



whose **development**



Examining the Extent to Which Development Actors Align with
Communities' Interests

Tendai Murisa

Whose Development?

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ISBN 978-1-77929-861-4

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THE DEVELOPMENT SET

Excuse me, friends, I must catch my jet-
I'm off to join the Development Set;
My bags are packed, and I've had all my shots,
I have travellers' checks, and pills for the trots.

The Development Set is bright and noble,
Our thoughts are deep and our vision global;
Although we move with the better classes,
Our thoughts are always with the masses.

In Sheraton hotels in scattered nations,
We damn multinational corporations;
Injustice seems so easy to protest,
In such seething hotbeds of social rest.

We discuss malnutrition over steaks
And plan hunger talks during coffee breaks.
Whether Asian floods or African drought,
We face each issue with an open mouth.

We bring in consultants whose circumlocation
Raises difficulties for every solution-
Thus guaranteeing continued good eating
By showing the need for another meeting.

The language of the Development Set
Stretches the English alphabet;
We use swell words like "epigenetic,"
"Micro" "macro," and "logarithmic"

Development Set homes are extremely chic,
Full of carvings, curios and draped with batik.
Eye-level photographs subtly assure
That your host is at home with the rich and the poor.

Enough of these verses- on with the mission!
Our task is as broad as the human condition!
Just parry to God the biblical promise is true:
The poor ye shall always have with you.

- ROSS COGGINS, 1974

Preface

Development is in crisis. What is development in the 21st century? Is the term still relevant? Whose development? These are some of the ongoing questions amongst practitioners and academicians. We have entered a new uncertainty; there is no clarity on what it really means to be developed. The modernization school suffered a setback in the 1980s but seems to be reemerging. One of the key tenets of modernization theory is the assumption that with assistance, “backward” countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have been. Huge volumes of Official Development Aid (ODA) have been deployed to Africa in the quest for a very linear form of progression from a certain kind of underdevelopment toward mimicking what has happened in the Global North. But we have also witnessed a surge in different utopias of development; those that celebrate local culture and eschew globalism.

In the past decades, we have been schooled about the need for Putting the Last First,¹ The Pedagogy of the Oppressed,² and The Weapons of the Weak and that development means good change and should do no harm. But even those texts have been thrown away in favor of what is convenient. Development actors now speak of results-based management (RBM) or theories of change. Communities are still treated as recipients of development and not as active agents engaged in the cocreation of their better future. When communities are invited to participate, it is into processes with preestablished outcomes based on frameworks designed elsewhere. We have reduced participation to a farce, usually made up of ‘ice-breakers’, a discussion of what is working, and steering into the different agendas of the one who has invited people to participate. The participatory school is in retreat, and in its place, we see a reimposition of technical and expert-driven top-down processes in what Harry Boyte has called ‘the cult of the expert’ typical of the modernisation approach to development.

Philanthropy, that gallant force for good, is at a crossroads; new entrants

1 Chambers, 1983

2 Freire, 1993

into the space speak the language of impact and the more traditional types are still not sure how to fund communities that are not organized in a manner that suits its due diligence. NGOs are also caught in the middle; without their own resources, they can realign only with what is fashionable. They are mostly involved in short-term transactions with communities where the latter have been mobilized and reorganized to suit the logic of the project. Yes, there is a new optimism around the growth of responsive philanthropy, which may ultimately positively affect development, but the current situation is that of growing inequality and political systems that increasingly look like democracies when they are actually self-perpetuating elite-based aristocracies who periodically hold elections. The most common situation across Africa is that of poverty, working in informal spaces, and with limited freedoms.

In this study I raise a number of questions to do with the ‘how’ of development and in the process examine the extent to which communities are actually engaged. Such an undertaking to further understand how rural communities’ function in terms of addressing public or common problems should essentially be multidisciplinary in nature, focusing on power or authority forms of social organisation and the civic capacities resident within.

My endeavour is both a critique of practice and an ongoing reimagining of how to realign the work of agents of development with community interests. I devote significant attention to an analysis of how external actors, such as intermediary and service delivery nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies responsible for extension, and philanthropy, operate. In my reimagining, I give considerable attention to recasting these roles as potentially catalytic in promoting rural collective agency. In the process I discuss how civic agency in its collective form can emerge and respond to sustain and defend livelihoods. At the center of my discussion is a concern with identifying processes and approaches that strengthen rural communities and their civic agency for reestablishing local decision-making capacities for economic planning and addressing social concerns.

My hypothesis: development, in its modernization form, has failed due to its lack of alignment with community agendas and interests. Earlier critical interventions that challenged the assumptions of modernization theory, such as Robert Chambers, James Scott, Paulo Freire, and the Participatory

School, did not effectively contribute to a total rethinking of the processes and end goals of development. Current practices have hindered the organic development of strong communities that are not dependent on state or NGO-based food handouts. In the long term, this, along with other structurally embedded constraints, have hindered the transformation of rural communities.

Through analysis of secondary data (including unpublished material) of seemingly isolated and disparate cases, the discussion analyzes the significance of emerging conversations on (and in) rural communities. It also demonstrates the varying levels to which agents of development (including extension, NGOs, and other external actors) are influencing rural livelihoods, promoting or constraining local collective action, and shaping the texture of power relations within communities.

I try to take due cognizance of the challenges of generalization and oversimplification of otherwise complex processes that are unfolding throughout rural communities around Africa. My emphasis is on identifying opportunities for learning and model replication. I start by acknowledging that globally rural livelihoods are in a precarious position and it is time for the community of academics and practitioners to exchange notes. The envisaged exchange is based on highlighting what has not worked, what has worked, what may work, and how it will improve rural livelihoods.

These conversations are not isolated in nature. They emerge from, firstly, the failure of the global development project to deliver on its promise of ending hunger and poverty. Secondly, they arise from a realization that the one-size-fits-all approaches to rural development are inadequate in design and fail to take advantage of local opportunities to respond to local challenges. There is a need to pay particular attention to the immediate. Thirdly, these conversations also emerge from a realization that democracy is best nurtured at local community levels. Fourthly, and related to the preceding, is the need to create platforms for unleashing communities' civic action for pragmatic problem solving. It is in this light that the study looks to community-based and local agency as possible interlocutors of a broader dialogic process of facilitating communities' own production and reproduction of knowledge as well as new ways of organizing and sustaining processes of deliberation that revitalize their own civic agency, which is the lifeblood of democracy.

Chapter One

Revisiting Rural Development and Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Across Africa rural livelihoods in their multifaceted nature are undergoing severe challenges. Poverty, characterized by an increase in the number of food-insecure households and malnutrition, still persists throughout much of rural Africa. There have been some notable attempts to deal with poverty by national governments, official development aid, and NGOs. In most cases these have been top-down with limited local buy-in. Attempts at participatory-based approaches have made some progress but remain constrained by either the costs of such processes or, at times, the insincerity and tokenism that is now prevalent in participation platforms. A better framework is needed, one that creates collaborative governance arrangements that think outside the box, especially in their treatment of

nonexperts and communities' own forms of collaborative formation. There is concern (albeit at different levels) about the manner in which public institutions, rather than affirming local knowledge and deepening citizens' action, actually end up curtailing the generation of communities' own forms of knowledge.

The discussion in this book is focused on examining how development initiatives align with the interests of communities and on identifying ways in which better alignment between external agents of development and communities can be created and sustained. The starting point for such an endeavor is to understand in a detailed manner the ways in which rural communities organise themselves for production, accumulation, and consumption as well as the ways in which they connect with intricate networks and practices of external agents. The policy context in which livelihood choices are made also needs to be understood. In the process, the study raises pertinent questions, such as, how are development priorities established? The study is predicated on a premise that a comprehensive understanding of relationships between agents of development and communities could provide a more nuanced understanding of some of the problems limiting rural development and opportunities that have not yet been exploited. Local forms of knowledge that include innovations in farming practices, norms of interaction amongst themselves especially in the establishment of collective action forms, and their various modes of exchange within the local marketplace of economic and social goods also need to be adequately understood and analysed.

BACKGROUND

There are various reasons that explain the broader agricultural crisis, and others have argued that the crisis can be accounted for by increased levels of urbanization. Data on migration has been used to create a fallacy that the world (and even sub-Saharan Africa [SSA]) is urbanizing. Indeed, the world has never had so many people living in cities, but there has also been an unprecedented growth in the number of people currently residing in rural areas. The global population has grown. In SSA, 60 percent of the population is still based in rural areas, compared to 80 percent in 1960. There are more people living in rural Africa than at any other time. Whilst the share of the population living in rural areas has decreased, the actual

number of people living in rural areas has increased. Eighty percent of the population in SSA in 1960 was 182,868,804, whereas in 2016, 60 percent of the population was 619,800,000.

The rural development challenge has become even more pertinent in light of the failure of the formal economy to absorb labour at a sustainable rate. In many African countries, the share of the population employed in the formal sector is less than 30 percent. There is a need for a brief historical discussion on how agricultural policy has evolved across Africa. When most of the countries were acceding to independence, the view prevailing among Africans at the time was that underdevelopment was due to backwardness, which could be overcome only by redoubling efforts aimed at progress in an already defined and known direction. Starting with the 1960s up until the late 1970s, the majority of newly independent African states pursued policies of national self-sufficiency in terms of cereal and other food requirements. During this period, food imports were perceived as both economic and national security risks that had to be avoided (Moyo, 2008:6). Both left- and right-leaning governments tended to converge on the need for accelerated modernisation and complete integration into international commodity circuits (Amin, 1990:10).

When many countries began to face balance-of-payment challenges, beginning in the late 1970s into the early 1980s, they turned to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for support and were enticed into economic reform programmes that Gibbon et al. (1993) have called 'sink or swim' structural adjustment reforms. The adjustment recommendations in agriculture were mostly uniform: allow an increased role for the market by restructuring or privatising commodity marketing boards, remove subsidies and reduce government allocations to the smallholder sector, which was considered part of the social sector. Within this paradigm, food security would be achieved through a market-based system of producing commodities (goods) in which a country had a comparative advantage and by using its earnings to purchase foods from the global commodity market.

In many instances these reforms had the aggregate effect of reducing state support for agriculture. *The Economist* (2010) estimated that African countries moved from spending an average of 17 to 18 percent of their budgets toward agriculture to an average of 4 percent. Moyo (2008:20)

observes that ‘. . . there has been reduction of public financing of the agricultural, rural development and social welfare systems of most countries, leading to incomes deflation and reduced farm investments’.

