

## **The bureaucratic performance of development in colonial and post-colonial Tanzania**

***Please note: this is very much a draft. Should you want to cite or quote it, do contact me first; there may be a more polished version to consult.***

The present paper focuses on long-term continuities in the nature of development projects pursued in one of the most impoverished parts of Tanganyika/Tanzania, the southeast. The basic pattern identified is one of proposals that promise agricultural production increases, often projected in quite specific figures and supposed to be driven by new inputs or regulations. Over time, they tend to transmogrify into more complex and modest attempts to produce qualitative change in cultivators' methods, which are harder to express statistically. It is therefore fairly clear that the figures used in this context present a case of 'policy-driven evidence' rather than evidence-driven policy. Put differently, the passing off of wishful thinking as planning or assessment has become a recurrent feature of agricultural and social development in this region.

Nevertheless, the figures used in this are not simply produced out of thin air. Some of the compilers of figures assessed their quality quite carefully, and some formed part of quite concerted attempts to gather information on agriculture in the region.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, development programmes *have* changed over time in an attempt to take earlier failures into account. Yet they also keep returning to narratives with persistent moral overtones, of reward (for the dedicated cultivator) and punishment (for the laggard one) and have persistent voluntarist tendencies (if only the peasants decide to make an effort, all will get better). Numbers, in this context, end up in an ambivalent position of expressing part asserted or assumed realities, part explored ones, and part intentions.

Arguably, these features are best understood with reference to the political (rather than economic or social) significance of the development that planners and statistics discussed. The implicitly political nature of development programmes in post-colonial Africa has been examined at length, and very controversially.<sup>2</sup> There are far-reaching critiques of the whole proposition of development and its corollary, development aid. Those coming from the left tend to portray development programmes as ultimately geared towards creating economic benefits for the donors rather than the recipients of aid, through tied contracts, participation of companies from interested countries, or by enabling the continuation of debt repayments.<sup>3</sup> Those from the right tend to see aid as too closely tied into the reproduction of corrupt African elites to do much good.<sup>4</sup> There are also versions of such arguments that are not clearly politically affiliated, such as Alex de Waal's condemnation of 'Famine Crimes'.<sup>5</sup>

In the present paper, the focus is kindred to the studies of development projects conducted by the anthropologist James Ferguson. Unlike critiques that focus

---

<sup>1</sup> see the statisticians' comments in the next section.

<sup>2</sup> For a very perceptive critique see James Ferguson, *The anti-politics machine*; for an overview of the debate Paul Nugent, *Africa since Independence*; for a general critique of the concept and practice of development, see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering development*.

<sup>3</sup> See Nugent, *Africa since independence*; also Christopher Clapham, *Africa in the international system: the politics of state survival*. The charity Oxfam is, among other charities, an articulate proponent of this view.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent statement of this view, see Dambisa Moyo, *Dead aid: why aid to Africa isn't working*.

<sup>5</sup> Alex de Waal, *Famine crimes*.

on corruption and inefficiency, whether perpetrated by African elites or built into aid conditionalities, Ferguson is clear that development projects have manifest effects. These effects, however, do not pertain predominantly to economic change, but rather to the politics of the states receiving aid and of the locations where development efforts occur. (This is, in other words, not simply an argument about the 'neo-colonial' dependence of African governments on Western donors, but concerned with the reproduction and extension of states in particular African settings.)<sup>6</sup>

These points apply in the present case, albeit not in the exact same way as for Ferguson's study. He characterised the development project he examined in Lesotho as inextricably bound up with the expansion of state power in the countryside. In the present case, too, state power is at stake, but its expansion is not; rather, 'development' helps mitigate and manage the weak Tanzanian state manage its incapacities. It does this partly by providing protocols for the disbursement of imported, often foreign-controlled, resources. But as important is the rhetoric of development. It helps structure public performances of consultative interaction between 'the populace' and different levels of officialdom. Such gatherings may or may not lead on to actual economic, 'developmental' measures or effects. But they always help reproduce state power in the countryside.

The use of the terms 'rhetoric' and 'performance' does not, here, imply a concerted campaign of dissimulation. There is no assumption of an underlying grand plan, no conspiracy to mislead. Rather, certain terms, tropes and narratives recur because they are in some sense useful, and useful in a context of perennially lacking resources and limited options. The argument is thus also about the institutional dynamics of development among provincial officials. The rhetoric of public gatherings gets reproduced along the administrative food chain, as underlings seek to position themselves advantageously towards the centre.

In this regard, and inasmuch as it includes colonial precedents, the present case also speaks to the recently efflorescent literature on colonial and imperial development and, in particular, the figure of the expert. Helen Tilley's and Joseph Morgan Hodge's studies, in particular, show the complex evolution of ideas of African backwardness and progress, of needs and priorities for development, since the inter-war period.<sup>7</sup> In part, the experience of the region under discussion confirms the patterns they describe, for instance with the interest in 'soil conservation' arising in the 1930s and culminating in the 1950s. But it also indicates some of the discontinuities between programmatic discussions among imperial metropolis and colonial centres, and the pragmatic, haphazard, issue-driven considerations of officials in the sticks.

Put differently again, the present paper focuses on the weary succession of small-scale half-measures that made the spasmodic large-scale interventions, first the groundnut project of the 1950s and then villagisation in the 1970, so attractive to policymakers by comparison: the intermittent attempts to mitigate dire poverty that characterised policy in this region. Ultimately, poverty is what development projects seek to address, and development speak, no matter how specialised, is in a way a means of telling stories about (explaining) poverty. Considered in this light, both the tentative character of development planning and thinking, and its long-term regularities (especially the recurrent reliance on narratives of reward and punishment) become particularly apparent.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, *Anti-politics machine*; idem *Expectations of modernity*.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Tilley, *Africa as a living laboratory*; Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the expert*.

<sup>8</sup> On poverty as a moral problem in the African context, see John Iliffe, *The African poor*; for Europe see Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty: a history*.

The documentation on these small-scale measures also offers evidence of the mixture of institutional amnesia and flashes of institutional memory that at times informs development thinking. In a context where the status quo is identified with backwardness (as was very explicitly the case in this region since at least the Groundnut Project), development measures tend to be defined as innovations. This is part of what makes them plausible and promising. At the same time, though, where there isn't an obvious path towards economic advancement, such as developing mineral extraction, the purveyors of development unsurprisingly look towards precedent for inspiration. The constantly shifting paradigms of the development literature offer the opportunity to make the old new when presenting plans to both internal audiences (higher-level administrators) and external ones (the people to be 'developed').

