

Development and the household: Missing the point?

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Abstract

Over the past two decades development has been shifting its focus toward smaller scales and particular problems. As a result, the household has become an increasingly important institution for development, and has come under increased scrutiny as development practitioners and scholars seek to better understand this institution's functions and foundations, trying to 'get the household right'. These efforts, rather than clarifying the character and the function of the household, have contributed to its indeterminacy by reifying the very institution they seek to analyse. Arguing that these efforts fundamentally miss the point of examining the household, this paper introduces a different framework of analysis that addresses the household not as a fixed object of research, but as a local construction that embodies flows of power and knowledge both within and transcending the local. Using the example of varying constructions of the household in two villages in Ghana's Central Region, this article illustrates how such an approach allows us to address the various functions of the household as particular embodiments of these flows, an approach that better explains the endurance or ephemerality of these functions. Such an approach provides a stronger foundation for the consideration of how particular constructions of this institution may have troubling implications for issues like gender equity and sustainability.

Viewing the household merely as a convenient conduit for data collection rather than as a conceptual construct runs the danger of leaving important questions unasked and thus unanswered. (Editorial in the IDS Bulletin, 1991).

Introduction

Over the past two decades development has seen a broad shift away from projects designed to completely rework the 'underdeveloped' setting to achieve greater legibility and efficiency (Scott, 1998; Sumberg, 1998; Breusers, 2001) to projects aimed at smaller scales and specific problems. One result of this 'downscaling of development' has been an increasing focus on the household as an institution through which to implement and evaluate such projects. The rise of the household as a central institution in development thought comes at a time when critical voices in the mainstream development literature have focused on such issues as the failure of 'development experts' to properly apprehend their objects of research (for example Adams, 1991; Varley, 1991; Geisler, 1993; Reardon and Vosti, 1995; Reardon, 1997) and the failure of certain economic models to explain the outcomes of particular projects (for example Haddad and Kanbur, 1990; Fafchamps, 1993; Udry, 1996). As the household has become more important to the practice of development, these mainstream critics have engaged in extensive efforts to 'get the household right.'

Despite these efforts, the understanding of the household as an institution in the developing world remains contentious in both economic and qualitative social scientific literatures. I argue that this contentiousness stems from the reduction of the household to a reified social object through these efforts to 'get the household right.' In short, most approaches assume the existence of the household as a given, and work to understand or better approximate its function in various ways. These efforts to understand the household via its function in various social and economic spheres assume that the function of the household can be understood independent of its local constitution. This is a troublesome assumption, as any particular function of the household may play roles in the local context that exceed capture by functional analysis. As a result of this assumption, then, we cannot understand either the particular functions through which we have approached the household up to this point, nor can we interrogate the household as an institution as its constitution has been placed outside the sphere of analysis.

I contend that a more productive path to the study of the household lies in examining how particular constructions of this institution embody flows of power and

knowledge both within and transcending the local. In so doing, we can address the various functions of this institution not as the products of a bounded institution, but as particular embodiments of these flows that better explains their endurance or ephemerality. I begin with a discussion of current efforts to 'get the household right' in the development literature. This review illustrates the various ways the development literature has approached the household, as well as the tendency of these approaches to fix their analyses within the institutional framework of the household, making it a 'stable object' of development. I then turn to two villages in coastal Ghana to examine how the household in this context becomes an institutional site of production and consumption through local understandings of economic and environmental uncertainty. In these villages the household is not merely a social object with particular functions, but also part of the process by which those functions come to have meaning with reference to the local environment and economy.

Questioning the household in mainstream development

The household is an idea central to the development literature. The various literatures addressing issues of development and change generally operate under the assumption that the goal of any strategy for negotiating change and uncertainty is the safety of the household. That safety, like the uncertainty and adversity of life in development contexts, is assumed to be distributed equally among the members of the household. A number of authors (Guyer and Peters, 1987; Haddad and Kanbur, 1990; Adams, 1991; Haddad and Hoddinott, 1994; Udry, 1996) note the common use of the household as the minimum unit at which development studies or projects are aimed. Haddad and Kanbur (1990) sum this trend up most clearly:

The ultimate object of concern for economic policy is the well being of individuals. Yet most policy, and most policy analysis, has until recently equated the well-being of individuals with the average (adult-equivalent) well-being of the household to which they belong.

A survey of publications on development policy reveals an overarching concern with such issues as 'household ecology' (Wilk and Tannenbaum, 2001), the 'household economy (or economics)' (Goheen, 1988; Low, 1989), 'household decision making' (Haller, 2000; Kalinda et al., 2000), 'household income diversification' (Reardon, 1997), 'household food insecurity' (Ali and Pitkin, 1991; Immink and Alarcon, 1991; Kennedy and Peters, 1992; Akinyele, 1997; Nyariki and Wiggins, 1997; Phillips and Taylor, 1998; Sutherland et al., 1998; Washington and Downing, 1999) and the comparatively rare 'household livelihood strategies' (Barrett et al., 2001). In all cases, these studies treat the household as the meaningful institution through which those living in development contexts construct means of

coping with the uncertainty and instability in their lives.

Though it is an institution central to the development literature, there is a great deal of debate surrounding the issue of how we are to understand the household. For example, despite its common appearance in the mainstream development literature, the monolithic household is not uniformly accepted as a valid means of understanding the livelihoods of those living in development contexts. On the contrary, there is a growing body of literature challenging this construction and its uncritical application in development. The overall approach employed by those critical of the monolithic household is to examine its economic (Folbre, 1984; Haddad and Kanbur, 1990; Haddad and Hoddinott, 1994; Udry, 1996) and/or social (see the surveys of Ong, 1994; Parpart, 1995; Leibbrandt et al., 2001; and the contributors to Rocheleau et al., 1996) function.