Tracking fertiliser usage in Africa serves to demonstrate the negative impact of adjustment programmes. In the period after decolonisation during the 1960s, fertiliser use grew rapidly up until the end of the 1970s and began to stagnate in the 1980s as subsidies to agriculture were being withdrawn (Murisa, 2012:8). Currently, only about 1.3 million metric tons of inorganic fertiliser are used in Africa, representing less than 1 percent of global fertiliser production. Furthermore, even though the science behind the efficiency of treated hybrid seeds is widely accepted, very few countries in the sub-region have made significant investments toward local production of seed. Tanzania, a country mostly made up of smallholders produces only 10,000 tonnes of the 120,000 tonnes required by the smallholder population.

Since the 1970s, we have noticed the emergence and implementation of policies that are hurriedly designed by agencies, notably from the Bretton Woods institutions (and also the UN family) and more recently from private philanthropy foundations. Some of the key development concerns for this period include the relevance of rural development and the form it takes; should agriculture be export oriented or for self-sufficiency and how do we enhance the enhance integration of the rural into the urban. These are significant questions that have dominated the development (economic and social) discourse since the 1960s but have recently become part of ‘contested terrain’, given the structural constraints they raise around access to land and markets. The fact that most Northern advanced capitalist societies³ have, based on new scientific innovations, significantly increased their production capacity has often been wrongly cited to suggest the resolution of the food question. However, these developments do not address the distribution and accessibility imperatives that are central to achieving food security. Amartya Sen (1999) has been one of the most influential scholars behind the entitlements theory, which is based on observations made from how famines actually affect rural communities (see for instance De Waal 1987). Sen’s studies on the famine in Bengali suggest that food insecurity is not necessarily caused by a decline in food availability, but rather by a lack of

3 Weiss (2007) has carried out an in-depth study of the role of multinational corporations in the global food commodity chains.

sufficient capacities to access food even on the market. This he called the ‘capability approach’, and he argued that development interventions should not focus on providing relief but instead focus on enhancing affected households to achieve purchasing or production capacities.

The global economic crisis and the waning influence of the Washington Consensus also provided an opportunity to rethink the models for rural development. Since 2008/09, there has been a global consensus of sorts on the need to resuscitate agriculture. In 2008, the World Bank’s World Development Report (WDR) was focused on agriculture. It is important to note that this was the first WDR to focus on agriculture in 25 years.

In 2008 and 2009, Africa experienced a number of food riots. Food price riots spread like a veldfire across the continent, beginning earnestly in 2007. In September of 2007 in **Morocco**, people took to the streets to protest the price of food, which had been deemed too excessive. On February 20, 2008, rioters protested a 65 percent rise in the price of some foodstuffs in **Burkina Faso**. The rioters burnt government buildings and looted stores. A couple of days later, similar riots erupted in **Cameroon**; a taxi drivers’ strike over fuel prices became a massive protest against soaring food prices leaving about 20 people dead and hundreds arrested (Sasson 2012:5). A month later, police in **Senegal** used tear gas and beat people protesting high food prices.

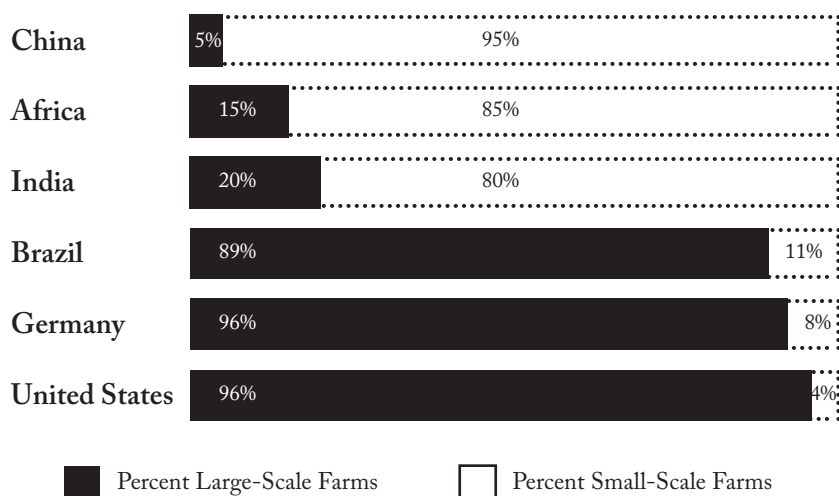
In **Egypt** in April 2008, workers in Mahalla launched an expanded strike that encompassed larger concerns about inflation and low salaries. Protestors burned two schools, and more than 150 demonstrators were hurt. Protestors in Cairo and other cities joined the call for a general strike. In Cairo, stores were closed and students protested at three universities. These events converged with the long lines and shortages throughout Egypt. Fights at bakeries left at least seven dead during this period. In his annual May Day speech a few weeks later, President Hosni Mubarak announced wage increases of 30 percent to help Egyptians cope with increased prices. To calm public anger, the state-owned Al Ahram announced the arrests of 12,000 people for selling flour on the black market (Sachs 2012).

A couple of years later in 2010, people took to the streets in Maputo the capital city of **Mozambique** after the government had announced a 25 to 30 percent increase in the price of bread. Shops and banks were looted, and roads were barricaded with rocks and burning tires during three days

of rioting that paralyzed the capital.

Despite the evident challenge of the distribution of food produced globally nowhere else is the rationale for one's own production [through small family farms] as highly contested as it is in Africa (especially the southern Africa region). The contestation is largely informed by the supposed role of the dominant or more 'superior' colonially established and technologically advanced large-scale farm sector. The disruption of the large-scale farm sector in Zimbabwe through fast-track land reform was, for instance, seen in many other previously progressive quarters (see, for instance, Bernstein 2003 and Moore 2003) as negatively affecting agricultural growth despite the historical injustices associated with the colonially established patterns of land grab by minority whites and dispossession of the black majority. There is very limited knowledge on smallholder capacities and production trends across the sub-region except for Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The Malawi maize miracle of the 2008-2015 period has perhaps provided a new impetus toward rethinking the model of rural development, especially agricultural growth. More than 80 percent of Africa's farms are small. The continent shares a similarity with China and India; the two have 95 percent and 80 percent small-scale farms, respectively. The opposite is at play in Europe, Brazil, and the United States, where large farm sizes comprise 92 percent, 89 percent and 86 percent, respectively. The figure provides an illustration of the different agrarian systems by region.

FIG 1-1 AGRARIAN SYSTEMS BY REGION



The chapters that follow, although not dealing with agriculture directly, engage with the softer issues of rural development by discussing the range of issues that affect communities and efforts at transformation. It is a study of development through an analysis of what agents of development (those that come from institutions outside the rural space) do and the local agency of communities. It potentially provides an opportunity for a more comprehensive analysis of how decisions on development are made and the issues of power within these interactions. Although highly cognizant of the global processes, the study remains preoccupied with local ways of engagement, whether in the initiatives introduced by external agents or through local initiatives, and how they redirect production and consumption from privileging global markets toward community needs.

WHY ANOTHER STUDY ON RURAL LIFE?

Despite the indeterminate nature of communities engaged in agriculture, this study focuses on rural life for many reasons. Firstly, whilst agriculture is the main income activity in the rural space, the discussion focuses on community dynamics in terms of how they organize themselves and interact with external actors that seek to support/enhance their activities. Secondly, the intention is to look at what may otherwise be overlooked, a focus on the process of development itself, paying particular attention to the interaction between development and the extent to which the beneficiary participation is nurtured therein.

The discussion is necessary and timely. It recognizes that smallholder agriculture is no longer just a rural concern nor is it an agenda for only developing countries. It has become a global concern, especially in the aftermath of the 2007/08 food shortages and riots discussed above.

Secondly, a 21st-century discussion on agriculture should learn from the pitfalls of the dominant theories of development, such as the assumptions of modernization theory discussed above. The new paradigm or approach must devote adequate attention to the potential and role of grassroots-based mobilizations against a certain form of accumulation in agriculture.

Thirdly, one cannot miss the connection between the rejuvenation of the different forms of rural agency with the deeper yearnings for power over the allocation of resources (such as land) and the frustration with the business-as-usual kind of politics. Democracy is being rejuvenated in different ways.

The sections that follow focus on (i) the context of land-based livelihoods, including the policy regimes being proposed; (ii) a discussion of concepts that will be used throughout the book; and (iii) creating the connection between development, participation and democracy.

DIVERSIFIED RURAL LIVELIHOODS

In the discussion on smallholder agriculture, we must note that it is becoming extremely difficult to speak of a landed category of rural households with a common experience of poverty, a common set of income strategies, and a common political objective. Contemporary rural families wear more than one hat; they are simultaneously involved in a diverse range of urban and rural production and work activities that defy easy class categorization. One organizational survey of five trade unions in Zimbabwe found that 75 percent of households maintained dual homes in town and country (Peta et al., 1991). Brycesson et al. (2000) have increasingly called into question the contribution of small landholdings in sustaining rural livelihoods. The authors argue that generally these rural households are not necessarily dependent on agriculture alone, but rather combine with other nonfarm rural and urban income generated to sustain their reproduction. They further claim that rural livelihoods are composed of a process of maintenance and continuous adaptation of a highly diverse portfolio of activities to sustain their incomes (Ellis, 2000).

Income diversification implies the existence of many different activities and income sources, thus also typically requiring diverse social relations to underpin them. Rural livelihoods diversification is defined as the process by which rural households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living (Ellis, 2000). The causes and consequences of diversification are differentiated in practice by location, assets, income level, opportunity, institutions, and social relations. Diversification in many cases is determined by, among other things, prevailing land tenure regimes, land pressure due to fragmentation through inheritance, the need to raise cash to buy agricultural inputs, and natural shocks such as droughts.

Thus, the countryside is made up not only of differentiated households, but also of diverse sources of income earned through physically straddling town and country. (In most cases the husband is a migrant laborer and the

wife and children are based in the rural home.) Even within the rural space, many households, although still engaged in petty commodity production of agricultural goods, have also incorporated other highly diversified nonfarm livelihood strategies, including seasonal migration and rural-based artisanal activities to supplement incomes earned from agricultural incomes (Moyo, 2002). The majority of these rural producers are incorporated into world markets through the export of classic primary commodities (Moyo, 2002).

Migration into urban areas is also one of the most visible aspects of diversification. Africa has notched up the fastest rate of urbanisation in the world (3.5 percent annually), and nearly 40 percent of the population is urbanized (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 27). The global share of African urban residents is projected to grow from 11.3 percent in 2010 to 20.2 percent by 2050. Sub-Saharan Africa's 143 cities generate a combined \$0.5 trillion, totaling 50 percent of the region's gross domestic product (GDP). In Tanzania a livelihood study identified more than four nonfarm income generation strategies in which communities were engaged (Ellis and Bahiigwa, 2003). In some localities this entails declining involvement by rural underclasses in increasingly unreliable and unproductive agricultural activities.