### **Planning and voluntarism in early post-colonial Tanzania**

In 1961, an agricultural officer then deployed to the Southern Province of Taganyika transmitted to Dar es Salaam the 'production targets' he had set for the province. Here are the ones given for one district, Lindi:

For the purposes of the Plan the District has been divided into six broad zones based upon soil conditions and climate. In each zone minimum acreages to be cultivated by each family have been laid down as a result of which it has been found possible to set the following district production targets for the next five years:

	present average	estimated 1962	1967
(tons)			
Pulses	700	450	1500
Cassava	100	150	2000
Sesame	2500	4500	7000
Groundnuts	15	20	500
Caster	300	300	600
Copra	140	150	500
Cashew	6000	8000	12000 <sup>9</sup>

These increases were supposed to be achieved by increasing acreage, better 'crop husbandry', new seeds and only limited use of new technology; in other words, largely through significantly increased labour input by cultivators.

The development plan also made a strong statement for the need for better roads in the province, so as to move its cash crops more efficiently. Here, the author repeats a plea that officials in the province had been making since the early 1930s.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the optimistic estimates, the discussion of the need for infrastructural improvement acknowledges that cultivators here faced difficulties beyond their ability to effect change: poor access to markets that threatened to make their bulky, low-value trade goods unviable. This is the extent of the discussion of potential limitations on growth in the agricultural economy; none such were discussed for the production side.

<sup>9</sup> Tanzania National Archive (TNA) Acc 498/D30/23 3-year development plan, 1961/62-1963/64, p. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> TNA Southern Province files, Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 1933.

This acknowledgment of marketing problems thus coexists with a heavy emphasis on what might now be called 'behaviour change' by cultivators. The author claims that extended circumcision ceremonies and a system of land tenure 'under which large areas of potentially productive land lie neglected owing to the absence of the owner/occupier' limit production in Lindi district. He states that 'an approach has been made' to the District Council to 'change' these factors, without stating how. In this quite thinly populated district, it seems that this planner was aiming to abolish fallow. In more populous Mtwara district next door, he stated his intention

'To arrive at a standard minimum acreage for every cultivator to aim at and to try to get him to cultivate this area by the use of TANU and the TANU Youth League who will be taught to step out acres, and who will try to cajole more effort out of farmers by making public examples of those who do not try and models of those who do.'<sup>11</sup>

The official thus shows considerable awareness of the agricultural methods used by people in this area, but his preferred way of dealing with them involves bullying. Six years later, another official, based at the Ministry of Agriculture in Dar es Salaam, transmitted to the Regional Agricultural Officer of what was now the region of Mtwara (the southern part of former Southern Province) a 'linear projection of crops' for the half-decade 1966-70. He accompanied them with the warning that

'I must point out that the figures for 1966-70 are mere linear projections of the past trends. Hence it is assumed that whatever factors that have been affecting production during the past five years, will continue to do so at the same level and/or with the same degree of intensity. This is rather a broad assumption and therefore the figures should be interpreted very cautiously.'

A further reason for caution in handling the figures may be found in the fact that the author produced upward trends for all the crops he dealt with, even though for some of them yields over the previous half-decade had fluctuated wildly and declined in the most recent year.<sup>12</sup> Unlike his colleague six years earlier, though, this expert did not propose to change agricultural methods.

These two documents give evidence of different yet related approaches to developing African agriculture. One offers its 'linear projections' with elaborate cautions, but nevertheless conditioned by an unexplained optimism. The other proposes 'production targets' with great assurance and no explicit defense of their plausibility. Together, they illustrate the slippage between limited and problematic statistical information on one hand, and on the other programmatic thinking apparently unfettered by material constraints, and premised heavily on increasing cultivators' effort.

Quite possibly, anybody who has looked at this kind of material from the late colonial and early independence period in British Africa would recognise the tone mixed of technocratic optimism and nationalist idealism.<sup>13</sup> With new technology and cultivators' commitment to advancing the young nation, how could production not

---

<sup>11</sup> TNA Acc 498/D30/23 3-year development plan, 1961/62-1963/64, appendix b.

<sup>12</sup> TNA K1/D.16/13 Zyelji, Ministry of Agriculture, DSM, to the Regional Agricultural Officer, Mtwara Region, 14 March, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Discussed e.g. in Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940*; for nationalist euphoria in Tanzania in particular, see John Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanganyika*, and Susan Geiger, *TANU women*.

increase? In this sense, the documents above illustrate the mindset of 'late colonialism' with its focus on technological inputs and the 'modernisation' (de-tribalisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, etc) of society.<sup>14</sup>

But there is also a more pessimist undertone here, as evident from the reference to making 'public examples of those who do not try': evidently, not all cultivators were sufficiently keen. There is also a clear failure in the planning document to acknowledge the limitations of statistical information, and blatant voluntarism: an unstated but insistent assumption that cultivators can do things quite differently - be present in greater numbers, work more land, 'husband' it better - if only they want (or are forced) to. These undercurrents of 'late colonial' thought, too, have been recognised.<sup>15</sup>

They were, however, not limited in time to the late-colonial period. The exact same kind of reasoning was still applied in the 1990s. In a document entitled 'Soil and Water conservation project in Makonde Plateau', produced by the Regional Commissioner's Office in Mtwara in November 1991, planners projected that dried cassava production would triple from 1 ton/ha to 3 ton/ha in five years from the start of the programme proposed, through 'improved management'.<sup>16</sup> They also expected the price of such flour to rise from 10 to 25 Shgs per kg. The measures proposed consisted in the 'reservation', that is, removal from agricultural use, of land around a dozen wells on the plateau, afforestation especially in so-called 'shelter belts', and general 'coordination of services'.<sup>17</sup>

Why they would have such a dramatic effect on cassava production, in an area where land was reported to be under considerable stress and 'desertification' occurring, is not explained. But the references to improved management and integration of services (presumably referring to the agricultural extension services used by cultivators) suggest that once again farmers' effort is supposed to be the cause of change. Notwithstanding the many frustrations that technocratic optimism had endured since the 1960s, then, it was not going away. Nevertheless, the vocabulary and tone in which it was stated had changed somewhat. The background to these changes becomes clearer if we consider the antecedents of the 1991 document just cited.

### **Permutations of 'soil conservation'**

The Makonde soil preservation project just mentioned offers a neat study in the recurrence of a particular type of project, once it had been proposed. The 1991 study explicates a long list of precedents. It states that the thought to make the escarpment a forest reserve was first mooted in 1954, in connection with a large-scale scheme to improve water provision on the plateau.<sup>18</sup> Twenty-three years later, in 1977, the area in question was mapped and surveyed. For half a decade in 1981-86, there were discussions of evacuating the escarpment and making it a forest reserve. They were dropped partly because of the high costs estimated for compensation. Then, between

---

<sup>14</sup> On the social science account of change in late colonial Africa, see Frederick Cooper, *Decolonisation and African society: the labour question in French and British Africa*; also Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*.

<sup>15</sup> For this region in particular, see Gus Liebenow, *Political development*; more broadly, Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject*.

