



BOOK REVIEW

INCREASING PRODUCTION FROM THE LAND A RESOURCE BOOK ON AGRICULTURE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN EAST AFRICA, BY ANDREW COULSON; ANTONY ELLMAN AND EMMANUEL MBIHA. MKUKI NA NYOTA PUBLISHERS, DAR ES SALAAM, 2018. ISBN: 978-9987-08-356-5. 276PP

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is an important contributor of food, incomes and employment all over the world. It is extremely important in the Global South where majority of the poor people live in rural areas where main source of livelihood is agriculture. Notwithstanding the notable contribution of agriculture to socio-economic development, African agriculture is said to be at crossroads. The sector faces numerous challenges including, growing population pressure and climate change. Authors have discussed these challenges and prospects of African agriculture in three parts which comprise twelve chapters using simple and straight forward English language and case studies. Despite its subtitle focusing on East Africa, the book is of immediate relevance to Tanzania. The main weakness of this book is the failure of the authors to discuss issues related to land conflicts between pastoralists and cultivators and how they impact smallholder farming in Africa. However, it is a very good resource for researchers, university lecturers and students especially those pursuing co-operative, agriculture and rural development courses, donor agencies and policy makers at both local and national levels.

Key words: *Agriculture, smallholder farming, rural development, population pressure, and*

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1. SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK

African agriculture at crossroads; according to authors African agriculture faces many challenges which include growing population pressure and climate change. Coulson, Ellman and Mbiha discuss these challenges and prospects of African agriculture in three parts which comprise of twelve chapters. Concerning population pressure the authors have the views that Tanzania has one of the highest population growth rates in the world and that it is urbanizing rapidly. Consequently, they argue the number of people living in the rural areas will continue to increase for many years. They report that, “on average, women are giving birth to around 6 children and this means that there are close to 3% more people to feed every year..... Some people argue that increased population is a good thing. But why? Generally, in the country there is no shortage of labour. Improvements in public health means that most children now survive to become adults so there is no longer a need to have many children to ensure that parents are looked after when they get old. For politicians, more people mean more people to keep satisfied and that will not be easy if there are shortages of land and lack of good jobs (P. 45)”. They have

also discussed extensively the challenge of climate change. According to them, “.....scientists do not doubt that the planet is getting warmer.... agrees that the main cause of this warming is human activity...” (p.19). Africa needs to prepare itself for more storms and hurricanes and unseasonal heavy rains, by preserving forests, planting trees and protecting soils which could be threatened by erosion. It also needs to prepare for droughts and long periods without rains...” (p.20).

The first four chapters (1-4) form part 1 and they focus on agricultural technologies, the chemistry of soils and plant growth, the different ways in which the land can be cultivated and used. In the authors’ own words, “....A lot of agricultural technology is embedded in people. They have skills which they learnt from their parents when they were children, or at college or university, or when working for others.that if they are faced by a certain problem, there are various courses of action that they can take” (p.72). Authors further argue that gravity-fed irrigation which is applied in Tanzania faces many challenges. In their own words, “the biggest challenge facing large gravity-fed irrigation schemes is the creation and sustaining of a fair organisational structure to decide on who gets the water, when they get it, and for how long...”(p.57). The main argument in part 1 is that agriculture is not straight forward; there are many processes to be followed. In agriculture, little can be predicted accurately and failure is a reality. Authors emphasizes that, agriculture is a business and almost a science as well. It depends on hunches and judgments, and on the minimization of risks. As a result the authors emphasize on the use of local knowledge according to them, smallholders’ local knowledge is of great value. “...Small farmers make choices, with the land, labour and capital available to them. They make decisions, about which crops to plant, where and how much should be planted, at what times, and using which seeds and inputs.....they decide how to prepare the land.....how to often weed, how to deal with pests and diseases and where to sell. These are commercial decisions, and some farmers are better at making them than others..... their local knowledge is of great value.” (p. 98). Another point which is being raised by authors is that people living locally can co-produce new knowledge in partnership with the outside specialists.

Part 2 of the book consists of five chapters (5-9) which discusses issues related to small and large farms, as well as impact of marketing and credit on agricultural growth. The main argument in this part is that large-scale farming has its place, but it is not the only way ahead. The potential exists for small holder farmers to gain more out of the land, without undue risks, and to earn good incomes, while contributing to national development. In this part authors further describe situations in which large scale farming is likely to succeed and its limitations and costs. They further argue that innovations not necessarily involve the government employed agricultural extension workers, many innovations are simply copied by one farmer from another. The last three chapters (10,11 and 12) forms part 3 and focuses on practice and policies. Within this part authors show how women are often exploited, marginalized, even though they do much of the hard work, and are used to making difficult decisions. They have the potential to have more, but their rights need to be protected; men have to accept that women have much to offer. Likewise, authors discuss agricultural policies formulation and practice. The main argument here is that small holder farmers need to be confident, to stand up against powerful interests groups who in most cases propose solutions which are not in the farmers’ best long-term interest.

2. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE BOOK

This book is not a political economy, rather a prelude to that. It explains the forces of production, or the means of production, in simple ways using the interdisciplinary approach which was practiced during the 1970s. As a matter of emphasis, a political economy would be how those forces of production were used or controlled at different times by different class groups. However, the book is a very good resource for researchers, university lecturers and students especially those pursuing co-operative, agriculture and rural development courses, donor agencies and policy makers at both local and national levels. It is also a useful tool for co-operatives and other farmer organizations. Furthermore, despite its subtitle focusing on East Africa, the book is of immediate relevance to Tanzania. This is because; the case studies and almost all the illustrations are from Tanzania. It is also of some reference to nearby East African countries and or other African countries, but it does not give sufficient emphasis to some features which are important for them, such as settlement of small farmers on former settler farms.

Authors were smart in the way they put up their arguments, they used simple and straight forward English language and case studies. However, authors should have discussed issues related to *land conflicts between*

pastoralists and cultivators and how they impact smallholder farming in Africa. Land and other resources such as water and biodiversity are essential because they offer diversified livelihood opportunities and alternatives to marginalised communities (Bob, 2010). Besides, Lund *et al.* (2006) argues that land is also a conflict-ridden resource; disputes and conflicts about land occur at all levels. The question about rights to land and territories has also been the source of civil wars as well as wars between nations. For example in Tanzania, we have witnessed persistent land conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Kilosa, Arumeru, Tarime and Rorya (Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2009; Kombe, 2010; Mbonde, 2015; Massawe and Urassa, 2016).

Likewise, authors ought to have presented and discussed briefly at least matters of *land redistribution* in Africa, prospects and challenges drawing cases from South Africa, Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Land redistribution issues in Africa are increasingly becoming policy issues. Similarly, authors ought to have discusses more about *land grabbing* in Tanzania especially on the biofuel production, its impacts on local livelihoods such as the risks of land dispossession it posses and the compatibility of the different biofuels business models such as contract farming to Tanzania's situation. That kind of assess is important especially now that studies have shown that most controversial biofuel projects in Tanzania have failed partly due to incompatibility nature between different biofuels business models applied in Tanzania (Hultman, *et al.*, 2012; Beyene, 2013). Similarly, the authors have included a case study of Tanga Fresh to prove their point that production by small farmers is possible, but they didn't discuss the serious competition it faces from Bakhresa which imports powdered milk though Zanzibar , reconstitutes it by adding water, and then sells it for a price lower than that of Tanga Fresh.

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