These economic diversification strategies are not new to rural households and have been adopted in different parts of the world. The strategies are pervasive and enduring and are not merely a transient feature in the otherwise smooth transition from agriculture to industry in SSA and Latin America (Ellis and Bahiigwa 2003). Their relevance becomes even more important when we factor in the effects of climate change on rain-fed smallholder agriculture. Most households, especially in SSA, depend on a diverse portfolio of activities and income sources amongst which crop and livestock production feature alongside many other contributions to family well-being (Ellis, 2000). The share of nonfarm income derived from nonfarm sources is estimated to be between 30 and 50 percent, and this figure can reach up to 80 to 90 percent in southern Africa (Reardon, 1997). In southern Africa '... [M]ost farmers are part-time, combining agriculture with other livelihood activities, including a range of off-farm work both locally and further afield sometimes in other countries' (Scoones and Wolmer 2003:4). In a recent study on rural Zimbabwe, Mubaya (2006) found that households combine agriculture with other activities listed below:

BOX 1-1 GENERAL RURAL LIVELIHOOD SOURCES

Home gardening
Common property resources (CPRs)
Processing, hawking, vending, and marketing
Share-rearing of livestock
Mutual help
Casual labor
Contract work
Domestic service
Child labor
Seasonal food for work
Craft work
Illicit activities (beer brewing and poaching)
Fishing
Worm-selling
Employment
Collecting wild fruits

Source: Mubaya 2006, 2014

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) led ‘sink or swim’ deregulation policies, in which farmers were pushed into global commodity markets, accentuated the process of diversification into new consumer markets where they exported fresh fruits, vegetables, and flowers to North America (Bryceson, 2000). Others, however, were forced into agricultural wage labor as Bebbington (1999) notes that the presence of nonviable agricultural units has not necessarily led to the end of rural livelihoods. A significant feature of some regional economies has been the growth of a rural proletariat working on capitalist agricultural enterprises.

CONCEPTS

‘Agency’ is about the individual’s capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life even under the most extreme forms of coercion and exploitation. According to Long (2001), social actors possess ‘knowledgeability’ and ‘capability’ to solve problems and learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them. More critically, agency

depends upon the emergence of a network of actors who become partially enrolled in the project of some other person (Giddens, 1984). Agency is embodied within closely knit social relations and can be effective only through them. It entails the generation and use or manipulation of networks of social relations and the channeling of specific items such as claims, orders, goods, instruments, and information (Long, 2001). Furthermore, any discussion on agency should also be concerned with how rural households respond collectively to the immediate constraints to social reproduction.

The reasons behind their emergence (or resurgence) vary, but many authors (Moyo, 2000; Rahmato, 1991) argue that they are part of the communities' strategy to respond to fill the gap left by the state when it retreated from agriculture as a result of structural adjustment policies. Other reasons include the need for social support in a context of obvious challenges around labor and productive assets and as a means to create capacity to engage with the state (Barr, 2004; Dekker, 2004). These local organizations sometimes serve as defensive instruments in the everyday struggles of smallholders to help contribute to the economic "viability" of rural households and to help create the enabling conditions for the pursuit of rural autonomy. These associations have a penchant for executing great undertakings in common. They make transparent to individuals the link between shared purposes and private well-being; once established, such associations allow for the transference of the habits of responsible action back and forth between civil and political spheres (Welch, 2009:369). It is these voluntary mechanisms that are behind the organization of production and welfare in the countryside. Barker (2011) has provide a heuristic model of associations in terms of their roles.

TABLE 1 - 1 THE ROLE OF ASSOCIATIONS

ROLE	DESCRIPTIONS
Integrating	They provide citizens an opportunity to develop norms of enlightened self-interest and the skills and habits of cooperation. The method of integration is horizontal, working through social networks among equals rather than relationships of dependency.
Differentiating	They provide space for individuals to form associations with distinct interests and identities. They provide a sense of community even for those who hold beliefs that are not accepted by the majority, mediating the tyranny of the majority opinion.
Capacity Building	Citizens learn the skills and habits of collective action and organize themselves to accomplish great deeds.
Synergistic	Reciprocal actions of man upon one another. Citizens in a democracy can exert social and political power rather than relying upon the power of great individuals.

Adapted from Barker (2011:208)

These local organizations have been given various names. Multilateral agencies such as FAO favor 'rural organizations'; Esman and Uphoff (1984) prefer 'local organization'; Bratton calls them 'farmers' organizations', but in most instances, this term refers to larger trade-union type organizations. Influential Africanist scholars (for instance, Rahmato, 1991; Mafeje, 1993; Moyo and Romdhane, 2002) prefer to call these formations 'peasant organizations', which refers to a variety of discrete associations formed by and involving peasants (Mafeje, 1993:17).

However, these formations do not necessarily emerge organically; they can also be a result of the intervention of external agents. Many of the local farmer groups (also known as community-based organizations) were

mostly formed through external agents, especially external NGOs. Rural households mobilized into these associational forms have been co-opted into the modernization framework to service the logic of technological and knowledge transfer focused on modernizing farming practice. The local associations are, in most instances, subordinate partners of intermediary NGOs that have steered them into localized 'development projects' focusing on ameliorating poverty without a clear transformational agenda. Furthermore, like government agencies, these NGOs operate through top-down planning and bureaucratic routines based on a specialised knowledge profession, which mostly uses a narrow language of economic efficiency (Barker 2010:10).

The proliferation of local organizations in Africa is impressive: there are 35,000 in Nigeria, 60,000 in South Africa, and over 3,000 in Zimbabwe, and in Botswana one study identified 25 different organizations in several villages (Korten, 1982; Moyo, 2002:15, Murisa & Helliker, 2011).

Agents of Rural Development

Rural life always looks very isolated and with limited activity, but further investigation reveals a complex web of private and public institutions active in the space. These range from government agencies to local operations of NGOs. These actors serve the communities in pursuit of different goals that range from social and economic to cultural and political. They promote (and at times impose) certain forms of social organization, knowledge, and production systems. In many instances, governments and their local structures do not have adequate capacity to address the development needs of rural communities.

These external agents, comprised of government agencies, NGOs, and religious organizations, are mostly responsible for the task of development. They have played a significant role in the transformation of agriculture through the promotion of 'modern' methods of farming, facilitating entry into markets. In some cases, they exercise overt power with regard to the identification of beneficiaries and exclusion of others from government and other public programs, especially in circumstances of extreme poverty, such as in developing countries. Other interventions include improvement of sanitation, access to education, and health-care facilities.

The manner in which these agents implement their interventions has

influenced not only social organization, but also either constrained or unleashed communities' agency. In agriculture, for instance, as part of a need to improve the delivery of the extension message, both government- and NGO-led interventions have introduced new social formations. Furthermore, intermediary NGOs, using various criteria, have to select beneficiaries for their projects from the communities because resources are rarely adequate to cover all members of the communities. In many instances, the selected beneficiaries are brought together into a local organization, mostly referred to as a community-based organization (CBO).

The criteria used for selection of participants in NGO-based projects vary from area to area, and different NGOs use varying criteria for selection. Those that provide direct agrarian support, such as inputs, use a combination of factors, such as vulnerability, gender (often seeking high representation of women-headed households), and access to land. Whereas those focused on introducing new farm or nonfarm innovations search for certain skills within the beneficiary community, proximity of the group, or claims that members of the community might make on a natural resource that forms part of critical resource for the 'development project' such as a dam (Interview with Norwegian People's Aid Programme Officer, 2008).

In many instances, rural life is not made up of one coherent public space, nor is it determined by any single organizing principle. Hence, the rural dwellers have had to learn to continuously bargain and improvise (Mbembe 1992:5). Faced with this reality, rural dwellers (mostly in developing contexts) mobilize not just a single 'identity' but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required, especially when it comes to accessing 'benefits' of development.

Rural Democracy and Participation

Democracy is most often commonly and erroneously referred to as a 'system of elections'. Lipset (1981:45) defined it as 'a complex political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and as a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among candidates'. In practice, democracy has been used as shorthand for certain forms of political arrangements that mostly include regular elections for

local and national governments. Nelson Mandela, in his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, observed another type of democracy—a highly participatory and local form. As a young man, he had observed the decision-making processes at the chiefs' meetings at "the Great Place", Mquhekezweni.

"Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer. . . . All were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens."

Restricting democracy to only processes of elections is not only limiting, but it also inhibits our appreciation of the field of politics itself. Elections-based descriptions of democracy eschew substantive issues of material well-being and equity and focus on only the more formal aspects of 'good' governance, that is, free and fair elections, transparency, and so on (Mkandawire 2011:41). Such thinking has led to narrow institutionalism without an organic evolution of democracy from the bottom. In fact, the 'democracy is equal to elections' mantra has led to an elite-based and unaccountable dynastic form of politics strengthened by clientelist relations that fuel corruption and entrench inequality.

We need a new democracy that adequately addresses questions of participation in decision-making and that nurtures how citizens can engage with external agents of development and also equitably access resources necessary for their social reproduction with dignity. Democracy is a social rather than a political term to refer to a society marked by equality of social conditions with no ascriptive aristocracy and with all careers open to all citizens, including the opportunities to be in government (Tocqueville 1835). The kind of democracy under discussion is the one that assumes there is no one of us who will make the best decision for others. We have to figure it out for ourselves. In other words, democracy is about learning together. Participation on the other hand is an important aspect or pulse of democracy, it should ensure that are citizens are not beholden to a particular group of power holders. In its broader sense, democracy should not only be about the equitable distribution of power and force, but it must also provide an inclusive framework for access to material (inclusive of natural)

resources and forces of production, as well as the promotion of bonds of solidarity amongst individuals that extend beyond political arrangements. Furthermore, democracy requires engaged citizens who will have to do more than participate in elections. They should know how to join with others in solving problems first at the local level and, hopefully, gain confidence and skills at that level that can also be used at national levels. There is a need for a responsive institutional framework to sustain such an ideal. True citizenship-based democracy should consist not merely of the manner in which individuals legally relate with the state over issues of civil law and the manner in which property is held. It should also include processes that ensure inclusive and equitable access to the factors (natural, physical, and financial) that enhance livelihoods. In rural contexts these would be land; productive forces such as machinery, inputs and credit; and technical knowledge made available within socially acceptable norms. The manner in which rural citizens engage (and are engaged by) institutions of local government and external agents focused on community and agricultural development is a vital aspect of the democracy equation or its lifeblood.

CONNECTING DEVELOPMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND DEMOCRACY

The popularity of the participatory school, which mostly promoted the voice and active engagement of 'subject' communities and their organic forms of knowledge, is on a gradual decline. In its place we have resorted to neo-Soviet forms of technical planning based on expert knowledge. In the process the engagement and consultation of communities has been reduced into a ritualistic checklist without creating adequate measures or processes to accommodate local and emerging knowledge and practices. It was always going to be difficult to enforce participation, especially given the required elaborate processes when, in fact, there is always a need for an urgent development or humanitarian response. The challenge to ponder is how to remake participation that reframes interactions amongst communities, professionals, and institutions into a truly participators' space without the nebulous processes developed in the previous decades (Eversole, 2010:32).