<sup>16</sup> 'Soil and Water conservation project in Makonde Plateau', Regional Commissioner's Office, Mtwara, November 1991, annex 2. RIPS library, Mtwara.

<sup>17</sup> Same report, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Liebenow, *Political development*, for more on the water scheme.

1987-1990, a number of small-scale afforestation projects had taken place, with ca. 240,000 seedlings planted.

Sources from the late colonial archive provide some additional insight into the interest in soil conservation and afforestation on the plateau. In 1963, the then agricultural officer for Mtwara, J A Whitehead, had written about the Makonde Plateau that:

[S]oil conservation ... is practically unknown....protecting steeper slopes by not cultivating them meets with strong opposition..... the position in Newala in some parts gives cause for serious concern ... tons of top soil will be lost .... if the people do not become alive to the dangers of cultivating the escarpment soon.<sup>19</sup>

Four years later, another agricultural officer, who signed himself Hilalo, stated that the 'evil custom' of cultivating on the slopes continued, and suggested making a bye-law against it.<sup>20</sup>

The terms used to express these concerns in the 1960s are familiar already from the 1950s, when forced 'soil conservation' measures had become a bone of contention in many places in British Africa.<sup>21</sup> For the region under discussion, Liebenow has shown that they resulted in a number of ordinances regulating the cutting of grass and cultivation in certain locations. They did not, however, result in projects involving forced labour contributions, of the kind that had been most liable to produce active resistance elsewhere, and they did not involve actual evacuation of these areas.<sup>22</sup>

The 1977 survey came on the heels of villagisation, which had been pursued aggressively on the plateau.<sup>23</sup> It forms part of a larger pattern of the influx of resources for agricultural innovation that accompanied the removal of the population into larger villages. The on-going discussion on evacuation of the escarpment in the early 1980s falls into the period of the gradual denouement of these schemes. It is perhaps not coincidental, and certainly telling, that officials buried the idea the same year the greatest champion of villagisation, Julius Nyerere, left office. It is thus easily possible to find a rationale for every stage in the exploration of this project in terms of current policy.

The 1991 report presents a new incarnation of the ideas that had lingered so long in administrative discussion. But now, the proposed project had an international sponsor: Finnida, the Finnish Development agency. The presence of Finnida in this region is traceable to the mid-1970s, when they were crucial to the setting up of water pipelines in newly villagised villages, through an agency known as Finnwater. In the late 1970s, they had cooperated in the soil and agricultural survey conducted by a British agency.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual reports Newala district, p. 37: Annual Report to Minister of Agriculture, Mtwara Region, 1963, J.A. Whitehead

<sup>20</sup> TNA 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual reports Newala district: Annual Report 1967 Newala district, agricultural division. 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 1968.

<sup>21</sup> David Anderson, *Eroding the commons*; James Giblin and Gregory Maddox, *Custodians of the land*.

<sup>22</sup> Liebenow, *Political development*.

<sup>23</sup> Priya Lal, 'Between the Village and the World: Imagining and Practicing Development in Tanzania, 1964–1975', unpublished NYU PhD, 2011, is a study of villagisation on the Makonde Plateau.

<sup>24</sup> Land Resources Development Centre, Tolworth Tower, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7DY, for Ministry of Overseas Development: Mtwara/Lindi Regional Integrated Development Programme - Report of the

Now, though, Finnida were proposing to work through a local arm, an agency known as RIPS, short for Rural Integrated Project Support. Then fairly newly set up, RIPS would become one of the most important and certainly the steadiest presence on the development scene in this region for the next thirteen years.<sup>25</sup> As the title of the agency suggests, it had a programmatic orientation towards aiming for close integration into the social contexts where it worked, and towards supporting small-scale projects thought to be in accordance with the priorities of villagers. This is reflected in the claim, made in the 1991 report that 'The project is participatory and heavily relies on successful involvement of the target groups in decision making and project implementation.'<sup>26</sup>

The paragraphs following this statement, nevertheless, specify under 'land use planning' that everyone allocated land under the terms of the project will be obliged to plant and raise trees. Moreover, bye-laws would be passed on soil and water conservation. These enforcement measures were to be accompanied by demonstration plots, training, seminars, field days, the use of cinema, posters and pamphlets. In other words, the project description contains elements that can be traced back to the inter-war years (demonstration plots), to the late colonial and early independence period (bye-laws; pamphlets), and others that reflect a conscious turn away from the centralised and top-down approach epitomised by the implementation, if not the original rhetoric, of villagisation. It was this newest 'layer' in the document, the emphasis on a 'participatory' approach, that enabled the project to pass as new, thus promising, in 1991.

It is not actually clear what became of the soil conservation project as set out in the above report. The RIPS library holds a feasibility study on it by a German development agency, but with that discussion trails off. The setting aside of land continued to be unpopular in the 1990s, so that failure to follow through on the project could be seen as evidence of actual responsiveness to villagers' preferences.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the districts under discussion became important sites for RIPS interventions, albeit of a somewhat different kind: rather than agriculture, the agency came to focus more on the provision of social infrastructure and, by way of helping 'wealth creation', goats.<sup>28</sup> With this transition, RIPS can be said to have made good on their insistence on listening and responding to rural peoples' needs. The records of the agency indicate that they took this aspect of their work very seriously, deploying a number of formalised procedures - transect walks, collectively-made drawings of villages' social geography, focus groups, video recordings - to explore and document villagers' priorities.

Nevertheless, while the term 'participatory' was new in 1993, the ambition to be so was not. The need to plan with the involvement of villagers had been repeatedly stated even in connection with villagisation, and indeed villagers were often consulted

---

Zonal Survey Team in Phase 2, Surbiton, 1979. Vol. 1: Methodology and physical environment; vol. 2: Farming systems and development prospects.

<sup>25</sup> The RIPS library in Mtwara, which holds several thousand documents, is evidence of the output of the project. Its presence is also felt in the work of a number of social scientists who have written about this region in the last two decades, such as John Wembah-Rashid, Pekka Seppaelae, Berta Koda and Stefaan Dondeyne.

<sup>26</sup> 1991 report on planned soil and water conservation project, p. 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> Personal conversations, especially with Taige Rudolfsen and Zuhura Mohamed, Lindi. See also Juhani Koponen's study on attitudes to forest reserves.

<sup>28</sup> See numerous documents on 'get a goat, lend a goat' schemes and goat-owning groups started by RIPS.

during that time, for instance on the siting of villages.<sup>29</sup> They could not, of course, expect to be actually heard: inhabitants of any village were liable to suggest that theirs should become the site of a new *ujamaa* village, so that they would not have to move. The decision on which village to oblige had to lie with higher authorities; a need for top-down decision-making was simply inherent in the project.