Within development economics the monolithic household most often appears in the form of unitary models of the household. Unitary models are those in which the household is treated as 'a collection of individuals who behave as if they are in agreement on how to best combine time, goods purchased in the market, and goods produced at home, to produce commodities that maximize some common welfare index,' (Haddad and Hoddinott, 1994, p. 543; see also Alderman et al., 1994; Udry, 1996, pp. 1011–1012). Many contend that these models are not a particularly useful way of understanding the behavior of those living in development contexts because they obscure different preferences and economic orientations within the household. Two major models of the household, cooperative and non-cooperative, emerge to address this shortcoming. Cooperative models of the household are those in which the individuals in the household are seen as having different preference orderings that are negotiated against one another. One school of cooperative modeling employs game theory to analyze the actions of the household, while another assumes that such negotiations are aimed at producing Pareto-efficient household decisions (Haddad and Hoddinott, 1994). Non-cooperative models treat the household as a site of individualized economies linked by reciprocal claims on one another (Haddad and Hoddinott, 1994, p. 544). While important approaches that make visible household dynamics obscured by unitary models, neither cooperative nor non-cooperative models have the universal support of those examining household economies, and therefore debate over the relative merits of these models continues.

Non-cooperative economic models, when seen as an economic critique of the problems associated with the cooperative household, run somewhat parallel to qualitative social scientific concerns with the unitary household. Geisler (1993, pp. 1966–1967) traces the origins of this qualitative critical literature to structural Marxism, which opened up debates about inequalities between kin formerly obscured by the ideology of kinship. Geisler argues that feminist social scientists built upon this

opening, introducing gender as another site of interrogation. These studies have expanded into a broad literature. For example, this literature points out that all women (for example Jackson, 1993a, b; Agarwal, 1997a, b, 1998; Locke, 1999; cf. Shiva, 1988) and households headed by women (for example Guyer and Peters, 1987; Varley, 1991; Ekejiuba, 1995; Peters, 1995) are not alike. Other writers argue that women should not be simply viewed as farmers functioning within a broader, male dominated household but rather as a complex and highly differentiated group with heterogeneous means of survival in marginal contexts (for example Adams, 1991). Still others examine how gender and the distribution of household resources are linked (for example Kennedy and Peters, 1992), how shifts in translocal economic structures have variable local impacts on men and women (Carney and Watts, 1990; Pred and Watts, 1992; Carney, 1996) and the structural motivations, both local and institutional, for the lumping of highly differentiated women's economies and lifeways into a unified household in the development discourse (Geisler, 1993). In all of these cases, the idea of the unitary household is shown to be inadequate for understanding the lives and coping strategies of those living in development contexts.

While these economic and qualitative social scientific efforts to 'get the household right' challenge various economic and social functions of the household, they share a similar shortcoming. These efforts base their critiques upon the assumption that the household is the appropriate site at which to study the function in question. Such an assumption reifies the household by placing it outside of analysis. Development economics, regardless of the model used, operates under the assumption that the household is the institutional framework through which one can apprehend economic and social life in development contexts. The issue in economics is whether or not the function of this institution has been properly modeled. On the other hand, much of the empirical literature describing the failure of the unitary household model does so in terms of functional and static roles played by individuals within the context of an uninterrogated household (Geisler, 1993, p. 1967). These qualitative approaches take issue with the roles played by individuals within the household, but not the household itself.

In an effort to examine the household without reifying it, a number of authors focusing on West African contexts (Guyer, 1986; Brydon, 1987; Guyer and Peters, 1987; Ekejiuba, 1995) have developed a different critical approach that questions whether or not the household is in fact the appropriate site at which to anchor analyses of various economic and social practices. Rather than attempt to 'get the household right' from the perspective of a given institutional function, this literature begins from an analysis of 'the major flows and transfers of resources between individuals and units,' and uses this information to define 'the significant units of production, consumption and investment' (Guyer and Peters, 1987, p. 208) in a particular context.

In other words, their analysis begins with the identification of the relevant institutions or social units through which to frame their critiques of various economic and social practices, instead of the assumption that the household *is* the relevant institution.

At first glance, this literature seems to address the problematic assumptions undergirding the analyses of development economics by grounding the analysis of the household in local practices and processes. However, by seeking the 'correct' institution or social unit for a particular analysis, the alternative approach presented by Guyer (1986) and others, like the other approaches reviewed above, tends to reify the household (and other institutions) by treating it as an institution that precedes bargaining and contestation within the context under investigation.

By placing the issue of the constitution of the household outside of analysis, existing approaches to the household run against broad trends in recent geographic and related disciplines' efforts to understand everything from the ordering of nature by nation-states and development agencies (Scott, 1998) to the actions of elites in developing (Mitchell, 2002) and developed contexts (Duncan and Duncan, 2003) as embodiments of larger social, political and economic structures. Such efforts do not deny individual or collective agency, but seek to understand how that agency is bound up in these structures, both global and local, in such a way as to make particular actions and understandings complicit in relations of power and domination. It is my contention that viewing the household in a similar manner, as an embodiment of local relations of power and knowledge that reference local social roles and translocal economic structures, allows us to both critically examine its constitution as a local institution with particular functions and better understand the wider significance of those functions.

To illustrate how we might approach the household as an embodiment of local relations of power and knowledge, I now turn to an examination of how the household is constituted as a site of production and consumption in two villages in coastal Ghana through an ongoing process of understanding and managing economic and environmental instability that characterize the residents' everyday lives. This example illustrates the ways in which the institutional embodiment of these flows and transfers in the household in two villages in coastal Ghana does not precede economic and environmental change, but is both the condition for and result of local understandings of such change.