A number of formalized organisations working within civil society space have carved a niche as an alternative to an ineffective and corrupt state and a rapacious business sector and have positioned themselves as the unelected and un-legitimised voice of the citizens. They have not necessarily

invested in developing the voices of the poor and bonds of trust that can be used to unleash community participation in local and national processes outside of the framework of the scope of a defined project. A supply of good institutions and organisations is evidently not enough. To create them by legislative edict does not make them work. Somehow people must be empowered to insist on good governance according to their own terms. But wanting it does not make it happen. Institutions will work when a public covenant builds around them and demands that they work. A civic compact between formally established organisations and communities is what makes it sustainable, and it should begin at the level of communities. Only then can it be usefully facilitated by the well-placed civic investments of philanthropic donors. Civic values must emerge organically from the public life of communities.

Broad participation has been identified as a potential antidote to the unfettered expansion of expert-based approaches that exclude citizens. However, even when considerations of participation are made, it is usually in the form of inviting citizens into already designed processes and at times with spelt out results and expectations before the consultations. Participation of citizens is an ideal that many official processes have failed to achieve, and instead, they have created 'invited' spaces which in effect serve to constrain rather than unleash the civic capacities of citizens.

Another stressor to participation is the limited attention given to on-the-ground forms of social organization, especially associational forms (discussed above) as a catalyst for enhancing participation and local decision-making. The role and place of associational forms remain mostly outside the scope of the democratization discourse and the few resources that have been invested toward nurturing their potential. McKnight (2013) argues that the democratizing potential of associational forms has largely been misunderstood or overlooked.

Chapter 2

Self-Organization and Collective Action

INTRODUCTION

There were many assumptions about what political independence meant, especially to the rural poor of Africa. Many assumed that it would lead to accelerated rural development. However, as already mentioned, conditions of poverty remain and in certain cases are deepening. Inequality, measured by the gap between the rich and poor, is also growing. The failure of the ‘independence project’ to deliver on national development, especially on efficiency, equity, and freedom, combined with growing monopolization of property and concentration of power in the hands of a small elite, has led to the questioning of the efficacy of the existing state and market-based forms of interventions in the name of rural development.

AGENCY: THE MISSING PART

The ‘failure’ to deliver on the independence project has led to increased

forms of self-reliance and collective action to defend livelihoods. The extent and scope of collective action has not been uniform across the continent but is, interestingly, one of the most common response mechanism to the worsening 'multiple crises of livelihood reproduction'. The discussion below focuses on how rural communities have harnessed their civic agency through self-organization into associational forms.

Over the years, rural communities have developed innovative support systems that cushion against possibilities of vulnerability and are aimed at enhancing the quality of life. These support systems include social arrangements of reciprocity, forced generosity, communal land, and work-sharing. In many instances, these have been supported by norms and forms of traditional authority. There is still no consensus on the role of tradition and customs in shaping agency. Chatterjee (1986) argues that these lend legitimacy, further mobilisation, and put moral pressure on the mediating forces such as the state. However, with the intrusion of the market and the state, some of the emerging response mechanisms have been independent or autonomous of both traditional authority and the state.

Others argue that collective action amongst smallholder farmers to preserve or promote their interests against both other collective actors and the state promotes economic pluralism and helps balance the demands of competing interests. Specific analyses of community-based forms of agency in the post-independence period are very rare, and in many instances, research energy has been devoted to either a state-centric analysis framed within a 'catch-up' form of development or by privileging the role of external actors in organising communities. These approaches unfortunately ignore the varied everyday attempts of survival, or what James Scott (1985) has called the 'weapons of the weak'. Whilst in the decades immediately after political independence there were some attempts to study the evolution of grassroots-based agency and different forms of collective action, the same cannot be said of the post-2000 period. Instead, what we have witnessed is a proliferation of writings that celebrate 'brave and heroic' NGOs at the forefront of policy advocacy or those confronting the state on issues of political governance.

In the process we have missed out on how rural communities are responding to the challenges of declining farm yields, climate change related challenges, and also how they are engaging with local centres of

power. Rural communities throughout the developing regions are engaged in a process akin to the one observed by Tocqueville (1835) that ‘Americans of all ages, all conditions and all dispositions constantly form associations’. Giddens (1984) observed that associations are critical to the emergence of community-based forms of solidarity. Rural society in most of Africa has a tendency toward collective action through different forms of associations, and the formations that emerge ultimately have an influence on the social relations of production. In the last 20 years, we have seen a resurgence of forms of rural collective action, including peasant associations, group farming, common property institutions, and community-based resource management (McKeon, et al, 2004:4).

At the centre of rural struggles for social change is a variety of structured and unstructured local organisations that employ both legal and illegal tactics to achieve their goals. Over time, a number of rural households have been mobilised into rural associational forms that have emerged across the Global South and East as a result of either local or external agency ostensibly to serve local needs. However, rural development literature referring to voluntary collective action (Chambers, 1983; Friedman 1992 and Korten, 1980) made no reference to locally emerging public action around land reform. Earlier studies, for instance Klein (1980) and Hyden (1983), emphasised the unique nature of these entities and how they serviced certain specific cultural contexts and needs. But later studies, especially Bratton (1986) and Romdhane and Moyo (2002), have argued that these have various shades but have mainly been formed in response to the harsh and exploitative market relations that have been promoted by the post-colonial state.

Rural communities act collectively in various ways, and Rahmato (1991) has identified nine forms of associations that thrive in the rural setting: (i) mutual support networks, (ii) welfare associations, (iii) societies for resource mobilisation, (iv) self-help organisations, (v) cooperatives, (vi) nongovernmental organisations, (vii) farmer organisations, (viii) secret societies, and (ix) political organisations. According to Rahmato (1991), the most common localised formations are mutual support networks, cooperatives, savings and loan groups, informal organisations, and social movements. These have been given various names. Multilateral agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) favour ‘rural

organisations', Esman and Uphoff (1984) prefer 'local organisation', and Bratton calls them 'farmers' organisations, but in most instances, this term refers to larger trade-union type organisations. Influential Africanist scholars (for instance, Rahmato, 1991; Mafeje, 1993; Moyo and Romdhane, 2002) prefer to call these formations 'peasant organisations', which refers to a variety of discrete associations formed by and involving peasants (Mafeje, 1993:17). This is despite the challenges surrounding the use of the term peasant in Africa. The emergence of such rural formations on the continent has been conceptualised as one of the rural responses against economic and political crises and as a potential force in a possible endogenous movement for alternative forms of development (Moyo, 2002:1).

The study of these local formations in Africa has a fairly short history. The dominant discourses, especially Marxist structuralism, did not treat local associational formations as an analytical concept, thereby overlooking critical forms of organisation and social struggle. Popular readings, such as Shanin (1987) and Gutkind (1988), simply ignored them. This is despite the fact that local organisations have been in existence over a number of years in various shades and have played different roles.

Corporatism has been used to analyse the relationship between rural associational activity and the state and market activity (Bratton 1994:11). Corporatism can be defined as

A set of policies and institutional arrangements for structuring interest representation . . . the state often charters or even creates interest groups, attempts to regulate their number, and gives them the appearance of a quasi-representational monopoly along with special prerogatives (Stepan, 1978:46 [Quoted by Bratton 1994:11]).

Rural formations are reduced to instruments of bringing about modernising rural development projects, such as the introduction of nonfarm income-generating projects. The colonial and post-colonial states have indeed been successful in nurturing national associations. For instance, prior to independence, they were instrumental in the establishment of the Rhodesia Commercial Farmers' Union (RCFU) and the smallholders' national farmers' association. However, these formations did not have an influence on local associational activity but were rather more concerned

with national agricultural policy.

The corporatism approach oversimplifies the rationale behind group formation among rural households and local level politics. It exaggerates the grasp African governments have over associational activity, especially in the rural areas (Bratton, 1994:11). In practice, it fails to adequately interpret the actual meanings of such interactions and local practice within local associational activity in terms of defending rural social reproduction through bargaining, negotiations, and compromises struck with the urban-based elites (Murisa, 2007). The potential contribution of these forms to democratic practice remained outside the scope of this discourse, despite the fact that these formations tend to be resistance movements or organisations against domination by the state, landlords, merchant capital, or men, in the case of women's associations (Mafeje, 1993:17).

Furthermore, rural households are not just economic units of production but sites of social and cultural interaction, and they operate within a political context in which their interactions with the external environment cannot be easily defined, as within a co-opted or autonomous framework. These organisations are defenders of political space as they play a politically adaptive role and respond to the exploitative relations unleashed by the state and the market (Holmquist, 1980; Moyo, 2002). Increasingly, they have become centres of micro-democracy given the revolving of leadership positions, unlike within the traditional framework where positions are held for life. Within this thinking, it is argued that the petty commodity-producing smallholders belonging to these associational forms are active and empowered forces that continue to occupy the terrain of struggle over land and agrarian reform. The following subsections provide an overview of the different levels of associational activities.

LOCAL LEVEL ASSOCIATIONS

The African countryside is made up of a mosaic of associational forms, including loose, unstructured mutual networks such as faith-based groups, credit associations, women's groups, labour-sharing groups, asset-pooling groups, solidarity circles, and the more structured peasant organizations, which are either localised or national. Local and structured organizations exist in various shades and play different roles. Some local organizations remain very informal with no known premises, not encumbered by a

structured leadership nor legally registered. These informal types might appear fragile and impermanent, but they tend to be ubiquitous and play a critical role in smallholders' struggles for viability (Rahmato, 1991:2).

Labour and asset-pooling formations tend to emerge out of the traditional institutional framework based on belonging within an identifiable lineage group, which also serves as a platform of cooperation, whilst those entailing the introduction of a new innovation, such as joint marketing or mobilization of savings, are founded by charismatic leaders (especially in peasant organizations). State-based local functionaries such as extension officers have at times influenced the formation of groups for sourcing inputs and for extension support (Mlambo, 2002). Rahmato (1991) argued that communities live by a shared system of values and that these traditional values have an integrative function, especially in mobilising networks of cooperation. In certain instances traditional leaders have been identified as a form of legitimizing the process of mobilizing people into these associations (Chatterjee, 2002). Petty commodity producers are likely to enter into associative relationships because of the perceived benefits of such an endeavor, especially in a context of repeated social, economic, and environmental crises (Bratton, 1986:368).