The main differences between villagisation and the methods of RIPS twenty years later, then, lie, firstly with the way in which consultation was formalised and recorded: the elaborate protocols for things such as transect walks and chapatti diagrams, and the insistence on repeating the process in the course of a project. Secondly, in sharp contrast to the pervasive reach of villagisation, RIPS specialised in small-scale projects intended to respond to the priorities expressed by villagers. In this regard, villagisation on one hand and RIPS on the other represented extremes, the two turning points of a swinging pendulum. It was not the first time that the pendulum had swung back and forth.

### **Transition from technocracy to participation: the Groundnut Scheme**

The Groundnut Scheme, started in this region in 1947, is rightly considered a case study in technology-led, overambitious development oblivious of its environmental and social contexts and quickly brought down by those.<sup>30</sup> Academic observers for a long time treated it as a case of temporary madness among British planners, who predicted production increases for groundnut from almost nil to world market-swamping quantities in a matter of years after having surveyed parts of the Southern Province from the air.<sup>31</sup> It is hard not to get a sense that Britain's post-war shortage of fats, and its lack of unoccupied (or at any rate un-owned) land had clouded the judgment of those responsible, making the sight of large swathes of apparently 'empty' land on which to grow oil seeds hard to resist. Surely, details such as surface water availability, labour supply and soil characteristics could be worked out along the way. Journalists put the cost of the project at about 30 million pound at the time British involvement ended.

But, as Matteo Rizzo has argued, the failure of the Groundnut Scheme to relieve Britain's oil seed shortage, or produce any significant amount of groundnuts, does not mean that it had no effects at all.<sup>32</sup> He has shown that for some people, the scheme played an important role in starting long-standing careers as both businesspeople and local leaders, and that the sense of prosperity it brought at its height was not entirely transitory. If nothing else, it left behind major pieces of infrastructure that continued in use for years. Arguably, some of the positive recollections and effects of the groundnut scheme he cites are not entirely due to the scheme itself, but to its conjunction with other positive developments of the 1940s. It was a decade of high global demand for cassava and millet, and cashew nut production, unlike groundnut production, was taking off. But whatever the exact balance of these factors, the 30 million pound spent did not disappear without *any* trace.

---

<sup>29</sup> For the initial emphasis on consultation in the villagisation programme, see e.g. Michaela von Freyhold, *Ujamaa villages in Tanzania: analysis of a social experiment*; for local memories of this claim e.g. interview with Alois Ali Gomea, Rwangwa 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Wood, *The groundnut affair*.

<sup>31</sup> Iliffe, *Modern history*; Rotberg et al, 'Very large agricultural projects'.

<sup>32</sup> Matteo Rizzo, 'What was left of the groundnut scheme?' PhD thesis, SOAS, 2004.



In the present context, though, the most interesting aspect of the groundnut scheme lies in the ways in which it did continue beyond the point at which the impossibility of producing the desired amounts of groundnuts was recognised. While the outside world deplored the loss of all the good money and no groundnuts resulting, successor organisations to the Overseas Food Corporation soldiered on at its main site near Nachingwea for most of the 1950s, trying out in succession several new justifications for its existence. On one hand, this meant trying different products: for instance, part of the cleared area near Nachingwea became a livestock farm.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, this reorientation entailed a turn back towards a production factor that the original plans for groundnut production had treated largely as an afterthought: African labour; in other words, African cultivators. Originally, the corporation had worked on the assumption that the use of machinery would overcome any labour shortages. Soon they found themselves short not only of personnel (and spares) to maintain machinery, but also of hands for a task that any villager would have identified as crucial and labour-intensive, and that their machinery could not perform: weeding. From ca. 1953, the corporation sought to recover something from its large-scale land clearing operation by inviting African 'settlers' onto plots on its site. They were to be trained up in 'modern' agricultural techniques.<sup>34</sup>

The exact fate of this scheme remains to be established; from the incomplete record I have seen it appears that African cultivators did not see the point of becoming tenants of a somewhat meddlesome landowner while land was available for clearing and using on their own terms nearby. In the 1970s, land near Nachingwea was in use as a prison farm and livestock breeding facility; in 2004 a cattle farm and an army camp were still running in the area.<sup>35</sup> Whether all of them are sited on land originally cleared for groundnuts is not certain, but it appears likely. Thus decades after the original scheme, working the land it had cleared still depended on either exceptionally well paid (cattle breeding experts) or very tightly controlled (prisoners and soldiers) labour.

In the 1950s, though, the focus lay on mobilising local labour. In this decade, the scheme went through a transition similar to that from villagisation to RIPS: from beginnings that treated African labour as an afterthought of technical implementation, it developed into a project that focused on 'educating' African cultivators. This reorientation was conditioned by a much greater awareness of the practical difficulties of agriculture in this region: its labour needs; its dependence on variable, in places fragile soils and variable rainfall; its vulnerability to pests. Planners' tone shifts from one of buoyant optimism and sweeping forecasts to something much closer to humility, and greater attention to detail.

After the expensive failure of the original plans, this humility certainly appears called for, all the more as it entails a greater show of respect for Africans' local knowledge. But the sequence also has overtones with problematic implications for the people working the land. They have moved back into the focus of the planners' insistence on perfectibility. Inter-war planners turned to attempts to compel villagers to increase cash crop acreages when they could not persuade the central

---

<sup>33</sup> TNA acc 16, groundnut scheme files; see also references to the Nachingwea livestock breeding station in the 1979 land use report. Thomas Beidelman, *The culture of colonialism*, contains an account of similar developments at the northern Kongwa site.

<sup>34</sup> TNA acc 16, 'groundnut scheme' files.

<sup>35</sup> 1979 land use report; oral information in 2003-04 identified the army camp as a source of HIV infection in the Nachingwea region.

administration to lower tax rates.<sup>36</sup> They focused on what they (thought they) could change over what they had thought most needed changing. Similarly, the successors to the Overseas Food Corporation, their machinery beaten by soil and weather, shifted to 'improving' African agriculture. Recognition of the importance of cultivators is thus accompanied by the insistence that they change, so that they produce the successes that the experts looked for in vain without them.

### **Linear projections and non-linear change: cassava cultivation**

The observations just made on the swings between large-scale, technocratic and small-scale pragmatic development approaches need not be taken to mean that planners' and experts' claims are driven entirely by the self-interest of development institutions and the orthodoxies of the day. Rather, a great deal of factual information and practical knowledge flows back and forth between cultivators, experts and policy makers, and as the limited aims of the groundnut scheme 'redux' show, it did, or at any rate could at times, influence planning. But it plays out here as one factor among several. Ultimately, all development projects are about getting a budget approved by whoever holds the money: before they can achieve anything else, they have to be politically feasible within the institutions that design them.

