

Agricultural commercialization, gender equality, and the right to food

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The United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirms the long-standing global goal of ending hunger and seeks to accomplish this by 2030. But the challenge is massive, and according to the UN's 2021 report on *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, the goal is unlikely to be achieved. Almost 10% of the world population faced hunger in 2020 and more than 30% were unable to access adequate food. Moreover, food insecurity has massively increased in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2021).

The UN agencies' report not only identifies conflict, climate change, and economic downturns as drivers of food insecurity but also emphasizes the key roles of poverty and inequality as underlying structural factors that make some people more prone to experiencing hunger than others. Indeed, there is today a widespread consensus that food security is not a matter of insufficient availability of food but more importantly of people not having access to land to produce food for their own consumption, or income from work or social security entitlements to be able to purchase food. Although food insecurity is thus recognized as a matter of distribution, international development policies continue to focus on increasing the production of food and non-food commodities. They seek to boost food supplies and farmers' incomes through the commercialization of agriculture, counting on private sector investments to enhance productivity and the free market to distribute food efficiently. The theory is that commercialization will increase both the availability and accessibility of food. In the long run, efficient markets are said to select the most productive farmers and insert them into global value chains, while farmers who are unable to compete move into other livelihoods. In this paradigm, inequality often appears as an afterthought in the trade-off between equality and efficiency, an unfortunate side effect that other policies must seek to address. Yet, if food insecurity is a matter of accessibility, inequality is part of the problem, which neoliberal development policies may aggravate rather than alleviate. There is ample literature to show that unfettered markets tend to generate inequalities along multiple axes of difference (Losch, 2004). These include ethnicity and indigeneity; they also include gender. In

commercialized agriculture, the unpaid farm and reproductive labour disproportionately performed by women are simultaneously central to and invisible within rural economies. The so-called ‘triple burden’ of farming work, off-farm labour, and reproductive labour that women provide within families and communities is symptomatic of the ‘super-exploitation of women and the environment’ (Federici, 2019) and ultimately, neoliberal capitalism’s ‘crisis of care’ (Fraser, 2016).

The contemporary food system is increasingly global. International trade in agricultural products has expanded rapidly since the 1980s, entailing the development of global value chains that link producers and consumers across large distances. These value chains are reliant on a highly concentrated private sector for the organization of inputs, production, trade, processing, and retailing. Indeed, corporations increasingly are not only involved in the governance of international supply chains but also encouraged to partner with public actors to foster commercialization as a means of development and to participate in setting standards (Clapp and Fuchs, 2009). Not surprisingly, the global food regime celebrates technical solutions to increase food production and reduce costs, increasingly adopting biotechnological innovations, such as genetically modified organisms and automated field operations (Hopma and Woods, 2014; Bourke Martignoni, 2021).

Since the mid-2000s, there has been an inexorable rise in food prices, driven in part by population growth, increased living standards, and consequently food consumption, in particular in emerging economies with huge populations such as China (McMichael, 2020), and in part by various non-food industries, such as biofuels, as environmental policies have supported the production of these crops as part of the transition away from fossil fuel energies (Dufey et al., 2007). The rising demand for agricultural products has spawned a wave of large-scale land acquisitions and the territorial expansion of industrial farms, in particular in countries in the Global South. High-income countries have acquired large tracts of land around the world to secure their own provision of food and animal feed products, commodities for biofuels, and raw materials for industry (Meyers and Meyer, 2008; Matondi et al., 2011). While this global land rush has been described as ‘unprecedented’ (White et al., 2012), there is doubt as to whether it constitutes a ‘distinct historical phenomenon’ (Margulis et al., 2013), a ‘turning point’ (Oya, 2013, p. 1548) in agrarian change in that land has now become a financial asset (Smaller and Mann, 2009), or instead a continuation of processes of land expropriation that reach back to colonial periods (Borras et al., 2011, p. 212). Regardless, a significant territorial expansion and intensification of commercial agriculture can be observed in Cambodia, where large-scale, mono-crop plantation agriculture has exploded (Carney, 2021), and in Ghana, where small landholding producers have been induced to develop cash crops on their own land or through ‘value-chain agriculture’ (Hall, 2011; McMichael, 2013), including via contract farming and out-grower schemes (Hall et al., 2017).