Collective action by farmers is most common where the state and market both have a strong presence and is least likely where both are weakly represented. For example, in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland East, 'group development areas have been active since 1972 in response to a government programme to deliver extension advice on a group basis' (Bratton, 1986:371). The state-owned Agriculture Finance Corporation (AFC)'s expansion into communal areas coincided with the mushrooming of "credit and cash groups" (Bratton, 1986:372).

The structured and unstructured formations serve a variety of purposes and assume a multitude of roles but mostly serve as a local coping mechanism to address social reproduction challenges that families may be facing, such as productive assets deficits, food shortages, and other socioeconomic grievances, in response to the negative effects of state policies and market penetration. They are not directly engaged in politics but eventually influence power relations at a local level.

In Malawi, the majority of Farmer Organisations (FOs) are externally driven. Consultations with stakeholders suggest that development

partners and NGOs tend to promote FOs as a last-resort exit strategy for their development projects. The philosophy underpinning the Farmer Organisation Development Strategy (FODS) is that any farmer-based organization in Malawi should be demand driven. Its inception should be based on the actual needs emanating from the people it is meant to serve. If the people have not fully perceived the advantage of belonging to an FO, the development partner or NGO should develop strategies for sustainability (FODS, Government of Malawi, February 2018).

Several studies of resettled communities in Zimbabwe found that one of the first things that many resettled households did was to establish some form of associational activity (see, for instance, Moyo et al., 2009; Murisa, 2009; Scoones et al., 2010). The local farmer associations that were established provide a platform for aggregating productive forces such as labour and farming assets, for building local processes of participation, and for defending land rights. These associations thus serve as an important institutional response for sustaining farm-based production and income generation within the resettled farms.

Amongst a variety of the other functions, local associations are also involved in defending the interests of smallholder rural households from outside threats and are part of an attempt to preserve a way of life in times of social stress. Other objectives may include social, religious, mutual welfare, or community integration. There are two broad types of local farmer associations: agricultural and nonagricultural (Arnaiz, 1998). The agricultural associations can also be further divided into two categories: asset-sharing groups and access associations.

Non-agricultural groups include welfare associations, women's groups focused on income generation (such as sewing and poultry production), and savings clubs. The benefits derived from these non-agricultural activities play an important role in supporting farm-related activities such as the purchase of inputs. These groups generally have a medium to large membership, and their objectives range from social welfare to solidarity and promotion of identity either through religion or recruitment into cults or secret societies (Rahmato, 1991). Some of the groups take advantage of the existence of ethnic and kinship networks or occupational affiliations (Rahmato, 1991:4).

It is important at this juncture to reiterate that rural life is complex and is neither fully commoditised nor fully pre-capitalist. Rather, inherent

within it is a hybrid of both worlds. The associational forms that have emerged are in most cases alert to these complexities and at times mobilise and operate within pre-capitalist social relations to enhance access to the market. A good example of an organization that attempts to respond to market challenges by taking advantage of pre-existing networks of kinship is the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), which operates mostly in the southern parts of Zimbabwe. It was established in 1981, and by the end of 1983, had established 300 local groups known as *amalima*, which in *isiNdebele* means “meeting together for working and helping ourselves” (Chavhunduka et al., 1984:3). The local *amalima* groups took advantage of pre-existing women’s clubs and were made up of families settled next to each other on the basis of ties of inclusion within lineage groups. The activities of ORAP include the establishment of service projects (water and sanitation), income-generating projects (sewing and carpentry), and training on new farm skills. These activities contributed to the further penetration of the commodities market by the participating households.

Post-2000 studies (Moyo, et al., 2009; Murisa 2009) of the most recent resettlement exercise in Zimbabwe have found that beyond the very localised (village level) association, land beneficiaries have also established associations at district levels in almost all of the country’s provinces. In one part of Goromonzi (Mashonaland East) district, the land beneficiaries have formed the Bromley Farmers Association (BFA) with approximately 250 active members drawn from the small- and medium-scale farming communities. The association was formed in 2005 and seeks to address common grievances within the resettled community (interviews with BFA members, September 2008). The association has been involved since its establishment in the bulk buying of inputs such as fertilizers and seeds for members.

In Mashonaland West, the Zvimba South Farmers Association services half of the Zvimba district, which includes Banket and surrounding areas. The association has a pre-resettlement history. It was created by local leaders (mostly politicians) within Zvimba to foster improved yields amongst its members and also to nurture good agricultural practice, but it was always hampered by low membership levels. In the aftermath of the fast-track programme, the association experienced a new lease of life. It was revived as a mobilising platform for those who had been offered land but were

struggling to obtain inputs (interview with executive committee member of the association, August 2006). Since 2003, the association has been involved in securing inputs for its members through bulk buying or entering into contract farming arrangements. The following discussion analyzes some of the internal features of many associations.

Nature of Leadership and Participation within Local Groups

Most of the local farmer organizations operate through elected representative structures (Rahmato, 1991; Moyo, 2002). The leadership is mostly made up of locals, and there is usually no requirement for special skills to run these organizations. In certain instances, lineage heads have emerged as leaders of organizations made up of members from a similar clan, and at times higher-level traditional authorities have appointed candidates of their choice in these organizations. ORAP, operating mostly in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands, is made up of smaller local units referred to as 'village groups' headed by lineage elders (Chavhunduka et al., 1984:6).

According to Rahmato (1991), most of the commonly elected leaders were found in organizations that mobilised and recruited on the basis of age, while clan-based mutual support and survival associations tended to be led by those appointed by traditional leaders. Although these organizations have been popularised by the participatory school, they tend to minimise popular participation in everyday decision-making. According to Moyo (2002), some of the local organizations have been found to be lacking in terms of promoting effective and inclusive participation. Besides the lack of participation, other undemocratic internal organizational features include failure to acknowledge women as effective decision-makers (in some organizations) and the exclusion of other social groups, especially rural landless households (Moyo, 2002).

Composition

The social basis of the local organizations, and their class and gender-based identities, are critical for understanding the extent to which these formations include different economic and social interests within their structures. An understanding of the social base contributes toward determining the extent to which local organizations mediate rural differentiation. Opinions differ on the social groups that are best represented in formal organizations.

Bratton (1986:373) argues that the 'middle smallholder' is the prime force in these organizations, while others believe that rural elites are the dominant force and the greatest beneficiaries. Arnaiz's (1998) study on local organizations in Shamva found that access (marketing) groups tend to have wealthier members while the asset-sharing groups tend to be made up of women and/or resource-poor households (Arnaiz, 1998). A study of local associational activity in three districts found that members of access groups tend to be the wealthier, cattle-owning (a proxy for wealth) members of the community, while the labour and asset-sharing groups were comprised of poorer members of the community (Bratton, 1986:373-4). These households tend to have limited access to productive assets such as land, farm tools, and draught power. Others have noted that poorer peasants, landless labourers, and women are excluded from the development project-based organizations and therefore from the material benefits that could be derived from them (Rahmato, 1991; Sibanda, 2002). The poorest with no assets generally find difficulty in joining either type of group.

Evidence gathered by Bratton (1986) and Arnaiz (1998) suggests that rural elites are not active in any form of local organization. They do not join groups because the scale of their farm enterprises is sufficiently large to be economically viable or because they are reluctant to share assets with other less-endowed households (Bratton, 1986:373). Instead, they concentrate their activities within organizations involved in resource generation and distribution. Wealthier households were found to gain disproportionately more from local associational activity than poorer ones in access to credit, water rights, land, infrastructure for irrigation, and equipment such as tractors derived from state, NGO, and donor support to the associations' projects. Those who do not produce commodity surpluses do not belong in marketing-focused organizations. Interlocking memberships and leadership of peasant associations thus tend to undergird the class and social differentiation of the peasantry rather than merely accentuate the different cultural and social identities existing within it (Moyo, 2002).

Participation in Local Farmer Group Activities

Local farmer associations belong to the family of voluntary institutions that have emerged throughout Africa's countryside, and although they operate under various names, they are usually

associations of persons who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common objective through the formation of a democratically controlled organization, making equitable contribution to the capital required and accepting a fair share of the risks and benefits of the undertaking (Hussi et al., 1993:13).

Like any other social formation, there is no uniformity in terms of the presence of some of the vital characteristics such as the level of democratic participation and equitable contribution to the capital, which may be in the form of labour time, cash injection, or other physical assets mentioned in the definition above. Mafeje (1993:17) argued that these formations “require no special skills to run them as they are usually small and characterized by face-to-face relations and based on mutual trust”.

Rahman (1993:12) argues that for a voluntary association to be successful, the associating individuals must possess a sense of identity with the entity so that collective interest registers emotionally in the consciousness of the member as part of his or her individual interests. Furthermore, effective participation requires that members manage to internalize the factors of creativity that are objectively external to individuals subjectively and to develop a sense of purpose in the exercise of ownership and decision-making (Rahman, 1993:17). In my studies of resettlement in Zimbabwe (see Murisa, 2009, 2011), I found that associations with fewer members (an average of 15 to 20) provided significant scope for members to offer input into the activities of the group and that the meetings are held more frequently. Associations with more than 30 members were more closed in allowing decision-making and most of the decisions, including the name, activities, and frequency of meetings of the group, had been taken by the leadership. There are longer intervals between meetings in associations with more than 30 members than in the smaller ones.

However, the mere frequency and high attendance of meetings of the association does not necessarily mean that members have internalized the goals of the association and identify with it emotionally. There have been instances even in the small associations in which critical decisions were made by the leadership without consulting members. Despite these weaknesses, the scope for participation is always greater within smaller associations than in larger ones. Within smaller associations, it is easier for the leaders to call for a meeting within a day and to allow everyone to

discuss an issue before an agreement is reached on what to do. It is also easier for all to see who is doing their share and who is not, and such peer pressure works positively against free riders. Frequent face-to-face contact and some sort of a common commitment make it easier for members to trust each other and to reach a common understanding.

The bigger the association the more difficult it is for the members to achieve a common sense of purpose. The leadership is oftentimes overwhelmed by the task of organising activities in which so many members have to participate. I noticed that it took an average of four to five days for the leadership to get all the members together into one meeting. Most of the meetings are poorly attended for a variety of reasons, including insufficient notice of the meeting, no knowledge of the meeting and trusting that others would make the right decision (based on focus group discussions held with three associations and personal observations, August-October 2008). One of the reasons for this low member participation in the association's activities is that there are no prior social relations within the groups and also that the majority of those belonging to such formations did not belong to any form of association before being resettled. The lack of prior experience with such formations means that members do not understand why they should attend meetings, especially when they have a leadership committee in place. They are not used to any conscious planning or depersonalized discussions on farm management problems. The most common practice that has emerged within the associations is that they elect anybody who claims to have experience of such issues as the leader and agree with the decisions made without seeking explanations. Once leaders have been elected, power is not shared in common to the extent that members do not necessarily identify with the decisions taken by the leadership.

