavily stigmatized social relations, and support them as they attempt to carve out a living through these means and aim to create alternative opportunities for survival. Hence, micro-credit schemes and income-generating initiatives should most definitely target these women as well. Lastly, women are forced to engage in fiercely stigmatized social relations most often because of lack of information, support, and options that would help them defend rights to "property", including their own and their children's rights to land tenure. Future initiatives must strengthen support for women by defending their rights, but must do so in ways that are locally determined and acceptable (i.e. leaving women with the option to draw upon either customary or statutory laws, or both, to defend their rights).

Differences between gender awareness and gender analysis

While many organizations have begun to pay more attention to "doing gender," it is not clear that this attention is grounded in in-depth theorization or understanding of what this actually means. As argued earlier in this book, gender is very different from 'women,' as all women cannot be lumped together as 'vulnerable.' Rather than a prescription to "add women and stir," what is required is an understanding of gender relations. For instance, simply adding data on women (that is, collecting gender-disaggregated data) is not enough. Indeed, researchers need to move beyond such simplistic, dualistic forms of information. Data must be processed, analyzed and thought through carefully in terms of its implications, meanings, and significances in light of appropriate conceptual frameworks. In short, I am suggesting that researchers should move beyond gender disaggregated data collection towards the use of this valuable data through informed, systematic, and rigorous analysis — in other words, gender analysis. Further, women do not operate in worlds devoid of men, or more powerful women for that matter. Those who are powerful must also be included in the constitution of 'the problem,' as well as 'the solution,' if there is to be any change, and in order to avoid the escalation of gender politics, which sometimes manifests itself in very real and violent forms.

I would like to end this book on a personal note. Researching and analyzing social sciences aspects such as gender for the first time as a physical scientist, has been humbling and a radical learning experience. Placing women's and men's words, stories, and experiences at the centre of analysis is often considered 'soft' and 'marginal' in the physical sciences. It requires a radical epistemological and cosmological shift, a massive reconceptualization of what we, as physical scientists, understand as the subject of study.

Gender analysis is just as complex and involved as the most complicated technical problem, if not more so. Analyzing the circumstances of people's everyday lives, and what these mean when contextualized within broader 'macro' policies and research in an in-depth and rigorous manner, requires moving beyond the realm of the linear. It requires a new way of thinking. To use a mathematical metaphor, it requires moving into the realm of the multi-dimensional, invoking complex and critical modes of analysis, and incorporating multiple, interrelated, and ever-changing variables. Gender analysis cannot be a mere 'add-on,' a box to check off, or a rapid method of coming to understand complex realities — not if it is to reflect local people's complex gendered realities appropriately. In an era in which research results and 'deliverables' are demanded in short time spans, in-depth research — whether it is focused on gender analysis or other types of rigorous social science analysis — quite simply requires time in order to reflect, appropriately and adequately, the complex realities of the people and the local contexts being studied.

Moreover, we must learn, as both physical and social scientists, to differentiate gender analysis from gender awareness when supporting and carrying out research and projects. *Gender awareness* is critical for political action, for engaging in collaborative initiatives, and for subverting patriarchal discourses and inequities within institutions. It is an action that indicates our personal and institutional politics for change and equity, and helps to focus our energies on the 'most vulnerable' people in a context of inequitable global and local power relations. Gender awareness is a powerful tool for instituting political action, as well as changing research agendas and development discourses.

But simply being gender-aware is not enough to carry out research or to institute gender policy. This requires an in-depth understanding of conceptual, methodological, and political issues pertaining to "doing gender". In short, what is required is gender analysis. Focusing energy on training and on creating opportunities for people in the 'South' to carry out gender analysis on their own terms is one way of ensuring that bland, nonsensical, superficial, and descriptive work, done under the rubric of gender analysis, is not instituted. It is a way of ensuring that in-depth and rigorous analysis, which can lead to real change and positive transformation, can be carried out.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBD	community based distributor
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
GSD	gender and sustainable development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KARI	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
KEFRI	Kenya Forestry Research Institute
KTDA	Kenya Tea Development Authority
PLaW	People, Land, and Water
NGOs	nongovernmental organization(s)
NPSIA	Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
NRM	natural resource management
SSA	sub-Saharan Africa
STDs	sexually transmitted diseases
TBA	traditional birth attendant
TSBF	Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Glossary

Amasatsi	a local bush
Asian	Indian
Boma	an enclosure for keeping livestock
Changaa	locally home-brewed beer or alcohol
Harambee	literally translated as "pulling together"; local self-help efforts or collections with specific objectives
Jembe	handheld hoe(s)
Kanga	a piece of African cloth used by women as sarongs
Kukus	chickens
Kuchunga	keeping cows for someone else (Kiswahili term)
Kugurana	barter and exchange
Kwegeka	keeping cows for someone else (Maragoli term)
Mechicha	brewer's waste
Mzungu	European, or more broadly, a Caucasian foreigner
Ngombes	cows
Posho	maize meal
Shamba	farm or plot
Ugali	stiff porridge, usually made from maize flour; can also be made from cassava, millet or sorghum

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