In order to get a sense of how uncertain the interplay is between cultivators' subsistence needs, market incentives, official compulsion, and the process of measurement and planning, it is useful to look in more detail at records on the crop mentioned above in connection with reforestation, cassava. This root is one of the mainstays of agriculture in the region under discussion, and especially on the Makonde Plateau. It has been cultivated throughout on peasants' own initiative, and intermittently been an object of planners' interest, as a famine safety measure or potential cash crop. Numerical information is scattered, due to problems with both measurement and record-keeping, but inasmuch as it shows anything suggests gradual expansion of production. Cassava never became a reliable cash earner, due as much to marketing as to production problems. Yet although the marketing problems were well known, attempts to 'develop' cassava focused on production.

Cassava first enters the administrative record in the 1920s as a famine safety measure. At the time, officials were keen to 'push' cassava cultivation, especially in districts affected by recurrent food shortages.<sup>37</sup> They deplored the inefficiency of 'Native Authorities' at enforcing cassava cultivation, while taking no interest in the practical causes of its slow spread: cassava is propagated through fresh cuttings, which are more laborious to produce and transport than seed grain.<sup>38</sup> Shortages of cuttings still occurred in the 1950s in a district where officials considered cassava well established in the 1940s.<sup>39</sup> While famine prevention was an economically and politically important aim (famine relief depleted funds in the region and made central authorities wary of investing here), officials saw no intrinsic economic value in

---

<sup>36</sup> TNA, Lindi province records, Agricultural officer Latham to Chief Secretary, 1933.

<sup>37</sup> The use of cassava as insurance against famine in 'plant more crops' campaigns was so widespread it was even discussed in London; see Hodge, *Triumph of the expert*. For a Tanzania-specific account of these campaigns, Gregory Maddox, 'Njaa: food shortages and hunger in Tanzania between the wars', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19 (1986), 17-34.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. TNA 19365 vol. II no. 148 (or, in pencil 334) Provincial Commissioner Southern Province to Chief Secretary, Dar es Salaam, 11 April 1938.

<sup>39</sup> TNA acc 16, Southern Province famine security files.

cassava until the 1940s; hard to transport or process and a low-status food, it made little sense as a cash crop.

By the 1940s, food crops were generally much more closely administered as part of the 'war effort', and any form of starch was potentially useful to feed troops.<sup>40</sup> With processing facilities for the transformation of cassava root into flour available, the produce became much more easily transportable. Moreover, the 1940s saw some exceptionally large harvests, coinciding with unusual global demand for starches. In 1948, the district officer in Newala, the district most geared towards cassava cultivation, reported that people in the district 'were able to market over 3000 tons of this crop which in the past was, save in times of famine, well nigh unmarketable.'<sup>41</sup>

Both harvested amount and global demand for cassava declined again from this peak, but in 1963 the district was still selling cassava flour to Poland and (presumably East) Germany.<sup>42</sup> In 1965, though, the annual report for Newala stated that cassava prices had discouraged an increase in planting. The 5652 tons marketed out of the district that year were said to be slightly less than what had been marketed ten years previously. Nevertheless they still beat the 1948 figure.<sup>43</sup> Cultivators, in other words, were responding to, or at any rate not resisting, the combination of official inducement and market incentives.

Peasants' interest in market access is confirmed by what was reported in 1967, when there was another 'bumper crop'. Without the hungry markets of the immediate post-war period, the outcome for producers was disappointing:

Generally, in crop production and taking cassava crop in particular, the year 1966 was the most favourable crop season ever had before. Total production of this crop, is without doubt, the highest on record ever reached. For a marketing period of 2 months only ... saleable tonnage had gone up to 23,000 and this was probably a third of the total produce expected for the year.

.... The co-operative societies were faced with a trouble of how they could get rid of such a surplus harvest.... it was then ruled by the Government that the only solution of such surplus production, was to reduce the price per kg. Of dried cassava from -/19 to -/12. This ruling, of course did not meet favourable welcome in the hearts of district's farmers and it was unanimously and adversely agreed by the farmers not to offer any more of this crop for marketing. At this date, a good lot of cassava is commonly found here and there with no economic value. The state has arisen ill feelings in the hearts of most individual farmers and has come out like a common song sung by many that the agricultural staff encourage the expansion of acreages for increased production but cannot find market for the produce. It is indeed a very serious affair, and it speedily leads to a draw back by some farmers...<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> On the administration of foodstuffs in World War II Tanganyika, see e.g. Jim Brennan, PhD.

<sup>41</sup> TNA 16/11/260, Mikindani district annual report 1948, p113.

<sup>42</sup> TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual reports Newala district, p. 37: Annual Report to Ministry of Agriculture, Mtwara Region, 1963, by J.A. Whitehead.

<sup>43</sup> TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual reports Newala district. Annual Report 1965.

<sup>44</sup> TNA Acc 494 A/AR/D/new: Annual reports Newala district. Annual Report 1967 Newala district, agricultural division. 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 1968.

Although this 'cassava hold up' clearly worried the agricultural officer, there is no record that it met with any reprisals.<sup>45</sup> It nevertheless offers a glimpse into the relationship between cultivators and the local arms of the state. Evidently, the 'grow more crops' campaigns had come across, but the farmers in Newala were not afraid to speak their minds and put local officials on the spot. As the official puts it, their only option was to 'draw back'; to give up on pursuing the elusive benefits of market access for cassava. Yet this was still a way of creating a potential problem for the administrator.

Twelve years and the villagisation campaign later, in 1979, a British expert delegation explored the possibilities of cassava as part of the most detailed study of agriculture ever conducted in this area.<sup>46</sup> They also collated the figures for the amount of dried cassava root bought by the National Milling Corporation in Mtwara and Lindi regions in the years 1971-78.<sup>47</sup> The first year reported the lowest quantity at 8,646 tons and the last year the highest at 18,163 tons, though for the intervening years quantities rose and fell.<sup>48</sup>

In the early 1990s, meanwhile, the GTZ's feasibility study initiated in the process of exploring the soil conservation project discussed above put the figures for cassava exports from Newala at ca. 30,000 tons for 1991-92, and ca. 40,000 for 1992-93.<sup>49</sup> The figures are too smooth to be considered anything but rough estimates, but unless they are complete fantasy, comparison with the patchy figures for earlier years suggests that between the 1960s and the 1990s production did expand significantly. Moreover, this report, written at the dawn of the era of 'farming systems research', constitutes the first systematic attempt to gather information not just on the quantities, but on the *conditions* of cassava cultivation.<sup>50</sup>

Later research very much in the spirit of the 'farming systems' approach suggests that official advice at times hindered rather than helped cassava cultivation. A RIPS-initiated study of cassava breeding and cassava disease, undated but clearly made in the 1990s while the RIPS programme was running, mentions that a previous attempt to introduce 'closer cultivation' of cassava had led to the spread of a pest called mealybug.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, much of the crop was infected with another pest, the mosaic virus, whose spread was also aided by closer planting.

