Women striving for self-reliance. Diversity of female-headed households in Tanzania and the livelihood strategies they employ
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Performing this study proved an entirely pleasant experience from start to finish. Far back in 1990, ideas about living and working in Africa became more concrete when my husband found a job as a Medical Officer in a rural hospital in Tanzania. Two years later, we (my husband, our oldest daughter and me) were to be posted abroad by Memisa. During that intermediate period, between 1990 and 1992, I prepared myself for the possibility of performing research in the village where we were to live for a number of years. I completed a one-year study at the Faculty of Rural Development Sociology in Wageningen. I received advice and instruction in selecting subjects for an academic study from Ir. B.E.J.C. Lekanne dit Deprez and concerning research in Tanzania from Dr Jan Kees van Donge. I am very grateful for their guidance during the preparation phase. I would especially like to thank Dr Jan Kees van Donge for offering me the following advice: “Consider producing a thesis, as you will have the rare opportunity of performing an exceptionally long period of fieldwork, in which you will be exposed to knowledge and experiences worthy of documentation.” Furthermore, he furnished me with a short letter containing some names and addresses of persons working at various institutions and at the University of Dar es Salaam, whom, he recommended, I should contact and who could assist in obtaining a permit for performing *utafiti* (research) in Tanzania. This was the first word of a new language I would eventually speak myself, Kiswahili. I owe many thanks to the Engineering and Consultancy Office Grontmij N.V., my employer at that time, who gave me the time and opportunity to attend lectures at Wageningen University during that year of preparation (1990-1991), in addition to my own scientific education. I studied Human Geography at the Faculty of Geographical Sciences of Utrecht University from 1986 until 1989.

My efforts to attend lectures and read voluminous studies on Tanzanian society and culture eventually resulted in the selection of the present study’s subject matter six months before my arrival in Tanzania. I was to study the economic well-being of female-headed households. Reviewing the literature on this subject neither convinced nor satisfied me of the supposed reasons for the seemingly inherent poverty of this group within the society. In the final period of preparations I made many visits to various libraries, most frequently to the Library of the African Studies Centre in Leiden. I borrowed many, many books, all of which I read during my first year in Tanzania. *Bedankt!* to Sjaan van Marrewijk and Ella Verkaik-Steenvoorden for their kind assistance, advice and patience during my search for books and articles. I often consulted them during and also after my stay in Tanzania. They gave me kind attention and understanding during that crucial period. Nothing I asked proved beyond their capabilities.

I made my first contacts with the University of Dar es Salaam three days after arriving in Tanzania. The letter from Dr Jan Kees van Donge advised me to contact Dr C.M.F. Lwoga of the Department of Sociology. Unfortunately, he was no longer employed at the University and was at that time working for the International Labour Organisation in Dar es Salaam. I
succeeded in contacting him and he kindly referred me to Prof. Dr J.P. Lugalla, Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Dar es Salaam. Based on a research proposal written on an old typewriter in Nairobi during our Kiswahili language course and the proposed appointment of Prof. Dr J.P. Lugalla as supervisor, the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology in Dar es Salaam, represented by Mrs. J.K. Ligunda, granted me a research permit. This provided me with the formal permission with which I could proceed with my research in Ndalal village. During my stay in Tanzania it was Prof. Dr J.P. Lugalla who supervised me and I would like to thank him very much for his guidance, support and supervision of my research.

My family and I arrived in Ndalal village on Saturday 23 May 1992. I would like to express my gratitude to all those women and men who welcomed me into their homes, showed me their kind hospitality, gave me their time and provided me with many warm memories during our visits. They radiated a feeling of great friendship and understanding. My status as a fellow villager, and as a mother, which facilitated our identifying with one another as women, probably contributed to the warm receptions I always received and shall never forget. I appreciated their questions and their eagerness to learn about the lives of women and men, farmers and families in the Netherlands. The conversations we held while sitting on vigoda (stools) or on the ground in front of their houses during the afternoon’s siesta were very pleasant and always cordial. I thank them for their cooperation, trust and patience, and for providing many pleasant experiences during the fieldwork. For reasons of privacy, I have altered their names in the cases mentioned in this study. In addition to the persons who responded to the questionnaires, I would also like to thank all those people whom I met in the village, in our home, at the shops, in the hospital, at the market-place etcetera, during my extended stay in the village. In this very convivial environment and during the many meetings and encounters I had, it became possible to live with them as a participant observer. Without their willingness, this study could not have been a success. A sante sana.

Regarding the period in Ndalal village, I wish to extend my gratitude to my dear research assistants Sharifa Njau and the late Antonia Mattias RIP. I would also like to thank Mary Makubiki. They assisted in asking countless questions, translating Kinyamwezi into Kiswahili (and vice versa) and elucidating any obscurities therein. My ndugu Sharifa Njau, was my first research assistant and we had a marvellous time together. She inspired me a great deal and she also knew exactly what my study was aiming to quantify. She was able to create an atmosphere of geniality and warmth as soon as we entered the homes of the local women. Her job as a nurse and midwife in Ndalal Hospital contributed to her being a well-known and respected person. Her kindness and love for the people, her insight into and understanding of the situations of women within the household meant that the conversations were very fruitful. Unfortunately, she had to leave Ndalal village in June 1994, but the late Antonia Mattias proved to be as suited to this job as Sharifa. It was Antonia who taught me much about agriculture in the locality and during our visits, she told me nearly everything I needed to know. She showed me, by her own enterprise, that women are able to sustain a household if they attempt to do so themselves – she herself was a single widow since March 1994. She was a very enterprising woman who was continuously searching for new sources of cash income, who collected fertilisers from the roads for her crops and who observed the market prices of tomatoes and groundnuts continuously in order to ensure large profits for her own harvest. She performed her research tasks excellently and together we formed a cooperative team. Her knowledge of the villagers and their activities combined with her reputation in the village made it easy to approach women and to receive invitations home, which facilitated our
conversations greatly. I am indebted to Sharifa and Antonia for their friendship, joy and love during the time we carried out the fieldwork, and during my stay in Ndala village. Antonia Mattias died in July 2000; a remarkable woman and good friend who will be missed by all who had the good fortune to meet with her.