The changing construction of the household in Dominase and Ponkrum

Dominase and Ponkrum are villages of 5 and 211 residents respectively, (Ghana Statistical Service, 2004) located eight kilometers to the northwest of Elmina in Ghana's Central Region (Figure 1). The villages¹,

located 600 m apart, are nestled in the hilly interface between Ghana's narrow coastal plain and the thickly vegetated Upper Guinea Forest. While these villages and associated farmlands are not heavily forested, typically such areas have enough trees about to form a partial canopy. The study area receives around 150 cm of rain annually (Reading et al., 1995, p. 7), though due to the bimodal seasonality of the study area most of this rain falls in the May–September rainy season. The study area is also marked by one of the lowest mean diurnal temperature changes in West Africa, about 8°C (Reading et al., 1995, p. 55).

Over the past few decades, a number of related economic and environmental changes in the area have created an uncertain and unstable environment in Dominase and Ponkrum. Various post-independence logging schemes located 5 km to the north of the villages

initially brought improved roads and job opportunities to the residents of this area. These logging operations, however, also brought environmental change by depleting the local hardwood supply, removing shade cover for farmers, and altering local precipitation patterns to the point that today less rain falls in Dominase and Ponkrum than two decades ago. This decline in precipitation and loss of shade cover has reduced the fertility of the fields in the vicinity of Dominase and Ponkrum (while there is no local record of rainfall with a fine enough geographic resolution to support or refute these claims, see Gyesi et al. (1995), for a description of similar processes in another forested part of Ghana) and made the cultivation of cocoa, once a cash crop in this area (Eguafo Abrem Management Committee, 1955), a virtual impossibility. Local farmer Ekow feels that farmers have to struggle to produce a fraction of what

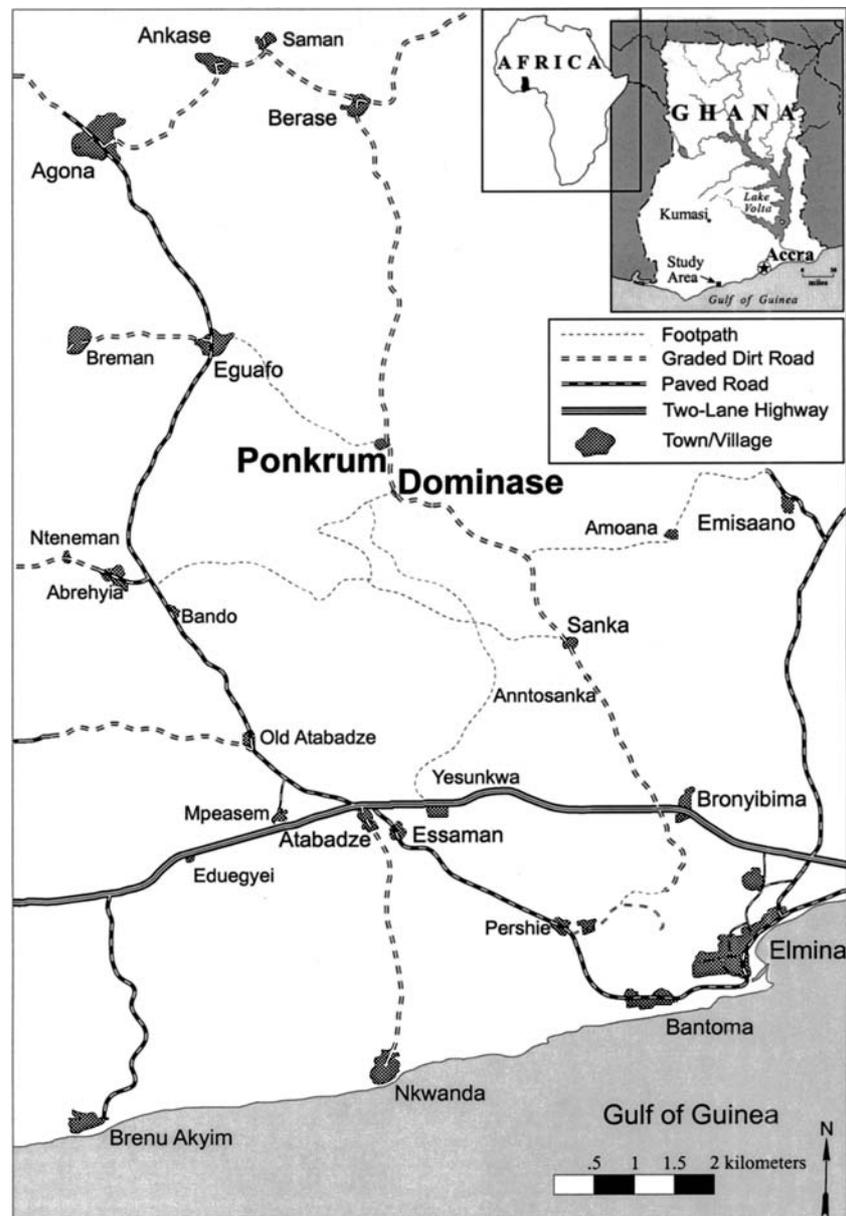


Figure 1. Locator map of the research area highlighting the villages of Dominase and Ponkrum.

the land used to yield, while Samuel, a lifelong resident of Ponkrum, says “I would not plant [cocoa], because it would spoil, because of the [lack of] rain.”

The declining state of the local environment and agriculture was compounded in the early 1970s by the closing of the local logging operation. With the loss of local logging, the primary source of non-farm employment (NFE) in the area also disappeared, which struck a blow to a number of household incomes in the villages. Further, as the logging venture ended, so did the maintenance of the feeder road through the villages constructed by the logging company. The decline of the road reduced the villagers’ access to wage labor in coastal towns, and therefore added to the overall loss of NFE. In this context, NFE is critical because, as Low (1989, p. 42) demonstrated in Southern Africa, the incorporation of wage labor into a household labor pool functions much like a variable crop strategy might by providing an alternate form of income that serves as a safeguard against crop failure, or, in this context, a degrading environment. The loss of wage income and the declining local environment has created a context in Dominase and Ponkrum best summarized by local resident Samuel: “You could live here for ten years, and you will not save a million cedis [\$266 in February 2000].”