While Mafeje (1993) is right to assert that such associations are usually too small, it is the claim that they need no special skills that needs qualification. There is a definite need for leadership skills in these groups to inculcate an ethos of consulting and designing acceptable resource allocation mechanisms. The current practices, in which leaders make decisions without consulting and are rarely questioned, have served to weaken group unity. In extreme cases, some associations have actually collapsed. Furthermore, modern innovations that are being introduced, such as contract farming arrangement with private sector players, makes it imperative for the

leadership within these associations to have some basic literacy, accounting skills, and understanding of commodity markets.

The current pool of leaders is made up of mostly those who are capable in farming, politically connected, and in some cases lineage elites. However, democratic practices are yet to be mainstreamed in the operation of these associations. For instance, most of the leaders of the small associations were not elected but either nominated by the extension officer (see next chapter) on the basis of their farming competency or wholly chosen by the members but without subjecting them to elections. Most of the associations have constitutions that promise some form of democratic practice. However, the failure or decision not to hold elections by these groups presents a somewhat different picture to an outsider. Furthermore, the current practice, whereby members disgruntled by the leadership of a certain association have gone ahead to form a new group, only leads to further fragmentation without necessarily reforming the internal practice of these formations.

NATIONAL SMALLHOLDER FARMERS' ASSOCIATIONS

Immediately above these highly localised associational forms, there are regional and national representative associations and unions, most of them with more than ten thousand members across villages and counties. Increasingly, they have become centres of micro-democracy, given the revolving of leadership positions, unlike within the traditional framework in which positions are held for life. Within this thinking, it is argued that the petty commodity-producing smallholders belonging to these associational forms are active and empowered forces that continue to occupy the terrain of struggle over land and agrarian reform. The emergence of such rural formations on the continent has been conceptualized as one of the rural responses against economic and political crises and as a potential force in a possible endogenous movement for alternative forms of development (Moyo, 2002:1). In some places these organizations have become defenders of political space for rural producers, especially when they engage in advocacy campaigns for better prices for commodities and subsidies to smallholders and demand to be included in various government-led commissions of inquiry. They are also defenders of land rights in the face of increased interest in rural land (see discussion in chapter 2). The subsections that follow profile national level associations that focus on smallholder farmers

in Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

Malawi-National Association of Smallholder Farmers' Associations of Malawi (NASFAM)

NASFAM was established in 1997; it grew out of a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project that sought to solve organizational challenges of smallholders and to enable them to benefit fully from the improving economic and political environment. It is the largest independent, smallholder-owned membership organization in Malawi. It operates on the principles of collective action, and it has a governance structure that delegates significant authority to the members. The clubs, associations, and national structures serve a membership of more than 130,000 fully registered members, of which 51 percent are women. The Cooperative Societies Act of 1998 provides for a three-tier structure of farmer organisations in Malawi, comprised of primary, secondary (or cooperative unions), and tertiary cooperative societies, also called apex bodies. The table below shows the structure of farming cooperatives in Malawi.

TABLE 2-1 STRUCTURE OF FARMING COOPERATIVES IN MALAWI

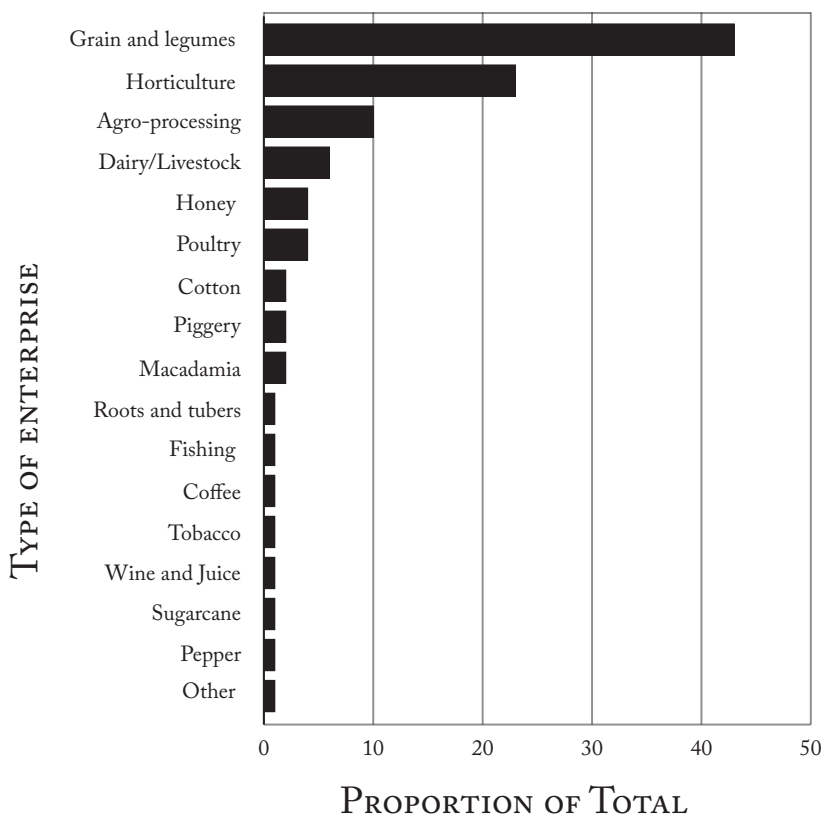
Tier	Activities/Membership Criteria
Primary Cooperative Societies	membership consists of individual persons
Cooperative Union/ Secondary Society	membership is restricted to primary societies
Apex	membership is restricted to cooperative unions established to serve the cooperative movement provides facilities for banking, insurance, and the supply of goods and services

Source: Draft Cooperative Development Policy (2018), Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism Malawi

NASFAM operates in 22 districts across the country and promotes farming as a business with a motto of “the future belongs to the organized”. It is organized into farmers’ clubs (comprised of 10 – 15 individual farmers) and

action groups, which are used as strategic points for disseminating technical messages to farmers and bulking of produce. A pool of action groups forms associations. The associations are grouped by geographical location under association management centres (AMCs). Association management centres provide management and operational support to associations in terms of production, marketing, and community development. The AMCs are, in turn, supported by the NASFAM head office structure.

FIG 2-1 AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES IN MALAWI, ORGANIZED BY TYPE



Source: Agricultural Cooperatives Societies Study Report (2016), Ministry of Industry, Trade & Tourism Malawi.

NASFAM's functions are split into commercial development activities as it supports member marketing, crop production, and other livelihoods programmes. It works toward strengthening the voice of smallholders in

policy processes. Through collaborative efforts it has, since its establishment, focused on mobilising the smallholder community to be engaged in policy processes through making demands and sustained smallholder empowerment. It has placed the smallholder community in a position to see itself as an engine for change. NASFAM claims to 'always recognise the importance of a conducive policy environment' and has been behind a number of campaigns aimed at improving agricultural policies, especially for the smallholder sector.

NASFAM has a policy advocacy unit that works with member associations to influence government policies and processes. The unit addresses the improvement of rural infrastructure, promotion of irrigation, pricing systems, and marketing mechanisms for farmers' produce; community schools and health facilities to taxation policy; and the protection of the legal rights of women and children. Training and capacity-building initiatives have been at the core of NASFAM programmes. More than 30,000 NASFAM members have benefitted from the adult literacy programme as a measure to improve the adaptation to technology rates.

NASFAM has also played a catalytic role in the organization of smallholder diversification into non-staple commodities, such as groundnuts, paprika, soybeans, pigeon peas, and cotton. NASFAM has been promoting food diversification, and members have now started growing other crops, such as pulses and cassava, bringing improved household food and nutrition security. NASFAM has brought the power of collective bargaining to input and service supply.

Besides NASFAM's national work, it is also involved in international and regional processes that focus on improved trade opportunities for smallholders (especially the Economic Partnership Agreements dialogues), global commodity prices (especially food), and other issues that potentially negatively affect smallholder agriculture, such as land investments for agro-fuels. At a regional level, NASFAM is a member of the People's Dialogue and is also a part of a global advocacy network called Global and Regional Advocacy for Small Producers (GRASP).

Mozambique National Union of Peasants (UNAC)

UNAC is a movement of peasants, and it fights for the active participation of farmers in the development process of Mozambique. It was established in

1987 and registered in 1994. In 2010, UNAC had about 86,000 individual members grouped into 2,200 local associations and cooperatives. The associations and cooperatives are organized under provincial and district superstructures; comprising of 83 district unions and 7 provincial unions of peasants. UNAC was established to give small farmers a voice in rural and agricultural policymaking because, as in many other countries, rural people lack the means to hold the government and international actors to account.

UNAC's general purpose is to represent the farmers and their organizations to ensure their social, economic, and cultural rights by strengthening farmers' organizations, participation in defining public policies, and development strategies aimed at ensuring food sovereignty, considering the youth and gender equity. Its other objectives include:

- promoting and strengthening farmers' organizations to better provide services to members
- undertaking actions that aim at increasing farm production and market access
- strengthening the participation of farmers and their organizations in the processes of design, implementation, and monitoring of policies

Over the years, UNAC has become the nerve centre for donor-based interventions into the countryside. The union has mostly sought and kept alliance with social movements within the sub-region but also internationally, such as La Via Campesina and the MST in Brazil. Like NASFAM, UNAC occupies and navigates within a very difficult and contested space. On the one hand, it has mostly been sustained by aid from donor organizations, and on the other, it emerged from the ruling liberation movement FRELIMO and is viewed by others as an appendage of the party.

Tanzania Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA)

Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA) is a national network of farmers' groups that brings together smallholder farmers from all regions of Tanzania in order to have a common voice to defend economic, social, cultural, and political interests. MVIWATA is an acronym for the National Network of Small-Scale Farmers Groups in Tanzania. It was founded in 1993, and it aspires to empower smallholder farmers

economically and socially through capacity building and undertaking lobbying and advocacy, especially by strengthening their groups and networks, facilitating communication, and learning so that they are capable of defending their interests.

The organization was formed to address challenges facing smallholder farmers, such as lack of a strong organization of small-scale farmers in the country, exclusion of small-scale farmers from decision-making process on matters that touch the welfare of small-scale farmers, and under-representation or complete lack of representation of small-scale farmers in decision-making bodies, low prices of agricultural produce, unreliable markets, and lack of access to financial services. To address these challenges, MVIWATA has been implementing various projects that strengthen the conditions for small-scale farmers.

Since its establishment, MVIWATA has organized several international and local farmers' exchanges between network members and other farmers' organizations. These various experiences have been documented for a wider use amongst the MVIWATA members. Relationships have been established with Uganda Change Agent Association; Imbaraga, a farmers' movement based in Rwanda; and Zimbabwean training centre called Silveira House. MVIWATA is also one of the founding members of the APM-Africa network (Farmers, Agriculture and Modernisation in Africa). Exposure to international processes has enabled MVIWATA not only to be globally connected but also to connect local smallholder struggles with the growing calls for global restructuring of the agricultural architecture.