I would like to thank Father Dr Frank Nolan of the White Fathers Mission in Ndala village for his assistance. He advised and corrected me, and conversations held with him about my research helped me to analyse what was relevant to my own research mission. Furthermore, I wish to thank Prof. Dr Trees Andréé of the University of Wageningen, whom I met during her visit to Ndala village, and who inspired me very much. She advised me about the formal procedures of finishing a thesis and how to proceed once back in the Netherlands. I am also grateful to the Sisters of the St. Charles Borromeo Charity in Ndala village, to the late Sister Sabina RIP, Sister Birgit, Sister Guido and Sister Kitty and all others who made us feel welcome in their community and gave us the feeling of safety and solidarity, and offered us a home away from home. They contributed to the fond memories of our stay in Ndala village, which will remain close to my heart for the rest of time. I would like to thank Noela Mbula, who often cared for our children at home while I was out in the field. She has become a close friend to them. Without her help with the household chores, I would not have been able to devote myself to my research the way I did.

We returned to the Netherlands in March 1996. Having acclimatised and settled in, I contacted Prof. Dr Carla Risseeuw of the Department of Social Anthropology and Sociology of non-Western Societies at the University of Leiden who was prepared to supervise me in analysing the data and tabulating the results obtained during my stay in Ndala village. I would like to thank her for her professional advises and ideas and for providing me with literature and lectures on gender ideologies and kinship relations that broadened my scientific knowledge and skills. She taught me to formulate questions on the realities of the research subjects, the people of Ndala village, and warned me not to permit my own knowledge about their realities to prevail when doing so. She supervised me from May 1996 until October 1999 and I would like to thank her for giving me the support I needed during that time. The larger part of the thesis, however, was supervised by Prof. Dr Ton Dietz, of the Amsterdam Research Institute for Global Issues and Development Studies (AGIDS) at the University of Amsterdam. My utmost gratitude goes to him for his excellent and professional guidance and supervision during the completion of this study. I am deeply indebted to him as he recognised the value of my research and the research material at a crucial stage in the writing up of this thesis. He placed himself at my disposal whilst I was writing my thesis and guided me in completing this piece of work. I wish to thank him for his enthusiasm about the content of my research, which he expressed during our meetings. This enthusiasm provided me with great inspiration. I would also like to thank him for his informed comments and arguments that not only increased the quality of this study but which also challenged me continuously. I also wish to thank him for his time and devotion in reading and re-reading the manuscript, bringing his expertise and editing skills to bear on the study. His assistance and contributions were crucial to the completion of this thesis and it is largely due to him that writing my thesis was a most pleasant experience for me.

This study also benefited from comments and contributions made by several other persons. I wish to give credit to the contributions of Prof. Dr J.T. Schrijvers of AGIDS (University of Amsterdam), Dr Loes Schenk-Sandbergen of AGIDS (University of Amsterdam), Dr Lorraine Nencel of AGIDS (University of Amsterdam) and John Houtkamp (former employee of the African Studies Centre in Leiden). My gratitude is also directed to Carina Mulé-Velgersdijk of AGIDS for her assistance in the administrative part of performing a thesis and to Maarten
Wispelwey for assistance in the layout work. I am very grateful to Dr Mirjam Ros-Tonen of AGIDS who assisted me by editing and correcting my manuscript in an excellent way. I am also indebted to Noel McCullagh MA of Integrator Translations, Groningen, and Howard Turner of Turner Translations for improving the standard of English. Special thanks also to Edy Mulié of IO-Graph in Utrecht for drawing all the maps. I am very grateful for the assistance provided by Gon Joosten, who furnished me with additional data about the villagers and their households in Ndala village and with more general data, obtained during the period following my stay in Tanzania, which helped me to keep this study up-to-date. Ann de Vries-Makulukulu deserves a special mention for translating the Dutch summary into her mother tongue, Kiswahili.

Last, but not least, I am grateful to all my relatives, friends and all others who continuously made inquiries into the progress of my research project. Every now and again, they gave me the opportunity to express my findings, discuss outcomes and project lines of thought, all of which helped me to critically analyse the data and tabulate it. Their support and interest is greatly appreciated. Special thanks go to Wilma Sevenhuysen, who was like a mother for my children, whilst I was occupied with research activities away from home. I wish to thank my parents who assisted my development in such a way that I was able to attain the goals I had set. I am extremely grateful to my husband Vincent for involving me in his African adventure, which appeared to be the mainstay of this study. I would like to thank him for his patience and interest in my progress, my thoughts and his admiration for what I did and how I did it without causing too much disruption for our children. I am more than indebted to my children Marije, Karlijn, Hielke and Jolien who had to endure periods of diminished attention from me, although I did manage to do most of the work whilst they attended school and after their bedtime. I am sure that they also benefited from it, as the lack of attention increased their already self-reliant nature and, to a certain extent, their independence from me despite their youth. I would like to dedicate this study particularly to Renske, who was, is and will be ever-present in my thoughts.