These developments have not gone without criticism. Growing alarm over the financialization of global agriculture, price fluctuations due to speculation, and interruptions of food supplies during COVID-19 lockdowns have led to increased demands for re-localizing food production (Clapp and Hel-leiner, 2012; Suarez Franco, 2021). Long before the pandemic, a variety of social movements, the most visible of which has been La Via Campesina (LVC), called for an end to the globally integrated and corporate-dominated food system and for food to be produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods (La Via Campesina et al., 2007; McKeon, 2014). They have demanded ‘food sovereignty’, that is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food and to define their own food and agriculture systems. They also have denounced the human rights violations that have accompanied land grabbing, the violence used to evict peasants from their lands and the economic, social, and environmental costs of unregulated neoliberal development. In parallel, feminist activists and scholars have highlighted the gender-unequal outcomes of neoliberal policies. By taking disembodied ‘rational’ actors as their starting points, these policies ignore women’s reproductive labour and end up promoting rural development at their expense, often not recognizing women as farmers in their own right and side-lining them into unpaid labour (Gladwin, 1991; Whitehead, 2008; Razavi, 2009; Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks, 2009). These critiques have found resonance in international human rights fora, in particular with the UN Special Rap-porteur on the Right to Food, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and in the intergovernmental Committee on World Food Security (CFS). They have accelerated the adoption of international norms on the right to food and the rights of peasants that incorporate provisions on gender equality and the rights of women in rural areas (Bourke Martignoni and Claeys, 2022). They also have led to the formulation of voluntary guidelines, by both the CFS and the World Bank, that attempt to temper the most exploitative features of land and agricultural commercialization and alleviate their discriminatory effects.

The research in this book takes the right to adequate food as its normative starting point to evaluate the unequal impacts of neoliberal agricultural policies and laws on the livelihoods of rural populations and their food security. In parallel, we explore the implementation of policies and laws that seek to advance gender equality and right to food. Propelled by Margulis’ (2013) argument that food security is governed by an international ‘regime complex’ that combines neoliberal ideas with rights-based understandings, we examine how international, national, and subnational policies and laws navigate the tensions between these sometimes-contradictory approaches. Our findings are based on research in Cambodia and Ghana. Profoundly different in terms of their histories, cultures, and geographical location, the two countries provide the basis for fruitful comparisons because they have made agricultural development a priority and adopted neoliberal approaches to accelerate agricultural and land commercialization. As a result, they have undergone rapid

agrarian transformations and are experiencing considerable commercial pressure on land. Each is also a party to international human rights treaties that create obligations to realize gender equality, the right to adequate food, and the inter-related rights to decent work and social security. In studying how the two countries implement these policies and the outcomes this has generated in their diverse contexts, we seek to discern distinctive mechanisms and patterns while also contributing to a better understanding of how to advance gender equality and the achievement of the right to food globally.

In the next section of this introduction, we provide an overview of international policies on food security, the right to food, and gender equality, highlighting the tensions between neoliberal and rights-based approaches. Next, we review existing literature that explores how the commercialization of land and agriculture relates to food security and how processes of commercialization are gendered. We then introduce the DEMETER project, under which the research for the chapters in this collection was carried out, present the research questions, discuss our key concepts, and explain our research design and methods. Finally, we provide an overview of the chapters that draw out the broad questions they raise and their findings.