On a more positive note, the same report also stated that cultivators distinguished many local varieties and sought to vary their cultivars so as to adapt

---

<sup>45</sup> I borrow the term 'hold-ups' from the historiography of cocoa and protest over cocoa prices in Ghana, see e.g. Polly Hill, *The migrant farmers of southern Ghana*.

<sup>46</sup> Land Resources Development Centre, Tolworth Tower, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7DY, for Ministry of Overseas Development: Mtwara/Lindi Regional Integrated Development Programme - Report of the Zonal Survey Team in Phase 2, Surbiton, 1979. Vol. 1: Methodology and physical environment; vol. 2: Farming systems and development prospects.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, appendix 1, p. 364.

<sup>48</sup> The numbers are hard to compare with those from the 1960s because it is not clear whether those, too, refer to dried cassava rather than fresh, which is considerably heavier. If like is being compared with like, then the amount of cassava marketed in 1977/78 was between three and four times that marketed in 1965. If the figures from the 1960s refer to fresh cassava, the increase was much larger as dried cassava is so much lighter than fresh roots.

<sup>49</sup> 'Feasibility study on the soil and water conservation project in Makonde Plateau, Mtwara, proposed by RC office' By Claus Huwe et al, for German Development Service, 1-15 December 1994. The 25% year on year growth need not, but may well be a feature of the reporting rather than the actual harvest.

<sup>50</sup> For direct references to a cassava-centric 'farming system' in newala, see Zonal survey team report, 1979, 60-61. On the rise and merits of the 'farming systems' approach, see Sara Berry, "The food crisis and agrarian change in Africa." *African Studies Review* 27 (1984), 59-112.

<sup>51</sup> RIPS library, 1/322: Cassava breeding and cassava disease by Lars Johansson.

them to specific micro-environments. Another RIPS-initiated report found in 1995 that cultivators used many different techniques to increase the fertility of soil planted with cassava. They included making ridges of soil mixed with leaves, mixing in of manure or old weeds, or three-year fallows.<sup>52</sup> They were thus expending precisely the sort of effort that planners often implied was needed, and comparison with accounts of Makonde agriculture in the 1940s shows that they had elaborated their methods in response to declining land availability.<sup>53</sup> Together, these studies suggest that the prime driving force for the expansion of cassava production may well have been the expansion in the number of cultivations, that is, population growth. The resilience and high calorie yield of cassava, its low nutritional value notwithstanding, is likely to have been a more persuasive long-term reason for growing numbers of cultivators to plant it than fickle markets, or officials whose advice was unreliable.

In fact, when examining the market conditions for cassava, the 1979 survey report came to fairly negative conclusions. Other parts of Tanzania were catching up with the Southeast in Cassava production; cassava flour plants were struggling to keep up with the supply of roots, and there were doubts over how far both international and domestic demand for cassava could be expanded. The fate of future cassava crops depended on questions such as whether an industrial bakery being built in Dar es Salaam would be able to process a percentage of cassava flour, mixed into wheat flour, into bread.<sup>54</sup> The authors concluded that the marketing prospects for cassava flour were too uncertain to justify expending significant resources on expanding production. The subsequent initiatives concerning cassava production were thus in defiance of this set of experts. But they did correspond to RIPS's insistence on reckoning with local priorities.

Whether cassava on the whole constitutes a story of success or failure depends on the observer's priorities. It was a 'qualified failure', punctuated by brief successes, as a currency earner, but a success in securing food supplies; a failure for 'close cropping' campaigns but a success for gradual intensification and expansion. Where the effect of official intervention in cultivation can be traced, it is as likely to be indifferent (as with the failed cultivation drives of the 1930s) or negative (as with the attempts at closer cropping and the reduction of prices in the 1960s) as positive (as official support for cassava planting in Tunduru in the 1950s, on the heels of a series of famines, may have been).<sup>55</sup> Overall, the reports and studies referring to cassava do show evidence of the kind of 'modernist arrogance' often taken as a hallmark of late colonialism at large and, more specifically, of Tanzanian villagisation.<sup>56</sup>

But this is only one of several things going on here. We also find efforts to understand peasants' methods and the constraints they work under, and to address the difficulties posed by markets. The most detailed suggestions for planning, from the 1979 report, are full of references to contingencies, while the most straightforwardly optimistic forecasts are poorly supported or based on the assumption that cultivators can simply 'do more'. This is as true of the 1991 report on declaring forest reserves as of the 1961 one on projected crop production, notwithstanding the former's more pragmatic tone and emphasis on participation. Numerical information, in this context, veers between attempts to portray and assess a complex reality, or to report success,

---

<sup>52</sup> RIPS library, RIPS/Naliendele research institute, report on 'Indigenous soil fertility improvement study' by C Kerven and others, Masasi and Newala districts, 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Newell?, 'Makonde Bush fallowing', 1944.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 361-64.

<sup>55</sup> TNA Acc 491 Tunduru District Office A 3/3/1 Food supplies and famine reports.

<sup>56</sup> James Scott, *Seeing like a state*.

or to will into being an elusive state of prosperity. The political causes of the insistence on the feasibility of development are the topic of the next section.

### **The rhetoric of development and post-colonial politics in rural Tanzania**

The character of post-colonial African politics, their relationship to the colonial period, and the place of development in them, are hugely controversial issues, as hinted at above. The dominant critique of the relationship between development and African politics focuses on the claim that development effectively bankrolls corrupt politicians, by providing resources to be deployed within patronage networks. The rural 'targets' of development efforts appear in these narratives, if at all, either as dupes (when funds are diverted and do not even reach them) or as pliant clients (when they do).

Tanzania, however, tends to be presented somewhat differently. Perhaps still under the influence of Nyerere's reputation for integrity, and with the limited salience of ethnic patronage networks in the country, references to high-level corruption are relatively muted. Instead, much the literature focuses on the outburst of benevolent yet unsuccessful authoritarianism that was the 'villagisation' campaign in the 1970s.<sup>57</sup> It was enabled partly by the ruling TANU party's unchallenged dominance in the countryside, and this apparent homogeneity, the lack of apparent factionalism in Tanzanian politics, is another dominant characteristic in the literature on Tanzania. Since the official end of the *ujamaa* ('African socialism') programme that drove villagisation, much of the literature on Tanzanian politics has focused on tracing or predicting the rise of political, ethnic and religious factionalism and social conflict.<sup>58</sup> While the ruling party's continuing ability to fend off challenges and the continuing low level of social conflict also attract attention, in some ways Tanzania appears to be becoming more 'typically' African.<sup>59</sup>