Today Dominase and Ponkrum exist in a primary-satellite settlement configuration, with Ponkrum dominating this relationship in terms of population and infrastructure (Ponkrum contains a borehole and pump, the intersection of two roads, bars, and even a soccer field, while Dominase has no such amenities). The population of both villages is nominally Fante, a linguistic subset of the Akan ethnicity. While some residents have one parent of a different ethnicity, such as Ewe, they self-identify as Fante, and this is the language, kinship system, and land tenure system used in these villages. The residents of Dominase and Ponkrum center their livelihoods on farming or farm-related activities. The farmland of these villages is so interspersed throughout the surrounding area that farmers from one village routinely pass through the other on the way to their farms and often farm adjacent plots. Finally, the political structures of these villages are closely linked; for example, the current chief of Ponkrum was born in Dominase. Therefore, while their residents would likely object to lumping the two together, the physical, economic, historic and social proximity of these villages suggest that for the purposes of examining the relationship between economic and environmental change and the household in these villages they can be thought of as a single entity with two settlement loci.

In April of 2004, the government of Ghana graded the dirt roads through Dominase and Ponkrum, thus rendering them motorable for the first time since the late 1960s. As a result, the residents of these villages now have access to regular transportation to and from Cape Coast and Elmina, major regional sites of NFE opportunity. Forty-six percent (26 out of 57) of the residents

interviewed after this road improvement were already looking for NFE, a significant change in this context, since less than 10% of this population was seeking NFE before the improvement of the roads. Only 9% (5 of 57) actually held NFE at the time of the data collection represented below, and therefore the relationship between economic and environmental change and the household discussed below reflects a point in time. In the future it is likely that this area will see dramatic economic and ecological changes in the face of this transportation improvement that will influence the local construction and function of the household.

Methods

The following discussion of economic and environmental change and the household in Dominase and Ponkrum is based on five seasons of fieldwork in these villages, four between 1997 and 2000 and a fifth in the summer of 2004. During my 14 months in and around these villages I conducted extensive participant observation of the lives of the residents to help me understand this context and how it fits into my broader concern for the local strategies residents employ to negotiate economic and environmental change at the rural margins of globalization. My initial research into these issues, which ran from 1997 to 2000, used participant observation as a springboard from which to engage 30 residents of Dominase and Ponkrum (14 men and 16 women) in more than 60 interviews about the household economy and agricultural strategies. Initially, I sought to interview anyone who was willing, both to gather information for my research, and to clarify the nature of my inquiry to the rest of the villagers. Later, as I perceived a division, and perhaps even a conflict, between the agricultural and economic systems presented by men and women, I began to focus on balancing my sample of interviews in each of these villages by gender and age. These largely unstructured interviews were part of what Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 47) call a continuous design model. Under this model, I followed the answers I received to various questions on the household economy and agricultural practice to new lines of inquiry, until I reached what Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 61–62, 111–112) call theoretical saturation, the point at which new concepts and paths of inquiry ran out and the data gathered through my interviews began to repeat itself. At this point I used surveys to reach additional residents and flesh out my understandings of certain key socio-economic relationships and gendered understandings of agriculture. These surveys were administered to 24 residents (17 men and 8 women) in Dominase and Ponkrum.

I returned to the villages in 2004 to conduct follow-up research on the strategies I observed between 1997 and 2000, only to find a newly graded road bringing new transportation options to local residents. These transportation options appeared to be a factor in rapidly changing economic expectations among local residents.

I spent the field season reshaping my questions about household economies, gender roles and agricultural practice drawn from the 1997–2000 fieldwork to suit the changing research context during the 2004 field season. To do so I conducted semi-structured interviews with 57 adult residents (28 men and 29 women) representing 34 households in these villages². Nine of the 57 individuals interviewed in 2004 were single (either divorced or a widow/widower). Two other households were represented by data from the husband only. The remaining 46 individuals belonged to 23 households in which I interviewed both the husband and wife in an effort to triangulate income and expenditure information. The new data resulting from these interviews, while reinforcing earlier trends in my data with regard to gendered agricultural strategies, expands upon these trends through a new concern with income differentials and greater individualized data on income from various crops, amount of landholding, and patterns of consumption than in the earlier dataset.

The following observations about Dominase and Ponkrum draw from both the earlier and more recent interviews, surveys, and observations. Though most of the residents with whom I spoke in 2000 and 2004 were eager to have their names recorded and reported in any publications, the inclusion of income and landholding data from the 2004 data set makes the use of their names problematic. I have therefore used pseudonyms throughout this article.

The household in Dominase and Ponkrum

The household plays a number of organizing roles in the economic and social lives of those living in Dominase and Ponkrum. However, only its role as the institution through which individual gain access to land is clearly recognized by all residents of these villages. Within the Akan land tenure system system, land is not held by individuals, but by familial lineages within nominally exogamous matrilineal clans (see Egyir, 1998, pp. 10–13 for a broader discussion of land rights among the Akan in Ghana). Each lineage controls land that is granted to its members for their use by the lineage head (who is usually a man). The head of household is allocated land for the entire household, which he or she then distributes within the household (Egyir, 1998, p. 5; see also Brydon, 1987; Awusabo-Asare, 1990; Quisumbing et al., 1999, 2001).