Governing food security: neoliberalism, the right to food, and gender equality

In the post-World War II era, food security policies were typically understood as policies to modernize agriculture. The experience of food shortages during the war paired with Malthusian anxieties over population growth fostered a productivist stance towards agriculture. Food security was considered a matter of national security; that is, the goal was to ensure reliable food supplies (in the Global North) and stave off famine and malnutrition as well as rural to urban migration (in the Global South). This understanding shifted in the 1980s, when an influential World Bank Report (World Bank, 1986) introduced the distinction between chronic and transitory food insecurity, suggesting that food security was a matter of purchasing power as much as sufficient supplies. In addition, Amartya Sen's influential book *Poverty and Famine* (1981) reinterpreted food security from the perspective of households and individuals, linking it to issues of inequality, entitlement, and freedom. Sen's ideas were also incorporated into international policy discourses, including the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) first Human Development Report in 1990. Food security thus increasingly became associated with equal access to productive resources and income through work or from social protection schemes. The definition of food security accepted at the 1996 World Food Summit reflects this broadened understanding: 'Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (World Food Summit: Plan of Action, 1996). The core elements of this definition are often summarized

as availability, access, stability, and utilization, with the latter including the adequacy of diets, nutritional well-being, and non-food inputs, such as clean water (FAO, 2006).

Yet, commercialization remained a core part of these policies, designed to ensure that food production kept up with projections (such as those put forward at the 2008 World Food Summit) that the world population would reach 9 billion by 2050 (Maye and Kirwan, 2013, p. 1) and the assumption that it would enable rural populations to increase their incomes. In the 1980s, neoliberal prescriptions were firmly encoded in the global food regime. The Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, launched in 1986, focused on the integration of agriculture within trade and investment regimes that favour liberalized market mechanisms. In parallel, structural adjustment programmes imposed policies on indebted countries in the South that dismantled national government control over food and agriculture. National land titling systems were developed – frequently with the support of international financial institutions and bilateral aid programmes – to facilitate the creation of land and agricultural commodities markets (De Schutter, 2015). Financial incentives were made available to prioritize economies of scale and promote large-scale, capital-intensive agriculture, while support for smallholder farmers was reduced. Foreign direct investment in the agricultural and land sectors in the South gained momentum (Ashwood et al., 2020).

At the same time, the imposition of neoliberal agricultural policies has long been contested, pitting the interests of countries with large-scale agriculture against those dominated by smallholders, and those of the South against the North. Today, the process of liberalizing trade in agriculture has stalled against the resistance of emerging economies, such as India and Brazil. Developmental priorities, in addition to social protection, climate change adaptation, and mitigation, have become major considerations in the future shape of global food systems (Saab, 2019). The idea of the right to food has gained traction within international food policy forums. It is also being promoted through the activism of transnational social movements who view the realization of the right to food as an essential component of food sovereignty frameworks (Bourke Martignoni, 2020). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 25), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 11), and many regional human rights instruments and national constitutions contain provisions on the human right to adequate food (Golay, 2011; Ziegler et al., 2011; Bourke Martignoni, 2020). In its interpretive General Comment No. 12, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights notes that the right to adequate food means the right for all people to have ‘physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement’ (CESCR, 1999, paragraph 6). The main benefit of a right to food-based approach is its emphasis on the responsibilities of states and other duty bearers to respect and protect the right without discrimination, which also means that they must remove any structural barriers to universal access to food (CESCR, 1999; Ziegler et al., 2011; De

Schutter, 2014; Fakhri, 2020). At the international level, states, international organizations and civil society actors recognize that the right to food plays an integral role in the achievement of food security, and legislation and policies for the implementation of the right to adequate food have been adopted in several countries (Graziano Da Silva et al., 2011; Monsalve Suárez, 2013, Graziano Da Silva, 2019).

The right to food approach resonates with efforts to integrate gender equality goals into the international governance of food security. Rural women and gender equality figure heavily in discourses on the right to food and sustainable development. Various instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 2), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (articles 2.2 and 3), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (article 14) acknowledge the linkages between women's equal rights and the realization of the right to food (Bourke Martignoni, 2018). The outcome document of the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing called for the systematic mainstreaming of gender considerations into all policies, and the UN specialized agencies in Rome (FAO, WFP, IFAD) and the World Bank have established gender strategies within their planning cycles. The UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development recognizes that achieving the goal of eliminating hunger requires attention to the important role women play in food production through small-scale farming. And in 2018, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reaffirmed the right to food and recognized 'the crucial contributions of rural women to local and national economies and to food production and to achieving food security and improved nutrition' (CSW, 2018, para. 17).