Distinctive though this literature is, it, too, tends to take the relationship between government and ruling party (particularly closely identified, until the 1990s, in Tanzania) on one hand, and their rural constituents, on the other mostly as a given. Rural people's electoral loyalty, in particular, is easily taken to indicate their persistent reliance on government and ruling party as their default patrons; their dependence and political apathy. There are exceptions. In particular, Goran Hyden, in a study based on much first-hand experience of villagisation, characterised the campaign as a desperate move by state institutions struggling to bring the rural population within their economic and political orbit; almost provoked by the frustrating independence of the peasantry.<sup>60</sup> While still recognised as an original contribution, Hyden's interpretation has lost out to James Scott's account of villagisation as modernist hubris (with

---

<sup>57</sup> On villagisation, see among many von Freyhold, *Ujamaa villages*; Goran Hyden, *Beyond ujamaa in Tanzania: underdevelopment and an uncaptured peasantry*; James Scott, *Seeing like a state: why certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, chapter 7; for an overview of literature on Tanzanian politics see Paul Bjerck, 'Sovereignty and socialism in Tanzania: the historiography of an African state', *History in Africa* 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Tim Kelsall, "Shop windows and smoke-filled rooms: Governance and the re-politicisation of Tanzania", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40 (4):597— 620. and idem, "Governance, Local Politics and Districtization in Tanzania: The 1998 Arumeru Tax Revolt," *African Affairs* 99 (2000), 533-51; Paul Kaiser, "Structural Adjustment and the Fragile Nation: the Demise of Social Unity in Tanzania," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34 (1996), 227- 37.

<sup>59</sup> Bruce E. Heilman & Paul J. Kaiser, 'Religion, Identity and Politics in Tanzania', *Third World Quarterly* (2002), 691-709.

<sup>60</sup> Hyden, *Beyond ujamaa*.

peasants again as passive victims), and his Marxist terminology has aged badly. Above all, though, his account of peasants skirting markets sits badly of the evidence, such as that cited above in connection with cassava, of rural producers' desire to market their crops.

If rural Tanzanians are such politically inert clods, grumbling at TANU/CCM but voting for it anyway come election, there seems to be little reason the government to even make much effort to keep them on side. Yet arguably the focus on electoral loyalty is misplaced. If most rural officials don't have to worry about the way villagers vote, this is not to say that they don't have other forms of compliance or non-compliance to be concerned about. It is in this context that they way public invocations of the shared aim of development, and celebratory performances of shared effort for this aim, become important. The concept of 'development' or 'progress', in Swahili *maendeleo*, has remained central, not only in the justification of the more interventionist phases of policy, but also in the state's assertions of its legitimacy.<sup>61</sup> Of course the predicament of being 'in the waiting room of history' is common to, and is in some way expressed in, all post-colonial societies.<sup>62</sup> But in the Tanzanian case there remains a particularly heavy emphasis on *collective* progress as a matter of policy.

That 'development' should retain the ability to mobilise and legitimise may seem puzzling after a half-century of failure. It becomes less so if we simply accept the proposition that perhaps in rural Africa too there is such a thing as discursive, combative, ideologically-influenced popular politics: that here too, officials and politicians have to *persuade*, rather than buy consensus with handouts. Arguably, if this proposition sounds exotic this is partly because of the sort of portrayal of rural dwellers, as unenlightened bumpkins who sometimes 'make an effort' but much too often don't, that is so evident in some of the planning documents especially from the early post-colonial period. Frederick Cooper tells us it is in itself an ideological heritage from the late colonial period, when African cities became defined as the sites of progress and the countryside, by contrast, as the realm of stagnant subsistence.<sup>63</sup>

At any rate, the notion of development is omnipresent in the public meetings, the speeches and announcements that constitute the point of contact between rural populations and the state. The post-colonial state has entrenched, routinised and elaborated its bureaucratic presence in the countryside, with its dense network of appointed officials concerned with matters including culture, agriculture and social development down to sub-district level.

One striking legacy of villagisation, though, is quite contrary to the authoritarian character of the campaign itself, namely the entrenchment of an elective element in rural administration. Villages and village wards elect their executive authorities, such as they are, and these elected officials liaise with the appointed ones. Village elections, moreover, are more likely to be genuinely competitive than those for parliament.<sup>64</sup> This, arguably, makes the local officials attentive to how they are seen; in other words, it lends a performative quality to how they conduct their office. By

---

<sup>61</sup> For a careful exploration, Leander Schneider 'Developmentalism and its failings: why rural development went wrong in 1960s and 1970s Tanzania'. PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty's phrase, from his *Provincialising Europe*.

<sup>63</sup> Cooper, *Decolonization*, 202-16.

<sup>64</sup> Achim von Oppen, 'Villages beyond ujamaa: land conflict and ecology in western Handeni', in Doris Schmied (ed), *Changing rural structures in Tanzania* (Muenster: LIT Verlag, 1996), 85-106; Donald Vaughn Hassett, 'Economic organisation and political change in a village of South East Tanzania' (University of Cambridge: PhD thesis, 1984; Pekka Seppaelae, *Diversification and accumulation in rural Tanzania*; interviews Rwangwa 2003.

extension, the appointees working with them have to reckon with the sensibilities of the electorate if they want to support (or indeed undermine) the local notables.

Moreover, these local electoral politics tie the working of village administration very visibly into the sphere of life that Goran Hyden termed the 'economy of affection': the informal networks of support and control, of patronage, patriarchy, but also competition that can make and unmake candidates in such elections.<sup>65</sup> The balance of power between these and the local arms of the state, their mutual dependence or independence, are a crucial aspect of the post-colonial order, as well as very fluid. It can appear as if the state could melt away again and villagers would continue their lives not so very differently, falling back on their powers of self-organisation. It can also seem at times as if the rural state could go about its business without acknowledging villagers in any way as political subjects; that it needs villagers only so as not to appear too Beckettian.

But these are tricks of the light; despite their partial independent or incommensurate sources of power and traditions of practice, the local state and informal village politics have had to reckon with each other throughout twentieth-century history. They have become constitutive of each other. One of the registers in which they have conducted their relationship is political performance.<sup>66</sup> In some ways, this is due to the weight of history, as performative politics clearly pre-dated colonialism.<sup>67</sup> But it also draws strength from aspects of the present, both long-standing and recent ones.

One source of its strength lies in the pervasiveness of performative aspects in everyday life, in a context where privacy is hard to come by. The combination of thin walls, open workspaces and the lack of lighting after dark means that you rarely have full control over who hears what you are saying. Making a virtue of necessity, the comment directed at one person but designed to be overheard by another is a regular feature of social life. More widely, the practice of conveying additional meaning to verbal content by way of tone, accompanying gesture or facial expression serves to compensate for the difficulty especially of making openly evaluative comments in the absence of secure privacy. Conversely, communications genuinely meant to be private may be made not in 'private' domestic spaces but in the interstices; on empty lots and sandy footpaths. The political performer thus has a highly perceptive audience to work with.