IMPACT OF NATIONAL FARMERS' ASSOCIATION ON RURAL AGENCY

However, these regional and national associations have their own contradictions; in most cases they started off as membership driven but for a variety of reasons were eventually penetrated and civilized either by the state or donor institutions. The states have routinely incorporated farmers' unions into their structures and used them as branches of the state's modernisation of the countryside plan. Those who have been spared the intervention of the state have found themselves at the mercy of willing donor partners also pursuing another variant of rural modernization. Thus, separation between membership-driven unions and rural intermediary NGOs is conceptually difficult to make in many situations. Furthermore,

some of them are led by elite rural elements that emphasize issues that address their own specific accumulation challenges rather than represent the entire membership's interests.

The entry of donors into these spaces has led to a limited and non-transformational form of agency. Rural actors' activities and lived realities have been subordinated to log-frames, externally imposed measurable project goals, such as increased household food security or improved literacy and sanitation. Instead, what we have on the ground is the worsening of rural social reproduction opportunities, increased differentiation, especially between project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and the demobilization of the countryside. Furthermore, despite their prominence, these associational forms constitute only part of society, and an analysis of rural social organization based only on an analysis of the activities of these formations might be misleading, given their exclusionary nature. They tend to be exclusive due to the different criteria they use for recruiting members, including ownership of certain assets, defined levels of vulnerability, and territorial proximity.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT RURAL AGENCY

The manner in which communities are organized has a bearing on the forms of public actions that emerge. The reverse is also true. There are a number of other factors that also influence social organisation and agency, such as the manner in which households are differentiated on the basis of wealth, access to land and privilege, power structures that exist, and the manner in which external agents such as NGOs and even the various arms of the state engage communities. The brief discussion below provides insights into understanding the factors that affect rural forms of agency.

Differentiation

Africa's colonial history was associated with varying levels of separation of the direct producers from their means of production, usually in the form of the violent seizure or expropriation of native communal landholdings and the consequent forced insertion of the displaced landholders into the wage economy in a process known as 'proletarianisation'. The proletarianisation process was, however, uneven, shaped mostly by the form of colonialism and the extent of land alienation. Former settler colonies such as Kenya, Namibia,

South Africa, and Zimbabwe experienced significant land alienation, and attempts at proletarianisation were most pronounced in these countries. The process of land alienation was uneven within the settler colonies; in some instances certain communities retained their landholdings or were moved into infertile areas, while other groups were totally proletarianised after being rendered landless.

Beyond land alienation, colonialism was also associated with the conversion of small-scale agriculturalists previously producing for their own consumption into petty commodity producers. Commodification, with its emphasis on cash crops for the market, disrupted the cycle of household food production with an attendant decline in food production, increased vulnerability to the vagaries of the world market, and rural impoverishment, which was partly caused by state and transnational requirements that peasants produce and sell specified crops under unfavourable conditions (Bernstein, 1979; Cooper, 1981; Watts, 1983). However, the effects of commodification varied; in some places, such as Zimbabwe, commodity traders used their control of credit to promote smallholder production in areas easily accessible to the market, whilst the majority in remote areas were marginalised. A good example of this division occurred in the Makoni customary areas in the eastern parts of Zimbabwe, where a combination of reliable rainfall patterns and a road network enabled access to credit and commodity markets unlike their counterparts in remote customary areas (Ranger, 1985:16).

Commodification also yielded defiant responses. Because neither the colonial state nor merchant interests could effectively oversee petty commodity production or completely lock the producers into the market, some enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy (Isaacman 1990:18). Even among those forced into the wage economy, some managed to utilise earnings from that economy to accumulate productive farm equipment. The situation was compounded by the fact that, even though officially land markets did not exist in customary tenure areas, other mechanisms of expanding landholdings were devised, including taking over underutilised land belonging to family members and direct purchase of land. Lineage elders (chiefs and village heads) manipulated the laws and in the process sold off some land to those willing to expand farm production. Thus, the differentiated nature of African rural households has a longer pre-

independence history (especially in southern Africa) than recently acknowledged by some scholars (Moyo and Yeros, 2005a).

Political independence in most of the Global South and East did not necessarily halt the process of land alienations and the commodification of agricultural production. This was due to a number of constraints regarding the redistribution of land and the hegemonic influence of the logic of producing for the market promoted by both the local states and multilateral development agencies (especially in southern Africa).

The bundle of survival strategies adopted by rural-based petty commodity producers contributes toward their further conceptual elusiveness. This elusiveness derives from the indeterminate, disparate, and fragmented activities of production and reproduction of rural households (Helliker, 2006:30). Following Bryceson's (2000) arguments with regard to the contradictory process of depeasantisation and the enduring presence of poor rural dwellers within the countryside, there is a definite need to reanalyse agrarian change processes, going beyond the current fixation with class categories to explore rural production realities and what they mean for social reproduction.

Rural differentiation is not fixed; it is based on a number of external socioeconomic and political determinants that affect social reproduction. These determinants include the vagaries of nature, actual landholdings, market fluctuations, and one's own perception of wealth. The capacity to adopt a diverse set of income strategies and the presence of structural difference in access to land and other natural resources are some of the factors behind the deepening of rural differentiation. The social relations that emerge are expressed in many interconnected realities that do not necessarily conform to mechanistic formulations of class and domination. Social hierarchies in the countryside are not concretely defined by accumulation of wealth, but rather by other intrinsic endowments, such as the manner in which labour is mobilised.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter has shown how rural people are almost always a member of some association and has also demonstrated the role played by local level associations in addressing immediate production-related and other socioeconomic grievances. Whilst not exhaustive, it has also provided

analysis of the landscape of national level associations in Africa. Despite the persistence of rural poverty, there seems to be a decline in the number of associations that are mobilizing toward policies and programs that can lead to equitable and inclusive development. Whilst there is evidence of local civic energy toward resolving immediate production challenges, instances and evidence of moments when that civic energy connects with national level processes to influence policy are rare. Rather, what we have are isolated actions taken at a very local level by disgruntled groups, such as land occupations in Zimbabwe that were not connected or organized by the structured national association. More recently, strikes by farm workers in the Western Cape Province of South Africa were also outside the organisation or mobilization of the bigger and national trade unions. The main trend, however, besides these isolated pockets of resistance, is that rural associational activity in Africa seems to be giving in to external interventions from the state and external NGOs and in the process diluting their original intentions and even their politics (these relationships are discussed in more detail in the following chapters.) In many ways rural associational life—the platform of everyday politics—is mostly dominated by foreign-funded NGOs whose agendas are not always aligned to that of the unions.

Chapter 3

The Extension Function

INTRODUCTION

The composition of life in rural settings presents an illusion of isolation, idleness, and limited activity, but further investigation reveals an active, complex web of private and public institutions. These range from government agencies to local operations of NGOs. These actors serve the communities in pursuit of different social, economic, cultural, and political goals. They promote (and at times impose) certain forms of social organization, knowledge, and production systems.

Government agencies are responsible for extension services; NGOs and religious organizations are mostly responsible for the task of development. They have played a significant role in the transformation of agriculture through the promotion of 'modern' methods of farming, facilitating entry into markets, and in some cases exercising overt power with regard to the identification of some beneficiaries and exclusion of others from government and other public programs, especially in circumstances of extreme poverty such as in developing countries. Other interventions embarked on by these 'agents' include improvement of sanitation, access to education, and

managing of health care facilities.

The manner in which these agents implement their interventions has not only influenced social organization but has also either constrained or unleashed communities' agency. In agriculture, for instance, as part of a need to improve the delivery of the extension message, both government- and NGO-led interventions have introduced new social formations. In this chapter and the following one, I revisit the (re)organization of agriculture through the lens of agents of rural development by paying particular attention to the ways in which they understand their task, their tools of intervention, and how these contribute to sustainable agriculture-based livelihoods. In this discussion I will focus on the role of extension⁴, given its primary focus on agriculture.

DEFINING EXTENSION

Agriculture extension is defined as a service or system that helps farmers to improve their methods and techniques for increased production efficiency and subsequently better livelihoods through a defined education programme (Nhongonhema, 2010:141). Extension programs also address environmental concerns around sustainable use of natural resources such as land and water. In most cases extension officers are suppliers of 'privileged' knowledge and have on either a one-on-one basis or through group approaches disseminated a certain form of knowledge within a defined paradigm of agricultural development. These processes are characterized by limited input from beneficiary communities, especially in determining or naming the actual problems that communities face. Instead of focusing on broader community challenges, extension has mostly focused on the dissemination of farming knowledge generated from research centres.

There are new attempts at revisiting the role of extension and, in the process, raising prospects for it to play a broader role in community capacity building and moving away from looking at itself as essentially experts.

4. The actual organisation of extension varies from one region to another. In the US, for example, most of the extension is offered through land grant universities and is commonly known as cooperative extension, whilst in developing regions such as Africa, extension is mostly offered by the government's Ministry of Agriculture or NGOs. There have also been limited instances where purely private sector organisations have offered extension as part of a contract farming model.

Regarding experts and politics, Shaffer (2011) argues that ‘a persistent challenge to citizen participation in politics, informal or formal, is the dominant voice of experts’ (Shaffer 2011:1). This is true also in the rural development landscape. Scholars such as Carcasson (2009) and Peters et al. (2005) have proposed the introduction of deliberative approaches as opposed to teacher-student relationships in the conduct of extension work⁵. The discussion below is an attempt to reconceptualize the role of extension, given the concerns about power relations currently embedded between the extension officer and the community receiving support. It attempts to understand how extension as a function of development can be integrated within community processes in a manner that does not negatively affect the community’s own civic energy but rather, as in the words of Campbell and Feenstra (2005:61), ‘works towards rejoining the disparate but interconnected forms of knowledge that exist within the communities and integrate it with the existing extension package’. Specific research questions that inform this discussion include:

- How do external agents influence local politics, processes of civic agency, and democracy?
- What is the current logic of extension?
- How does extension in its current form relate to the new visions of agriculture?
- What should be the new role of extension?

THE LOGIC AND EVOLUTION OF EXTENSION - OFFICIAL INTERPRETATIONS AND TENSIONS

Extension should not necessarily be analyzed in isolation as it is part of a broader complex system of intervention by external agents with a defined set of goals of ‘development’. These actors come from institutions that are mostly outside the rural communities. In certain instances, the institutions

⁵ Deliberation is a form of public decision-making that is different from voting, bargaining, or interest-group politics. It involves all concerned parties in a discussion, presentation of different opinions, the tensions within each course of action, and agreement on what will work best according to the community rather than the experts.

may employ locals with requisite skills or recruit some on a voluntary basis, but the bottom line is that they seek to bring in initiatives or innovations that currently do not exist within their particular communities. They come from NGOs (discussed in the following section), government agencies, quasi-government agencies, religious organizations, and businesses. Though there are a few instances in which these institutions coordinate their efforts, most of the time they work in isolation. As a result, instead of encouraging synergistic relationships, the space is replete with cases of duplication and competition amongst different agencies, especially for success stories.