The implementation of gender mainstreaming within food and agricultural commercialization policies and legislation has also attracted criticism. For example, giving women individual land titles, which in neoliberal policy circles are considered a prerequisite for creating land markets, is often promoted as a form of empowerment. In contexts of unequal gender relations, however, individual joint titling initiatives have actually led to the dispossession of women and to the alienation of communal lands that may have previously been used to supply food (Deere and León, 1987; Agarwal, 1994; Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997; Razavi, 2003, 2007; Tsikata, 2009; Levien, 2017; Bourke Martignoni, 2018). More broadly, the 'smart economics' approach of the World Bank and other international financial institutions tends to subordinate gender equality to gains in economic efficiency and instrumentalizes women as vectors of economic growth, household food security, and broader development outcomes without changing intrinsic structural inequalities (Roberts and Soederberg, 2012; Calkin, 2015; Prügl, 2016; Esquivel, 2017). In the regime complex on food security, neoliberal ideas have thus become tightly interwoven with the language of rights and ideas of gender equality in particular. The suggestion that gender equality is both a matter of human rights and economic efficiency has become an international mantra (Prügl and Joshi, 2021).

The gendered impacts of commercialization on food security

An extensive body of empirical literature has developed to assess the diverse impacts of agricultural commercialization and export-led agriculture, including with regard to gender equality. Debates in this literature centre on the productive efficiency of small farms compared to large farms, the marginalization and disappearance of small farmers, the impacts on food security, and gendered effects with regard to labour and access to resources.

A core argument has been that large-size commercial farms, due to their capacity to mobilize capital and technology, can be the drivers of a productive modernization that small-scale farms cannot achieve (Collier, 2008). Scholars suggest that capital-intensive farms have greater capacity to adopt new crops, adapt to changing demand, generate higher yields and therefore have better access to global markets and value chains than most small landholders (Byres, 2012). In the long run, it is argued, the development of large farms will benefit smaller farms through technology transfer and by facilitating access to new markets. In this scenario, it is posited that market efficiency will increase the availability and accessibility of food as successful farmers can insert themselves into global value chains while those who are less competitive will move to non-farming livelihoods where they can earn income to purchase food.

But the comparative advantage argument about large-scale farming has been controversial for decades, as small-scale farmers also have commercialized successfully (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). In the case of Southeast Asia, the participation of smallholders in commercial agriculture has been widespread (Hall, 2011), and there are many contexts in which they have been successful in growing cash crops (Delarue, 2011; Sikor, 2012). Their performance depends in particular on the support they receive from governments (Gouyon, 1995; Fox and Castella, 2013). The technical superiority of large-scale farming in the generation of agricultural surpluses has also been questioned in the case of sub-Saharan Africa (see Baglioni and Gibbon, 2013).

Contrary to the trickle-down paradigm and its associated 'win-win' rhetoric, a majority of empirical studies have concluded that agricultural commercialization, including large-scale land acquisitions, have been detrimental to most small landholders. First, smallholders lose farming land and free access to natural resources such as wild food, grazing, and fishing areas. In many cases, if not systematically, losses may be aggravated due to the absence of formal land rights, poor regulatory enforcement, and a lack of access to independent legal mechanisms to adjudicate land rights in cases of dispossession. Second, small landholders may not have the resources needed to invest in commercial crops. Third, they may not be able to make enough profits to guarantee a decent standard of living given volatile global value-chain prices and the fact that they are competing against large-size farmers (van der Ploeg, 2008; Spieldoch and Murphy, 2009; De Schutter, 2011; Amanor, 2012; Borrás and Franco, 2012). Finally, the impacts of environmental degradation

and climate change are increasingly making themselves felt in agricultural production and small-scale farmers often have less ability to invest in climate adaptation (Saab, 2019).

