

The broad objectives of this paper are: firstly, to examine the initial impact of colonialism on food production by women, by considering their role and activity patterns within the household in terms of rights, obligations, exchanges, allocation of resources and responsibilities and the division of labour in the selected African Societies of the Luo, Kikuyu and Luhya (Kenya), Ewe and Kusasi (Ghana), Mandinka (The Gambia), Yoruba (Nigeria) and Azande (Sudan). These ethnic groups used as examples were mainly selected on the basis of their predominance and availability of data in these countries lying in the Sub-Saharan Africa having similar historical roots of the British colonial policies. Secondly, some of the possible social, economic and biological effects or implications on the changes in rural women's work in the chosen case studies in Africa are elucidated. It has been hypothesized that the development process in rural Africa has marginalized women (with varying degrees) in the subsistence sector, reducing their productivity and control over resources; and that women's total work burden has relatively increased, a phenomenon which can be understood as an integral process of capital penetration and accumulation. These changes may have significant implications for nutrition and health affecting the overall levels of food production. Although the selected illustrations do not represent the full range of possibilities in Sub-Saharan Africa, the data on the gender roles and workpatterns and the different changing ways do indicate that the women's role in food production has profound implications for socio-economic development in general and nutrition and health in particular with much wider applicability. In fact no such cross-sectional study has been conducted in rural Africa. It is generally concluded that any consideration of women's agricultural production should not neglect the structural bases of their inequality, and the policies can be inadequate if they overlook the relationship between the subsistence and commercial sectors and the women's role in each. In effect, the relative and absolute losses in women's food production and incomes bear immediately on the food crisis of many of the Sub-Saharan African countries, and that the current policies for the food crisis are likely to fail unless there is an improvement of the data base in women's and men's specific food production activities, processing and marketing for use in policy formulation and implementation. Indeed, the integration of women into the development process should be sensitive to and cognizant of their needs, contributions and potentials in Sub-Saharan Africa.