Though the household functions as an institution through which individuals gain access to land in this context, and it is through agriculture that the vast majority of local residents earn their livelihoods, one cannot simply extend the function of the household to economic production or consumption. Despite the reliance of household members on the male head for access to land in Dominase and Ponkrum, individuals within the same household in Dominase and Ponkrum almost always plant separate farms (one common exception is when a woman is pregnant and unable to tend her own

farm). These farms, generally comprised of one or more non-contiguous plots measured in units of land called pools, are designed to take advantage of differing soil and shade conditions found on clan lands in the vicinity of the village. Further, the owner of the farm, regardless of gender, is recognized by all to control the proceeds of that farm (Egyir, 1998, makes a similar observation about the control of income in the broader Akan context). Though the income generated by a specific farm belongs to the household member who owns that farm, members of a household contribute labor to all of the farms associated with that household—though women often contribute a disproportionate amount of labor to men’s fields. Therefore, the household functions as an institution through which labor is organized and distributed (unevenly), but this organization is informal and not sufficient to control all production-related decisions.

Therefore, in Dominase and Ponkrum the household does not have a ‘customary’ role in either production or consumption, except to informally organize labor. However, when discussing patterns of income and expenditure with residents of these villages, I found that men persistently claimed to control a ‘shared income’ which included at least portions of the agricultural income of other members of their household. For example, John, a farmer in his late 20s with a wife and small baby, said of his household’s incomes, “I control the shared income.” Kodzo, a farmer and petty trader in his mid-thirties with a wife and several children, stated ‘I keep the shared money, and have final say over it.’ Kweku, a farmer in his mid-thirties with a wife and several children, said “The crop money is for both of us, but I decide what to do.”

The merging of autonomous incomes into a ‘shared income’ under the control of men is controversial, as there is no provision for such income in the land tenure system of the area, and therefore no authority by which such cooption of resources can take place in a legitimate manner. A large number (but not all) of the married women in Ponkrum who I interviewed asserted their control over their farm income. Esi, John’s wife, claimed, “The money from crops is for the person planting [those crops].” Abena, the elderly wife of the chief of Ponkrum stated, “The farm is for me, so I get the profits.” Ama, married to a farmer who splits his time between Dominase and Ponkrum and another nearby village, said “The palm and the coconut are for my husband. The rest is for me.” Ekuu, married to a member of my field crew, claimed “I use my crop money for buying fish for soup. [My husband] uses his for himself.”

Despite the claims of women, in practice men control the economic decisionmaking of the household, often to their own benefit (Egyir, 1998, p. 17 observes similar outcomes in the broader Akan context). For example, men often pool income from their own and their wives’ farms to purchase items such as *akpeteshi* (locally-distilled alcohol) and batteries, which are clearly not

household necessities and, in the case of the batteries, go toward servicing a radio that the man often carries out of the house, thereby making it impossible for his wife to use it as well. With the exception of clothing, the women I interviewed rarely mentioned purchasing any goods that were for their own private consumption (see Kongstad and Mönstedt, 1980; Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Geisler, 1993, for similar observations in the broader African context). The merging of men's and women's incomes into a 'shared income' signals a construction of the household not as a narrowly defined institution that plays a role in land tenure and labor organization, but as *the* broad institution through which production and consumption (to the extent that individual's consumption within the household is shaped by their access to resources with which to purchase materials) take shape.

In these households one cannot explain either the unusual (within local land tenure rules) claims made by men over women's income or women's limited resistance to these claims through an examination of how the household functions as an institution of production and consumption. Even an approach that questions whether or not the household is in fact an institution of production or consumption fails to illuminate the form taken by these claims and their outcomes. Indeed, the limited resistance on the part of women in this context is based on the claim that the household is not such an institution, but this claim has little material effect on the constitution of the household as an institution of production and consumption. If, however, we examine the relations of power and knowledge the household embodies in Dominase and Ponkrum, we can place this resistance in context and better understand how the household functions as a social and economic institution. In these villages, a key point of access to these relations of power and knowledge are the local strategies for managing economic and environmental uncertainty.

Uncertainty and the household in Dominase and Ponkrum

The residents of Dominase and Ponkrum have developed two main strategies to manage their challenging, uncertain context. The first seeks to balance market and subsistence production within the household to guard against economic and environmental uncertainty. The second emphasizes household market participation, treating the accumulation of cash resources as the solution to this uncertainty. The strategy employed by a particular household is closely linked to the income of the male head of household. Seven of the ten³ households with male heads earning less than \$340⁴ annually adopted a 'balanced' strategy that employed both subsistence and market-oriented strategies (the remaining households adopted a strategy somewhat similar to that described as a 'market' strategy below). Six of the seven households with men making more than \$340 a year employed a 'market' strategy oriented toward cash income through the sale of agricultural products and

through various non-farm economic activities (the other household adopted the 'balanced' strategy mentioned above). It is likely that the 'outlying' households seen in both income groupings were experiencing a transition in their livelihoods (i.e. the recent acquisition of a job by the male head of household), resulting in a situation where the household strategy was out of step with the male head's reported income in 2004⁵. Each strategy produces/rests upon different constructions of the household that, while having similar manifestations with regard to issues of social power and economic practice, are closely tied to the income of the male head of that household because of the issues of control over the household that different levels of income grant these men.

