10-1-1989

Review Of "Satisfying Africa's Food Needs: Food-Production And Commercialization In African Agriculture" Edited By R. Cohen

Raymond F. Hopkins

Swarthmore College, rhopkin1@swarthmore.edu

Recommended Citation

Raymond F. Hopkins. (1989). "Review Of "Satisfying Africa's Food Needs: Food-Production And Commercialization In African Agriculture" Edited By R. Cohen". *Journal Of Developing Areas*. Volume 24, Issue 1. 83-85.

https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-poli-sci/195

SATISFYING AFRICA'S FOOD NEEDS: FOOD PRODUCTION AND COMMERCIALIZATION IN AFRICAN AGRICULTURE. *Edited by Ronald Cohen.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1988. Pp. xi + 244, $25.00.

Ronald Cohen has assembled nine chapters discussing the political economy of African agriculture from varying disciplinary and country perspectives. He introduces the contributions of seven other scholars plus his own chapter on Nigeria by arguing that no single solution will satisfy the growing requirement for Africans to expand food production. Cohen favors a "multimodal" approach to production, thus explicitly rejecting the widely held thesis, put forward by Christopher Delgado in the second chapter, that proposes to target assistance to African peasant smallholders because they will outproduce and better distribute income than large farmers. Similarly Cohen rejects all single-factor emphases such as improved transportation and irrigation systems, reduction of state intervention and higher prices to producers, macroeconomic policy adjustment, or enhanced investment by the state in agriculture. No one factor is sufficient or even appropriate in all contexts. The contextually specific, experimental approach to solving African food problems advocated by Cohen is exemplified in the multifaceted recommendations and analyses found in the totality of competing views in his book.

Hyden, for example, in his chapter "Beyond Hunger in Africa—Breaking the Spell of Monoculture," concludes that monocropping and a monoculture legacy have proved inappropriate by expanding the African state and encouraging peasants to withdraw from official markets. He concludes that Africa's crisis is "an institutional and policy problem that has to be resolved through a redirection not only of African governments but also of the official donor agencies, whether bilateral or monolateral" (p. 74). While Hyden wishes to change paradigms, Delgado, an economist, focuses on alleviating constraints on small-scale peasant production. His solution includes enhanced research on agriculture and appropriate policies, expansion of availability of credit and fertilizers, development of rural infrastructure, and the improvement of human capital (education). The major theme Hyden and Delgado share is their criticism of external aid agencies' priorities.

Lofchie compares China's agricultural revolution of the last decade with opportunities in Africa. He finds significant differences between China's and Africa's situations. China has locally produced consumer goods, rural industrialization, intensive agricultural techniques, and an emphasis on food production that is compatible with the principle of comparative advantage. Africa does not. As a result, Lofchie argues, "African countries should rethink their commitment to the principle of food self-sufficiency and concentrate instead on the production of high value exports such as coffee, tea, cocoa, and other tropical commodities" (p. 100). His vision is that in coming decades Africa will export tea to China while China exports consumer industrial goods to the world. This celebration of classical economic principles and a deepening of the international division of labor challenges both Delgado's emphasis on unimodal agriculture and food production and Hyden's thesis that a "new paradigm" is required.

Mabogunje would likely agree with Lofchie, however. His emphasis is on the positive effects of macroeconomic reform in Nigeria after 1986. The realignment of the Nigerian economy in which all segments of the population shared a fall in real income leads him to conclude that both large-scale agricultural production (as in the model farm established by General Olusegun Obasanjo) as well as small-scale farming will respond favorably to the diversion of resources from urban to rural areas for development of roads and infrastructure. Entrepreneurship and response to economic challenge is the positive lesson that Mabogunje sees resulting from the economic pain of adjustment through which Nigeria passed in the mid-1980s.