Effects on *food security* have also been problematic, as, in the words of Bello (2008), liberalization has amounted to the ‘manufacture of a global food crisis’. A substantial share of land in the current wave of acquisitions has been used for the production of non-edible crops, fodder, and/or food crops that are exported (Daniel, 2011; Cotula et al., 2014; Rulli and D’Odorico, 2014; Sans and Combris, 2015; Titcher, 2017). In the liberalization paradigm, this is not considered a problem because the idea is that food security in rural areas may be achieved through the importation of food. But this idea has been the subject of much debate, and there are recommendations that additional policy measures be taken to ‘alleviate many of the possible adverse transitional consequences’ (Pingali and Rosegrant, 1995, p. 184). Indeed, emerging evidence, including from the DEMETER project, finds little improvement in nutritional outcomes as a result of commercialization (Carletto et al., 2017). In our case regions in Cambodia many could not afford to purchase enough and quality food, and borrowing has become crucial, not only for productive activities, but also to buy enough to eat (Gironde et al., this volume). And our Ghana study identifies commercialization-induced distress sales of property to combat hunger (Dzanku et al., this volume), raising questions about the impacts of commercialization on marginalized social groups.

These impacts have been deeply gendered. Over several decades, feminist political economists have shown that with commercialization and associated class differentiation, ‘women’s independent farming came under increasing pressure, while many men were able to solidify their command over land, labour, and capital resources’ (Razavi, 2009, p. 203). Gender differentiated access to and control over resources of all kinds have reproduced gender inequalities since the colonial period (Agarwal, 1994; Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997; Deere and Leon, 2001; Razavi, 2003; Tsikata, 2016). Intra-household relations of production and reproduction are a crucial transmission belt for the gendered impacts of commercialization (Elson, 1998; Naidu and Osse, 2016). As men’s subsistence labour becomes wage labour or is incorporated into value chains, this has entailed the ‘productive deprivation’ of women: their labour gets displaced and new gender divisions of labour emerge (Harriss-White, 2005). Women’s labour remains unremunerated, loses value, and becomes readily available as a low-cost input into projects of commercialization. Thus, studies of export-oriented agriculture have shown that investment schemes typically have created a low-paid, often seasonal, and disproportionately female labour force, although differentiated by other status positions (Barrientos et al., 1999; Barndt, 2008; Bigler et al., 2017; Sulle and Dancer, 2020). Moreover, gendered inequalities, in intersection with other status positions, have facilitated the extraction of surplus value from agriculture, establishing ‘chains of exploitation’ with rural women at the bottom and agribusiness companies at the top (Maffii, 2009; Luna, 2019). Research has

concluded that a combination of pre-existing gender inequalities, women's lack of power to claim rights, and the gender blindness and biases of projects are responsible for the poor livelihood outcomes and gendered impacts of commercial agriculture projects (Izumi, 2007; Mutopo, 2011; Behrman et al., 2012; Daley and Park, 2012).

Based on this scholarship, studies of the new wave of land grabbing in the early 21st century confirmed that pre-existing gender inequalities shaped the outcomes for the dispossessed, creating particularly onerous structural barriers for women to access new opportunities (Izumi, 2007; Chu, 2011; Behrman et al., 2012; Julia and White, 2012; Daley and Pallas, 2014; Doss et al., 2014; Mutopo and Chiweshe, 2014; Tsikata and Yaro, 2014; Park and White, 2017). Employment opportunities created by agricultural investments were insecure and mainly reserved for men, and few women were able to take advantage of out-grower contracts. Instead, women lost the resources they derived in the past from harvesting the commons (Brandt Broegaard et al., 2017). While enjoying ancillary benefits provided through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, these were mainly targeted at their domestic activities and at their children, providing a meagre substitute for what was lost (Behrman et al., 2012; Julia and White, 2012; Piacenza, 2012; Daley and Pallas, 2014; Tsikata and Yaro, 2014).

