

Göran Djurfeldt, Hans Holmén, Magnus Jirström and Rolf Larsson, *The African food crisis: lessons from the Asian Green Revolution*. Wallingford UK and Cambridge MA: CABI Publishing, 2005 x + 259 pp. GBP 65.00

This is an important book that deals with a major theme in contemporary development studies: why is there the divergence in growth between Asian and African countries? Agricultural policies play a major role in this debate, and indeed Asian countries have become much more self-sufficient in food than African countries. The Asian Development Bank predicted in 1977 a substantial supply-demand deficit in rice, wheat and maize by 1985, possibly ranging from 24 to 30 million tons. "Less than a decade later, starting in 1982 and peaking in 1986, Asian rice farmers experienced the so-called 'crisis of success' as the world market price of rice plummeted" (p.25). "Whereas population in Africa South of the Sahara has quadrupled since 1950, cereal imports have increased ten fold between 1961 and 2001" (p.66). This book highlights the role of improved seed and fertiliser or "the green revolution" in this divergent development path. The authors stress the importance of the institutional component in this "revolution" in Asia: driven by the state; mediated by the market and dependent upon smallholder farming. In the African situation there is no shortage of "green revolution" initiatives, but these do not persist. The authors speak about the limping green revolution in Africa. The book contains thematic chapters, for example about the State and green revolution in Asia or on the role of technology in African agricultural successes, and chapters dealing with four African countries: Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana. Surveys, called the AFRINT studies, were carried out in selected regions in the latter countries. They dealt only with food crops: rice, maize and cassava.

The book offers a surfeit of information and the interested reader is advised to be selective. I recommend paying special attention to Rolf Larsson's article on crisis and potential in smallholder food production in Africa that synthesises the findings from the survey. It documents not merely a stagnant or declining mass among African farmers, but also a highly productive minority of commercially oriented farmers. Yields are generally low in Africa, but the survey documented "a general gap of about 60% between the majority and the best performing farmers within the same village" (p.116). The potential for higher productivity is thus there, but it is not realised because of social and economic factors. The nature of market integration is then one of the crucial factors. For example: "Off-farm income in the form of employment, however, has the opposite effect. Employment in the form of low income jobs underlines the poverty condition of affected households and indicates that crop sales for this group are distress sales. This is a condition they share with households without access to off-farm incomes" (p. 129). In such statements I recognise the situations that I encountered while studying rural Africa in recent years, albeit that I would lay more stress on the exploitative relationships between rich and poor.

The chapters on particular countries are sometimes surprising. For example, the chapter on Ghana documents a spurt in the production of food crops as a response to structural adjustment. In Kenya, reduced government involvement in subsidising production led to a fall in output. The Tanzanian chapter is puzzling in this respect. The authors say that

there were production gains in the immediate post liberalization period up till the early nineteen eighties. "However, such gains have not been sustained, especially after 1994 when all subsidies for the agricultural sector, both explicit and implicit, were removed" (p.199) . Yet, Figure 11.2 presents after 1994 some of the highest production figures since 1961. Production figures do become more erratic then. This is a theme that could have been explored further. Production scores become more erratic if there is a less stable environment in terms of credit, input supply and crop marketing, but we know relatively little about the reasons why. I disagree, however, that "Unlike the Asian experience, however, policies in Tanzania were weak on credit supply and administration as well as on development and maintenance of marketing structures" (p.199). During the nineteen seventies and eighties there was a maize boom in four regions of Tanzania: Rukwa, Ruvuma, Mbeya and Iringa. Over a period of more than a decade this was carried by credit, a dependable input supply and produce marketing on the basis of a pan-territorial pre-planting producer price. It is of course logical that one will query findings more, the more one is acquainted with countries and regions. It is a major strength of the book that it gives so much material to agree and disagree with. Even if one cannot muster the energy to read this dense mass of information, it can very profitably be browsed.

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