In contrast to Mabogunje's emphasis on getting Nigeria's macroeconomic forces and priorities between urban and rural sectors adjusted, Goldsmith, Haugerud, and Bates all focus on sectoral or microelements in the political economy of Kenya. The chapters by Goldsmith and Haugerud emphasize the complexity and resiliency of small-scale peasant farming and its adaptability to physical and policy constraints. Bates, in an elegant chapter on "From Drought to Famine in Kenya," proposes that the behavior of the National Cereals Produce Board (NCPB) has in fact acted in a procyclical rather than countercyclical fashion with respect to fluctuations in maize production resulting from changing rainfall patterns. "There is thus evidence of a systematic tendency for the Board to manage its affairs in such a way that periods of abundance alternate with periods of drought" (p. 116). The large price swings that maize farmers experience, particularly in the informal market in which many of them are forced to sell during periods of abundance or buy (at high prices) during periods of drought, are compatible with findings by Haugerud in her study of Embu. Interestingly, even in a drought situation some Embu farmers realize a surplus for sale, while at the other extreme in periods of abundance some Embu farmers are reliant on additional purchases above their own production. Unsurprisingly, larger landholders contribute more and do better in food production. Goldsmith's chapter on miraa production and marketing provides the reader with considerable anthropological and economic detail regarding how the people of Meru produce and market this tree-crop stimulant. Chewing fresh leaves and tender young shoots of a miraa tree provides greater alertness and concentration—I gather it is more of a high—than drinking coffee but falls short of potent drugs. Goldsmith's details make easy reading: "Miraa is unloaded in the darkness and quickly finds its way to the correct owners who share cramped quarters and a gaaru-like communal existence" (p. 142). His chapter, however, is richer in anthropological explication than in useful prescriptions about food production. His study does suggest that miraa farmers and traders possess great adaptability and ingenuity, which, if generalizable to less perishable and lower value food crops, offer substantial hope that local entrepreneurship can provide solutions to Africa's food problems.

In the final chapter of the book, Cohen discusses the situation in Nigeria, reiterating points made in the introduction. He concludes, "The most important finding of this research is the generalization that small holders alone may not hold the solution to per capita food deficits." In contrast to the work of Delgado and many others who have written on problems of African agriculture (over a dozen books have appeared in the last few years on Africa's agrarian problems), Cohen's volume argues for a multimodal, country-specific, and entrepreneurial approach to Africa's food problems.

In many respects the particular disciplines of the respective authors predict well the points of reference and conclusions they put forward. Political scientists focus on policy reform. Economists focus on economic adjustment and appropriate investment priorities. Anthropologists see a variety of contextually specific solutions and urge sensitivity to the variety and authenticity of different approaches from large-scale to smallholder farming. Thus, the book is more a testament to the variety of efforts social scientists have used to understand and to help improve Africa's food crisis than a breakthrough in research or new perspectives.

RAYMOND F. HOPKINS
Swarthmore College

STRATEGIC MINERALS: THE GEOPOLITICAL PROBLEMS FOR THE UNITED STATES. *By Ewan W. Anderson.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988. Pp. xii + 160, $39.95.

The book begins with the assumption that the supply of strategic minerals is a complex, interdisciplinary problem involving technology, politics, economics, and geography. The author's purpose is to examine the key issues affecting U.S. supplies of strategic minerals and the vulnerability of these supplies. Following the introduction, four chapters address the subjects of dependence, sources, trade routes, and global threats and possible responses. A short summary concludes the book.

The introductory chapter reviews concepts from mineral politics and economics. A key argument shows that the mineral supply is controlled at all geographic levels from the very local to the international. Anderson explains the mutual dependence between mineral consumers and producers and shows that cost benefits go to consuming nations that are willing to risk dependence upon foreign exporters. The United States has thus given up self-sufficiency in strategic minerals in favor of free trade. "Strategic" minerals are those required by the United States, which, lacking adequate domestic supplies, must import them even though the supplies are subject to various instabilities.

Chapter 2, on dependence, describes the decline of mineral production in the United States and its increasing reliance upon imports. Anderson discusses the vulnerability of import sources in terms of logistics, political instability, and the mining infrastructure in exporting nations. He then selects numerous minerals that are potentially strategic to the United States and describes seven in detail—platinum, tungsten, tantalum, columbium, manganese, cobalt, and chromium. The chapter concludes by comparing the United States and its NATO allies with the Soviet Union, which is nearly self-sufficient in minerals.

Chapter 3 undertakes an assessment of risk for various sources of strategic minerals. The author proposes a model by which to evaluate risk,