In an influential article in 2011, Tania Murray Li (2011) argued that the impacts of land commercialization should be assessed through the lens of changes in labour relations. Indeed, various studies reported that one effect of large-scale land acquisitions was an increase in women's workloads. In Cambodia for example, the agricultural wage work in areas impacted by economic land concessions (ELC) was associated with more reproductive work for women, generating time poverty with frequently negative consequences for food security (Ironsides, 2009; Maffii, 2009; Paramita, 2013; Beban and Bourke Martignoni, 2021; Gironde et al., 2021). In upland rice systems, when farmers reduced fallows due to pressure to raise production, weeds frequently increased, and gender roles were re-inscribed as older women performed more weeding or applied herbicides, while men and younger women migrated (Pierce Colfer, 2013). Similar effects were reported from Ethiopia, where large-scale land transactions resulted in increased labour time for women (Hajjar et al., 2019). More broadly, in his historically and geographically wide-ranging comparative review of the effects of land dispossession on women, Levien (2017) illustrates how changes in the gender division of labour linked to land commercialization were invariably disadvantageous to women, though this differed by class and caste.

Critical engagement with the land-grabbing literature resulted in a second generation of research that pays attention to longer-term processes of land and agrarian commercialization (Edelman et al., 2013; Oya, 2013). Studies in this vein have broadened the discussion from the dispossession of small-holder farmers to examining the processes that lock them into global agricultural value chains as plantation workers, contract farmers, and small- and

medium-scale farmers producing for export markets. Lending nuance to processes of commercialization, this research shows that outcomes differ depending on local contexts and investment practices (Gironde et al., 2015). Commercialization seems to increase household incomes in the aggregate, but also generates considerable inequality as it leverages patriarchal norms and political economies in ways that tend to favour men (Gironde et al., this volume; Hall et al., 2017; Park and Maffi, 2017; Park and White, 2017).

The literature thus casts doubt on commercialization as a pathway to achieving global food security. Food production and earning off-farm income both emerge as problematic for women, producing land loss and seasonal food shortages on the one hand and changing divisions of labour, low wages, and new dependencies on men's income on the other. While contexts and intersectional inequalities matter, unfettered land and agricultural commercialization seems to disproportionately benefit those with access to power and resources. Understanding how such power relations affect household food security requires a closer look at situated contexts.

Approach and methodology

The chapters in this book emerged from an international research project on land commercialization, gendered agrarian transformation, and the right to food – the DEMETER project. Started in 2015 by a research partnership of scholars from Cambodia, Ghana, and Switzerland, the project asked three questions: (1) how does the commercialization of land and agriculture impact food security? (2) How do local, national, and international norms and policies shape these outcomes? and (3) how do processes of commercialization and associated policies, laws, and practices affect gender equality and the right to food?

To address these questions, as an interdisciplinary team of scholars, we combined critical approaches from political economy, gender studies, and socio-legal studies, and applied these within a human rights-based approach to development. This led us to conceptualize commercialization as a type of agrarian change, to think of gender in relational terms, and to use it as an analytical lens.

Commercialization as agrarian change

The development of commercial agriculture and the relative decline in subsistence agriculture is a universal phenomenon (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989; Mazoyer and Roudart, 1997). It involves the replacement of staple food crops that were used mainly to feed their producers with crops that are farmed for sale. However, 'agricultural commercialization means more than the marketing of outputs' (Pingali and Rosegrant, 1995, p. 171). It reorganizes the entire process of agricultural production, changing the character of land, labour, capital, inputs, and technology, which increasingly

become commodities to be purchased, rented, and sold (Li, 2011). Commercial transactions, in particular loans and repayments, become the primary mechanisms through which rights over productive resources are granted or rescinded. Personal- and community-based relationships, rights, obligations, and ethical principles such as redistribution, reciprocity, and solidarity (as identified by Polanyi, 1944) become less relevant in this new, commercial environment. Agricultural commercialization can thus be conceptualized as a process through which agricultural land, labour, and capital are increasingly distributed and allocated through monetary transactions, according to market mechanisms and commodity pricing structures.