The 'balanced' strategy

A close examination of the agricultural and economic strategies of the residents of Dominase and Ponkrum suggests that in households where the male head earns less than \$340 a year, men have a much greater market orientation in their agricultural activities than do women. This variable orientation is evinced in two ways. First, men were more likely than women to plant crops like cocoa and palm that derived most of their value from market sale. In 2004, palm, which takes its value from the sale of its nuts to large processors for the manufacture of palm oil, was found on 100% of men's farms in this lower-income cohort, while none of their wives' farms contained palm. Second, in these households men tend to have a greater market orientation in their agricultural production than do women (Figure 2). While this difference in perception may appear to have few practical implications, as these are different perceptions of the same crop that would face similar

	Men		Women
Pepper	Sell more than eat	Pepper	Sell = Eat
Garden Egg	Sell more than eat	Garden Egg	Sell = Eat
Maize	Sell more than eat	Maize	Sell = Eat
Pineapple	Sell = Eat	Pineapple	Sell more than eat
Cassava	Sell = Eat	Cassava	Eat more than sell
Tomato	Sell = Eat	Tomato	Sell = Eat
Okra	Sell = Eat	Okra	Sell = Eat
Water Yam	Eat All	Water Yam	Eat All

Figure 2. Visual representation of the common crops in the 'balanced' households as observed in 2004. Darker colors indicate a greater market orientation in the motivation of planting a particular crop. While men are not completely oriented toward market production, they have a much greater focus on the market than do women, especially when one considers that only one woman planted pineapple in this cohort, and her perception of this crop might be an outlier.

problems regardless of the gender of the farmer, this differentiation is important because it speaks to the overall production orientation of men and women in these households that might be lost if examined in terms of material outcomes alone. Indeed, farming largely the same crops, even with different relative emphases, does not result in greatly differentiated agricultural incomes. In 2004, the average pool of a man in this income cohort yielded a profit equal to \$35.51, while the average woman's pool yielded \$41.99. The difference between the average men's (\$159.04) and women's (\$54.27) agricultural income under this strategy only becomes significant because men tend to farm three and a half times as many pools (an average of 4.6) as their wives (an average of 1.3). Men in this cohort are able to farm three and a half times as much land as women in Dominase and Ponkrum because they are responsible for the allocation of land to the various members of their households. It is through the allocation of land that the male head of family can ensure his economic relevance to the household, since women's farms are not only more productive than men's per unit of farmland, but they also tend to bring in far more non-agricultural income than their male-owned counterparts.

Only three of 10 men in this lower-income cohort reported significant income beyond their agricultural profits, all three collecting rents on farmland they or their clans controlled. These rents yielded an average of \$12.73 annually. Seven of 10 women in this cohort reported significant income beyond their agricultural income. All seven obtained this income through activities such as petty trading and food selling (activities generally financed through farm income), earning an average of \$96.83. These other sources of income reduce the gap in individual incomes in these households to the

point that men only out earn women by an average of \$171.77–\$151.10 (Figure 3).

Though their incomes are quite similar, the differential orientation of men's and women's agricultural strategies among this income cohort in Dominase and Ponkrum suggests a balanced, agriculture-based strategy for negotiating the economic and environmental uncertainty that characterizes residents' lives. Men try to maximize the economic gain of their households, providing a buffer against weak crop years by selling scarce crops at market for a higher price and then using the money to maintain the household. Women farm for subsistence, ensuring that the household will have adequate food even if larger economic forces prevent its members from obtaining market access or nonfarm resources that might otherwise further the well-being of the household. Yet such a balanced strategy can only come about if the disparate agricultural strategies of men and women, embodied in their autonomous farms, are linked into a single income that is employed to meet the needs of the larger household. There is no means by which to do this under traditional Akan land tenure.

It is in response to this need that the male heads of the 'balanced' households construct a 'shared income' that joins men's and women's agricultural incomes (though rarely addressing incomes from other sources, such as non-farm employment or petty trading in the village) into a single fund under the control of the male head of household. In these households, women generally contest the idea of a shared income by referencing local land tenure rules to support their claims to their agricultural incomes. Despite the open contestation of the appropriation of their incomes, women generally lose effective control over their agricultural incomes.

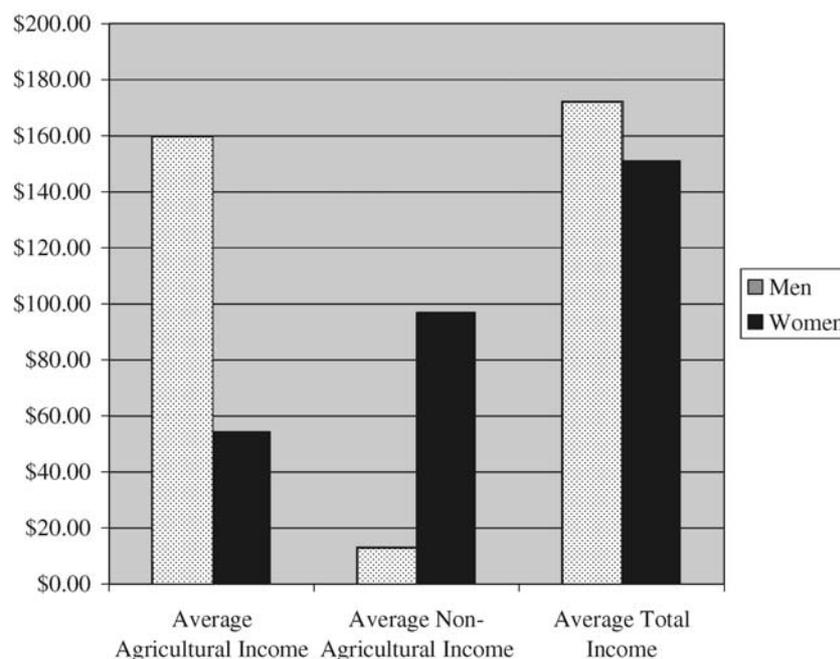


Figure 3. Men's and women's sources of income and amount in 'balanced' strategy households, 2004.

Women's contestation of this appropriation fails to have any material effect on the control of their agricultural incomes because of their understanding of the economic and environmental uncertainty which characterizes their everyday lives. In these households, economic and environmental uncertainty is understood in terms of the strategies employed to manage it. This 'balanced' approach to economic and environmental uncertainty, which incorporates both market and subsistence-oriented strategies, requires coordination of otherwise autonomous incomes. Men provide this coordination through the creation of a shared income linking the disparate incomes of men and women.