There is no need therefore to think of bureaucratic practice as somehow 'perverted' by performance. In a way, every visa or welfare office is a stage dedicated to a performance that is about power (the right to ask questions) and compliance (the obligation to answer). But in rural Tanzania, performance also serves to manage the persisting incapacities, the sheer poverty, of the rural state. Its resources are never satisfactory. Not only local but also lower-tier appointed officials may find themselves working out of thatched mud huts. Cars or petrol or both are often in short supply; papers, pens and stamps have to be kept carefully. The expanding mobile phone network, while compensating for the dearth of landlines in the countryside, burns a hole into budgets; before its arrival, urgent messages might take the form of scribbled papers handed to the driver of the next vehicle to leave town. Reporting and

---

<sup>65</sup> Seppaelae, *Diversification and accumulation*; Hyden, *Beyond ujamaa*; Sally Falk Moore, 'Post-socialist micro-politics'; Kelsall, 'Arumeru Tax revolt'.

<sup>66</sup> On the theatrical qualities of the independence campaign, Susan Geiger, *TANU women*, also Iliffe, *Modern history*, and Becker, *Becoming Muslim in mainland Tanzania*, chapter 7.

<sup>67</sup> Jon Glassman, *Feasts and riot*; Becker, *Becoming Muslim*, chapter 1; Angelique Haugerud, *The culture of politics in modern Kenya*, chapter 1.



record-keeping, while at times elaborate, have no consistent relationship to the amount of advice, recognition or resources received from on high.<sup>68</sup>

Doling out such resources, though, is a crucial task of the local state; up to a point the notion of the state sustaining itself on its patronage role is appropriate. In emergencies, it has been since the colonial period, as the history of famine relief shows.<sup>69</sup> It became routinised in the late-colonial period, in the name of development, and while definitions of and prescribed paths towards development have changed, in one guise or another the notion has stayed in place.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in a way not totally unfamiliar to people working in cash-strapped public institutions in Europe, the relative shortage of resources to hand out tends to make the ceremony surrounding the handover more, not less, elaborate. Research support applications grow longer as funding available through them is cut; public meetings to explain the nature of new development measures need particular care if the measures themselves are disappointing.

Nevertheless, public meetings and invocations of development take place even where there is nothing to actually dole out. The doling-out, the invocation of development, and political performance come together in a particular kind of rhetorical political practice, in which the relationship between villagers and local officialdom is one of mutual dependency. Obviously, rural recipients want, in some cases direly depend on, the resources being doled out, however paltry. But officials, in their turn, need compliance with things such as building or vaccination campaigns, not to mention acceptance of primary produce prices and taxation. The invocation of the shared aim of 'development' helps both sides stake their claim and justify their accession to the other side's demands.

If, then, the term 'development' once was grounds for mobilisation to improve lives and show the world what Africans could do, it has become a common denominator that helps villagers and their administrators keep things civil in the face of a long history of mutual demands and frustrations. Moreover, it allows for the integration of non-state actors with resources, in other words, aid organisations of all kinds. Among the most routine forms of 'doling-out' is the per-diem, essentially a payment for attendance, that is a nearly universal part of the workshops frequently used by RIPS. It allows for the provision of no-strings-attached, individual income in connection with highly programmatic, collectivist development programmes.

## Conclusion

It could be said that statistical information and planning documents sit at a crossroads in the pursuit of rural development in this Tanzanian region. They keep being produced partly because of the *political* needs, stratagems and aims of the administrators who accompany the projects (as well as those of aid organisations themselves; an issue beyond the scope of this paper). At times, they reflect these aims and needs more clearly than any physical, social or economic reality. That is not to say that these realities do not intrude upon them, or that their authors do not at times try quite seriously to grasp them. Yet they do so with a peculiar kind of conceptual apparatus that contains the sediments of decades of development thinking, with various, typically un-admitted, ideological antecedents.

---

<sup>68</sup> This is a summary of my personal experience, from interaction with provincial administrations in research sites.

<sup>69</sup> See e.g. TNA 19365 on famines in 'Southern Province' in the 1930s.

<sup>70</sup> Liebenow, *Political development*, examines the late-colonial version of this phenomenon.

In particular, the permutations of a limited set of ideas and strategies about rural development traced above show the lasting heritage of the colonial period. Local officials continue to perform to separate audiences - the people they administer on one hand; the central administration on the other - and the records on development they produce are affected by their desire to impress. As in the inter-war context described by Tilley and Hodge, different levels of state institutions, with their own interests, intersect with both established and rising ideas about poverty and development. At the same time, the view from the provinces gives an idea of what is missing in their view from the centre: the influence of place-specific dynamics; the time-lags and cross-currents that make the long-standing idea of 'peasant conservatism' make the rather more rational peasants of the 'farming systems' approach meet in RIPS documents from the 1990s.

The cliché of the change-averse, inward-looking 'subsistence farmer', too, was elaborated from long-standing prejudice in the late colonial period. Its persistence in the face of so much evidence of change and interest in market production may well be due to its political usefulness. It offers rural dwellers a way, even if slightly demeaning, to reiterate their neediness, while placing officials and experts in a secure position of authority, as well as obligation, and providing a default explanation for developmental failures. Its salience contributes to the difficulty of assessing just how helpless, or not, rural dwellers in post-colonial Tanzania were and are in the face of authority. Undeniably, though, and in a way that is related to yet different from Ferguson's description of development discourse as 'whisking politics out of sight', development is recognised as both intertwined with the political process and a site of local politics.

Even where concepts and terminologies do change, they tend to arrange themselves into similar patterns. Again and again, a focus on input and output, agricultural extension and production, at times supplemented with attention to marketing, transmogrifies into a focus on rural producers themselves; whether to educate, punish, exhort, enable or empower them. Arguably, the recurrence of this pattern, too, has partly political causes. For officials with little influence on budget allocations, focusing on villagers in a way constitutes the path of least resistance. Projects pursuing peasant 'behaviour change' can be put together less expensively than large-scale infrastructure measures (processing plants, road-building) that would address problems of market or resource access. Moreover, changing conceptual approaches enable the recycling of old ideas, such as the protection of the Makonde escarpment, in a new guise, serving the in-built need of development practitioners for new, thus promising, departures.

It is striking, perhaps ironic, or perhaps tragic, how this focus on the poor as the agents of their own salvation, or its failure, brings statistical information, qualitative farming methods surveys, and the at times quite sophisticated conceptual apparatus of development thinking together into something resembling the most basic morality tales. Documents that set out the deep environmental and structural constraints faced by rural producers nevertheless conclude by asserting that rewards will come to those with dedication, or initiative, or just a knack for hard work. Development workers seem much like the rest of us in that they prefer to own their successes and externalise their failure - in their case, to its victims.