Agricultural commercialization is commonly associated with the consolidation of rural land holdings, increased capital investment and indebtedness, the widespread use of agro-industrial technologies, and the employment of wage labour. In order to produce commercially, smallholder farmers frequently find themselves under pressure to invest in agricultural inputs and machinery, with the growing need for capital and associated indebtedness driving forced sales of commodities and land. This tends to promote the dominance of large-scale, agro-industrial farming businesses. For small- and medium-scale farmers, it often means their transformation into out-growers in subcontracting arrangements for agro-companies, or they may become independent commercial farmers, producing mainly for the market and selling crops through brokers. Moreover, beyond agriculture, commercialization is usually accompanied by the development of non-agricultural livelihood activities, wage labour, and migration. Land is increasingly used for purposes other than the production of agricultural commodities, including conservation, special economic zones and infrastructures, mining, tourism, and residential housing (Zoomers, 2010). Thus, the growing importance of commercial agriculture is part of a broader process of agrarian change.

Gender as a relation and analytical lens

Following a political economy approach, we conceptualize gender as a social relation that is constitutive of divisions of labour and reproduces hierarchies in intersection with other status distinctions. The gender division of labour has long been theorized as generating a division between production and reproduction, between women's work and men's work, a division that underwent fundamental change during industrialization to create the figure of the unproductive housewife, which has been generalized to countries beyond Europe (Mies, 2012). But the housewife is not a universal figure. Feminist political economists have brought into view the changing character of social reproduction in contexts of commercialization, historicizing women's work. In so doing, they have shifted the narrow focus of political economy from surplus production to matters of care and the production of life (Razavi, 2009; Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017). In this book, we focus on these processes,

highlighting in particular matters of food and nutrition as critical aspects of social reproduction.

But we approach gender not only as a social relation that can be historically described. Gender also works by signifying power, assigning status hierarchies, and in this way regulating access to resources (Scott, 1986). It does so in intersection with other status positions, such as ethnicity or indigeneity (Menon, 2015). In the context of this project, we thus employ gender also as a lens, a way of looking at commercialization that makes visible the changes in power relations it brings about. It is a lens that refracts other axes of difference and, in this way, trains our focus on the reproduction of multiple inequalities. Gender thus articulates with the concept of rights: it makes visible injustices and offers the grounds for an assessment of outcomes.

Research design and cases

Our research was designed to enable comparisons between countries and between regions within countries that exhibit different patterns of agricultural commercialization. We selected two countries, Cambodia and Ghana, for in-depth case studies. For Cambodia, the shift towards economic liberalization coincided with the end of the civil war in the 1990s. The 1993 elections under UN supervision installed a government intent on moving the country to a free-market economy while strengthening its control over land and natural resources to consolidate its political power. In the 1990s and early 2000s, development institutions such as the World Bank supported large-scale land mapping and registration policies that set the scene for agricultural and land commercialization (Biddulph, 2010; Diepart and Sem, 2018). A new system of ELCs was established, leveraging neo-patrimonial political structures that empowered elites while generating new inequalities in the countryside. It attracted domestic and foreign investments that resulted in massive commercial logging and land consolidation along with the internal migration of people in search of farming land. It also led to the dispossession of smallholder and indigenous farmers and to diminished access to forests, communal grazing lands, and fisheries. In practice, the process of agricultural and land commercialization in Cambodia has been conflictual and marked by the violent grabbing of land from smallholders, dependence on volatile boom crops such as cassava and rubber, widespread indebtedness, environmental degradation, and increased inequalities within many communities and households.

In Ghana, the return to democracy in 1993, after years of populism and military rule, did not entail a major shift in economic policies. Rather, the transformed Rawlings government remained true to the neoliberal economic logic that had informed its structural adjustment policies during the 1980s. With a strong export-oriented sector since colonial times focused on the production of cocoa, Ghana's agricultural production has long been deeply integrated into global markets. Since the 1990s, national

development policies in the food and agricultural sector have prioritized strengthening investment in agro-industrial companies as key engines of growth, and these policies have garnered extensive support from international development actors. A multi-year, internationally funded land administration project (LAP) was put in place starting in 2011, geared towards establishing a land governance framework through the promotion of titling and registration in an effort to provide security of tenure and, in turn, to facilitate land-based investments. The LAP has been a key enabler, helping to accelerate processes of land and agricultural commercialization in a context where small-scale farming still predominates. While land grabs in Ghana are less extensive than in Cambodia, there are reports of displacements where chiefs – all of whom are male – use their prerogative as custodians of customary land to sell plots, including communal lands, for their own private gain. Within an agricultural system based on small- to medium-sized farms of less than five hectares, the loss of even small amounts of farming land may have disastrous consequences for the livelihoods of rural people (Li, 2011).