Defining economic and environmental change as an issue to be dealt with through a mixture of market and subsistence approaches to agriculture, this 'balanced' strategy for managing economic and environmental change rests on/produces a system of social differentiations supported at least in part by a gendered division between market and subsistence agricultural production. The understanding of economic/environmental uncertainty as something to be managed through both market (men) and subsistence (women) strategies gives an instrumentality to these differentiations by creating a need to coordinate men's and women's incomes. Therefore, women's subsistence farming represents their understanding of both the economic and environmental uncertainty in the context in which they live, and the possible actions for managing that uncertainty. This understanding of economic and environmental conditions overrides the local land tenure system, for while women speak strongly for the control of their own incomes, they continue to plant for subsistence and have those incomes appropriated by the male head of household. Under this strategy, the household is constructed through local understandings of economic and environmental uncertainty as the institutional site of production and consumption in a manner that (re)produces the social relations of power that enable men's appropriation of household labor.

The 'market' strategy

The construction of the household seen in the 'balanced' households of Dominase and Ponkrum is particular to the understanding of economic and environmental uncertainty that produces/is produced by particular social relations of power. The second strategy employed by households in Dominase and Ponkrum to manage an uncertain economy and environment, which focuses on increasing the overall market orientation of the household to have as much cash on hand as possible when instability strikes, results in a different construction of the household, and therefore different relations of power. In these 'market' households, both men and women adopt market sale as the primary goal of their economic activities. Such a claim is not immediately evident in a survey of the crops found on men's and women's farms. These farms are quite differentiated, with crops aimed

primarily at market sale being found in greater numbers on men's farms than women's. For example, acacia (used to make charcoal for sale in larger coastal towns) is found on all eight farms owned by men of this cohort, while only one woman in this cohort plants acacia. The same ratio holds for palm as well. However, if we examine the perceived goal behind planting these crops, we find that while men's agricultural strategies are more intensely engaged with markets than those of women in these households, both men and women orient the vast majority of their agricultural production toward market sale (Figure 4). Therefore, there exists a similarity in agricultural strategy between men and women of 'market' households not seen in the 'balanced' households. While this difference appears more perceptual than material when examined through farm composition, this shared agricultural strategy has great material effect on the construction of the household.

The overall greater market orientation of the agricultural production of members of these households, both men and women, results in greater per-pool productivity than that seen under the 'balanced' strategy. In this cohort, the average man earns \$67.22 per pool (for an average annual agricultural income of \$500.08), while the average woman earns \$55.94 per pool (an average annual agricultural income of \$119.34). As in the 'balanced' strategy, the principal differentiation in agricultural incomes among the 'market' households comes from the fact men farm nearly four times as many pools (an average of 9.3) as women (an average of 2.6).

Unlike those households under the 'balanced' strategy, though, *both* men and women in these households have access to other economic activities that can generate income. Four of the seven men in this cohort either had NFE or collected significant rents from their landholdings, earning an annual average of \$556 from these alternative sources of income. Four of seven women in this cohort claimed some other economic activity, from

	Men		Women
Acacia	Sell All	Acacia	Sell All
Garden Egg	Sell All	Garden Egg	Sell more than eat
Okra	Sell All	Okra	Sell more than eat
Palm	Sell All	Palm	Sell more than eat
Tomato	Sell All	Tomato	Eat more than sell
Pepper	Sell more than eat	Pepper	Eat more than sell
Maize	Sell more than eat	Maize	Sell = Eat
Cassava	Eat more than sell	Cassava	Sell = Eat

Figure 4. Visual representation of the common crops in the 'market' households as observed in 2004. Darker colors indicate a greater market orientation in the motivation of planting a particular crop. Note the overall greater market orientation of these households when compared to men and women of 'balanced' households.

petty trading to food selling, earning an annual average of \$103 from these activities. Thus, unlike in 'balanced' households, non-farm economic activity exacerbates the income gap between men and women: among the households of this cohort, men (\$1056.08) earn an annual average of nearly five times as much as do women (\$222.34) (Figure 5).

While the economic strategy of market maximization does not inherently require the merging of autonomous men's and women's incomes, in the households using the 'market' strategy, as in those operating under the 'balanced' strategy, men construct and control a 'shared' income over which they have control out of the different agricultural incomes of the household. Few women in the 'market' households contest this construction. Here, the cooption of women's incomes by men is relatively straightforward. Because men's economic contribution is so disproportionate to women's, the loss of access to men's income would, without question, negatively impact women's overall well-being were they to leave their husbands to protect their own incomes from appropriation. Women's access to and dependence on men's incomes can be indirect, such as living in a well-maintained house, or direct, in the form of an allowance. Five of the seven women living in a 'market' strategy household received large allowances from their husbands (an average of \$103 a year), amounts roughly equal to either their agricultural incomes or the amount of money they earned in non-agricultural activities.

The 'market' strategy for managing economic and environmental uncertainty, like the 'balanced' strategy outlined above, draws upon and produces social differentiations that shape the construction of the household. Here, the household is an object/process that allows men to co-opt other incomes within the household through a gender division where men take their social position from the disproportionate contribution to the household

economy made by their agricultural and non-agricultural incomes. In these households, men's income becomes a sort of shared income not because men cannot override other claims on that income, but because using income as a means of differentiating gender roles is instrumental to men's control over these households. Within the 'market' approach, uncertainty and instability are to be managed through cash income. Because men earn several times what their wives do in these households, access to men's income is constructed as crucial to the well-being of all members of the household. The household becomes the institution of production and consumption because the household and the male head of the household become conflated. Women's incomes, by comparison, are secondary. The division between men and women created by/creating this strategy, while still enabling the cooption of women's incomes, is constructed via means that reduce the challenges seen to this cooption. When women challenge this cooption, men can offer their wives large 'allowances' to offset their efforts to resist.