Our research design also enabled comparisons within countries. In Cambodia, we selected six communes in the provinces of Ratanakiri, Kampong Thom, and Kratie. All were heavily affected by ELCs, but the magnitude and severity of impact varied for small landholders, in some cases, among villages of the same commune. The rapid pace of livelihood transformation in Cambodia also allowed for comparisons over time. Moreover, we were able to build on previous research by Gironde et al. (2015) in Ratanakiri, which provided long-term data for this case. In Ghana, we selected four districts, two in the Southern Region (Kwaebibirem and Asunafo North), and two in the North (East Gonja and Garu Tempene). This allowed for comparisons across space, capturing ecological and climatic differences as well as degrees of commercialization.

The project employed a range of methods, from legal and discourse analysis to econometrics and feminist geographies. We collected extensive data over the course of seven years, including close to 500 interviews with local communities, government officials, and civil society actors; and two rounds of household surveys in the four districts of Ghana and six communes of Cambodia.

Scope of the book

The chapters in this collection offer a selection of our results, organized along our research questions. The first section reports findings on the impacts of commercialization on livelihoods and the adequacy of food. The chapters illustrate how commercialization processes create unequal opportunities for female and male farmers in Ghana, and generate food insecurity and indebtedness in some households in Cambodia, with women responsible for dealing with both. They also show deteriorations in the quality of food

and the privileging of men's nutritional needs over women's. The chapters in the second section examine the way policies and policy processes shape commercialization. They highlight how gender mainstreaming has been implemented in the policy areas of agriculture and food security in our case countries, illustrating the entanglement of an increasingly authoritarian political order with patriarchal politics in Cambodia and the tokenistic inclusion of women in agricultural policy-making in Ghana. They also discuss the co-optation of key government agencies by agribusinesses at the local level, their ability to push commercialization and cash crops at the expense of food crops, but also their focus on women's participation in agriculture. The third section examines the development and implementation of the right to food and gender equality through policies and laws in a context of commercialization. The Ghanaian case provides scope for reflection on the meanings ascribed to constitutional guarantees on gender equality and draws on recent jurisprudence to demonstrate the potential role of the judiciary in interpreting social development objectives as including the right to food. It also helps us to problematize the reality of institutional multiplicity and legal pluralism, that is the co-existence of customary and statutory law. In contrast, the Cambodian case provides materials to explore fierce conflicts around land management and gendered resistance to expropriation, and also allows us to trace the way in which gendered norms surrounding land inheritance are in flux as a result of commercialization. In the book's conclusion, we provide a comparative discussion of our findings in Cambodia and Ghana and argue that commercialization limits the availability, accessibility, and quality of food. The research documents violations of the right to food that are apparent in fluctuations in the seasonal availability of both food and income, gender, ethnic, age, and class-based barriers to accessing food and the prevalence of food that is of poor quality and limited cultural acceptability. To remedy these problems, we recommend that governments and agribusinesses prioritize the promotion and protection of the right to food and related rights to land, decent work, and social security.

Our project has sought to highlight a range of dimensions that are frequently overlooked or undervalued in studies of agricultural commercialization and its outcomes. These dimensions include food cultures, policy translation, national and subnational political and legal structures, the roles of multi-national agribusiness companies, national laws and constitutions, and the local practices and norms that construct gendered subjectivities. In presenting our findings, we hope to deepen the understanding of the impacts of commercialization in Cambodia and Ghana and offer guidance towards implementing rights-based policy approaches to agricultural development and food security globally.

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