Different households, same outcomes?

'The household', as manifest in Dominase and Ponkrum, is in fact at least two different constructions of this institution that have a similar manifestation in men's cooption of women's income with reference to local economic and environmental uncertainty. It is only by examining the constitution of this institution as a site of production and consumption, however, that we can see the ways in which the household is a social object through which various power relations, local understandings of economy and environment, and social roles are channeled and shaped. The households of Dominase and Ponkrum are not the institutional settings in which these social roles, relations and understandings

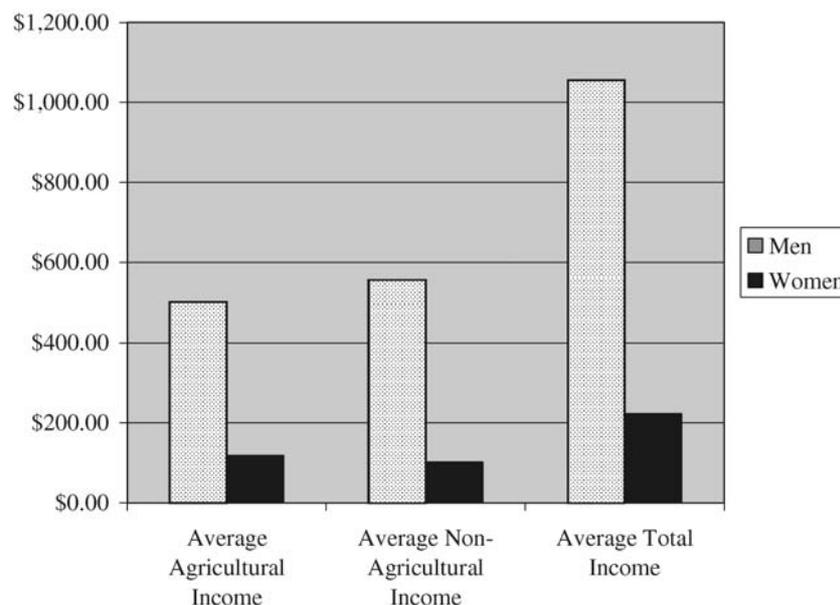


Figure 5. Men's and women's sources of income and amount in 'market' strategy households, 2004.

play out, but integral parts of these roles, relations and understandings.

Conclusion: getting the household right

The household will remain an important institution in both development practice and theory. This importance may indeed increase as development continues to focus on small, specific projects and the institutions through which to make such projects work. Accompanying this trend toward the smaller and more specific in development is an increasing focus on indicators of quality of life, as opposed to economic production, as measures of project success. The quality of one's life cannot be separated from a sense of justice often tied to some form of self-determination.

This article argued that current development efforts to 'get the household right' as part of a larger effort to retool development toward smaller, specific projects targeting quality of life issues, misses the point of this retooling. Current efforts to get the household right flatten this institution into a fixed object, and in so doing so miss the relations of power that produce, and are produced by, the household. In the context of Dominase and Ponkrum, this production, while taking various forms, secures social relations that enable and naturalize men's appropriation of women's labor and income. To assume that the household is the meaningful unit of production and consumption in this context is to devalue or dismiss women's contestation of this definition, and to overlook the fundamental injustice of these constructions of this institution.

If development is to use the household, and other local institutions in the 'developing' world, as means to understand and address the issues facing the world's poor, development must cultivate a sensitivity to context currently absent in efforts to understand local institutions. New efforts must be aware of how the local definition and role of institutions like the household have seen changing constructions over time with reference to economic, environmental and other factors. These efforts must explore why definitions and roles have changed, and who gains from and is disadvantaged by such changes. By addressing these basic questions, development theorists and practitioners alike can come to a meaningful understanding of the household and other local institutions by enabling productive further examinations of development contexts, the problems faced by people living in those contexts, and possible local solutions to those problems.

Notes

1. While Ponkrum is clearly the dominant settlement of the two, Dominase deserves mention as a separate village and not merely an appendage of Ponkrum. Dominase has its own stool, a symbol of settlement

autonomy, and the few remaining residents are still seeking a new person to serve as chief and perhaps revive the village. Further, while the official statistics for Dominase record only five inhabitants, during my fieldwork I observed four households and some 15 residents living in this village.

2. Of this new sample, 16 of the men and 8 of the women were part of the 1997–2000 sample of interviews and surveys. The remaining individuals were either unavailable or not interested in further participation in the study. I had particular difficulty locating and interviewing individuals who previously had only completed surveys.
3. To develop my understanding of these strategies, I had to constrain my sample to those households for which I had separate data from both the husband and wife about their agricultural strategies and incomes. This ruled out the use of the individuals who were single, the households where I only had information from the husband, and several households where husband and wife were not planting separate farms, but working together on shared plots (in all cases because the wife was pregnant and unable to work her own field in 2004). This reduced my overall sample from 34 households to the 17 households discussed below. 15 of these households lived in Ponkrum, and two in Dominase.
4. All dollar amounts in this article are converted from Ghanaian Cedis using the rates current on the 20th of December 2004.
5. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that the outlier households where men made more than \$340 a year adopted a 'balanced strategy', and the outlier households where men made less than \$340 a year adopted a 'market strategy', suggesting that households in Dominase and Ponkrum move between these two strategies. While I expect the apparent contradictions between men's income and household strategy in these households to be resolved over time as these transitions end (thereby allowing these households to be grouped in with one strategy or the other), I hope to confirm this through future research in Dominase and Ponkrum.

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