Agricultural extension finds itself within this competitive space. The aims of extension include helping farmers identify and analyze their production problems and hence creating awareness of the possibilities and opportunities for improvement. The rationale for yield-maximizing extension service gains currency in a context of declining productivity (land size vs. amount harvested) and in a global context where it is predicted that the world population is not only increasing at an alarming rate but also the purchasing capacity of previously poor countries has increased over time while actual food production has not grown dramatically. Given the fact that the production base (land) is a finite resource, the only solution within this line of thinking is to dramatically increase productivity.

The extension officer is the most visible local agent with the mandate to modernize agriculture and improve productivity. The roles of these officers include training on improved modern farming methods (advice on the use of seeds, fertilizers, and land preparation methods), assisting farmers' access to inputs (where subsidies exist), and facilitating their entry into specialised agriculture commodity markets. The power of extension agents is mostly visible in countries where, firstly, agricultural subsidies exist, such as in Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. Secondly, their power is visible in the manner in which they use top-down methods that do not accommodate the plurality of ideas and methodologies. Thirdly, extension officers (especially in countries where subsidies exist) have altered forms of social organization (discussed in more detail in the previous section) by insisting on offering their technical advice to groups of farmers rather than to individuals. This has led to the proliferation of extension groups. Extension has also (albeit unintentionally) contributed to an increasing dependency syndrome amongst smallholder communities for industrially

treated seeds and synthetic fertilizers.

EVOLUTION OF EXTENSION: TOP - DOWN TO PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Extension systems have evolved over the years from ‘top-down’ technology transfer to ‘bottom up’ approaches. The top-down approaches were mainly influenced by the assumed efficacy of the trickle-down theory. In many parts of the developing world, it led to the emergence of ‘Master Farmer’ categories within smallholder communities who were trained to then train others on an ongoing basis. However, because of the prioritization that these categories of farmers received from governments and input companies, the process served only to entrench an already ongoing process of differentiation within these communities. The approach was widely used across most of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It gained currency especially during and in the aftermath of the green revolution. In Africa it was considered successful in influencing adoption of technologies such as the use of hybrid seeds and the introduction of cash crops. However, studies have shown that the highest ever recorded adoption rate of the extension message using top-down approaches was 40 percent.

The South African Agricultural Research Council-Small Grains Institute (ARC-SGI) is a typical top-down provider of extension services. Its stated ‘aim is to impart knowledge and skills on new technologies that would significantly increase productivity of small grains within the small-scale farming environment’ (Mebalo and Morojele 2010:63). They view extension as ‘a policy instrument to increase agricultural production to achieve national food security and help alleviate rural poverty’ (ibid, 65). As such, their parameters of measuring impact are focused on their own activities and are highly quantitative without necessarily indicating how the communities influenced the measuring process. The selected indicators of progress or success, unfortunately, do not capture how the accomplished activities actually respond to the needs of beneficiary communities, the manner in which the communities participated in the establishment of benchmarks, or their levels of satisfaction with the approaches.

In the late 1980s, the participatory school promoting inclusive approaches to development, especially within the rural sector, began to attract widespread attention as a potential panacea to the challenge of

sustainability. During that time, the literature was already agitating for changes in the traditional public extension systems, which was seen as highly ineffective, paternalistic, inflexible, and less able to cope with the demands of agriculture. The participatory approaches were championed mostly by Robert Chambers (1983) and NGOs such as the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG). One of the goals of the approach was to address the low technology adoption rates among smallholder farmers. They emphasized the importance of integrating the needs of the farmers within a new extension message and process. Participatory approaches were complemented by farming systems research, which was steeped in the philosophy of consulting farmers on their problems. Farmers were also consulted in the design of suitable solutions.

One of the notable successes of participatory approaches was the Farmer Field School (FFS) method, which was successfully used in the promotion of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in cotton farming. Community-based resource management initiatives also used participatory approaches in deciding on methods to use and allocation of tasks. However, the participatory approach's tenure was short-lived. In countries such as Ghana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, it was popular for only two decades from the 1980s to the 1990s and did not spread as extensively as expected. The lack of replication can be attributed to two factors: (i) many of the processes were donor driven and lacked institutionalization within national governments and (ii) limited mind-set shift amongst farmers, who were used to top-down approaches and who invested very little in their own agenda-setting capacities.

Furthermore, the participatory approaches to extension could not avoid the pitfalls associated with the theory and practice of participation itself. Eversole (2010:37) captures this dilemma in a very precise way when she observes that

. . . the problem of participation is not that participation is impossible to achieve; but rather, that it is impossible to achieve for others. . . . Rather, the challenge of participation is about how to become participants in our own rights: choosing to move across institutional and knowledge terrains to create new spaces for communities and organizations to 'participate' together.

Participatory-based extension systems were characterized by ‘invited’ spaces and managed projects instead of what Cornwall (2008) termed spaces that people create for themselves. Government or NGOs still controlled the agenda of agricultural development. Rarely were communities consulted on their perceptions of what the goal of agricultural production should be. In very rare instances communities established their own processes and platforms and then invited the ‘experts’. In fact, what governments and NGOs sought to do and, in some ways achieved, was to modify top-down approaches and repackage them as participatory forms but with the same goal of modernizing agriculture. In practice, they did not create space for the actual integration of local knowledge into agricultural practices but rather continued on the path of promoting new technological innovations perceived by experts to be appropriate. Gaventa (2005) weighs in by suggesting that for effective participation, work on participation is needed from both sides of the equation, that is, to increase both the participation of communities and the responsiveness of government institutions. The challenge is to remake participation through reframing interactions amongst communities, professionals, and institutions into a truly participatory space (Eversole 2010:32).

The shifts that have taken place in extension have not necessarily occurred in a linear fashion from top-down models to participatory ones. Rather, in many cases participatory approaches have been abandoned in favor of the top-down demonstration farm model. Nhongonhema (2010), writing about Zimbabwe, observes an evolution from coercive top-down approaches to a flirtation with participatory approaches that was very brief, and instead, a very technocratic top-down model has reemerged both in the planning and actual implementation of extension practice.

EXTENSION WITHIN A SHIFTING AGRICULTURAL CONVERSATION

Clearly, the organization of agriculture is in a state of flux. Through different but interrelated initiatives, a shift is taking place in the organization of agriculture from a purely global food security concern to satisfying local community nutrition and environmental needs through the promotion of specific cereals and from a high dependency on chemicals to more organic forms of farming. In other areas, especially in developing regions, the concerns are centred on the need for improved access to land and agricultural

inputs for communities' autonomous production of food staples.

External agents such as extension officers have, unfortunately, not necessarily been at the center of the changes. Given its emphasis on a rigid form of agricultural production, extension is at times seen as an impediment to reform. In the past extension has mostly been a conduit for research findings from the universities and other research centers, using traditional information transfer methods (teacher to client), albeit with varied attempts at encouraging participatory processes. The extension officer's reliance on expert knowledge as a source of power is very apparent in the manner in which extension has traditionally been organized and is one of the key challenges regarding rural power relations. In many instances extension has created the all too familiar posture of knowing it all and of there being no alternative, which led to the 'cult of the expert'. (Boyte, 2009). Furthermore, the ways in which extension support is offered is mostly based on the wrong assumption that citizens have no knowledge of their own. Scholars such as Chambers (1983) have already challenged these myths about knowledge, but 30 years after his seminal work, top-down approaches still persist primarily because of the imposing nature of most institutions' agendas.

Besides its traditional production enhancing roles, others, for instance, various Kettering Foundation (KF) research reports have already identified the extension function as directly linked to achieving local democracy. Kettering Foundation and others have been engaged in a process of revisiting how cooperative extension can be an effective resource for solving the problems (beyond but including agricultural issues) that communities face in today's world (Diebel, 2009:17). The title of Raison's (2010) paper aptly captures the tensions that extension faces today: Are they 'educators or facilitators'? Cooperative extension's role (especially within the US context) has traditionally been about program delivery rooted in an information transfer from teacher to student using demonstration methodologies. Is there room for it to embrace community capacity-building facilitation processes in which extension brings people together and helps them identify capacity, expertise, and action groups (Raison 2010:2)?

Another important caveat to the discussion of extension is the treatment of the different forms of knowledge. The political role of extension, in terms of promoting (or imposing) certain forms of knowledge and production systems at the expense of local knowledge, has always been underplayed

and received very limited attention. It has been the 'soft' force behind the transformation of agriculture through the promotion of 'modern' methods of farming, facilitating entry into global commodity markets where rural producers have very little capacity or room to determine the price of their goods. In some cases, extension exercises overt power with regard to the identification of beneficiaries and exclusion of others from government and other public programs, especially in circumstances of extreme poverty. However, even in these processes it has continued to position itself as a very neutral and objective partner of technical development despite the subjective use of knowledge.

There are many other studies, besides Chambers (1983), that are ethnographic in approach and show how rural communities have over the years amassed vast amounts of knowledge with regard to the soils they use and the weather patterns and have then adapted their production methods. Practices amongst the Lozi of Zambia and Shona of Zimbabwe of naming the rains based on their intensity and the months in which they occur have been passed down through generations to inform decision-making on when to plant and which crops to plants. Chambers (1983) argued that rural people's knowledge is often superior to that of outsiders and cited practices such as mixed cropping as testimony to a deeper understanding not only of the environment but also of how to satisfy their food and nutritional requirements given the land constraints they face. Rural people's knowledge should thus be seen and appreciated as largely complementing the new and modern scientific knowledge. Extension, in many places, has yet to embrace this approach. Rather, oftentimes, extension workers hold the common assumption that the modern scientific knowledge is much more sophisticated, advanced, and valid and, conversely, whatever rural people may know will be unsystematic, imprecise, superficial, and often plain wrong (Chambers, 1983: 76). In this case, development practices and extension continue to be prescriptive, entailing the dissemination of modern, scientific, and sophisticated expert knowledge to inform and uplift the rural masses. There is very little to demonstrate that these 1980s-era criticisms fundamentally transformed rural development practices. Extension is still to a large extent dominated by top-down models of expert knowledge with sprinklings of tokenistic participatory processes (discussed in more detail below). The following table provides a summary of what local farmers know

and areas where they need assistance:

TABLE 3-1 COMPLEMENTARITIES OF FARMERS' KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

What Farmers Know Better	What Farmers May Not Know	What Extension May Not Know	Researchers' Contribution and Role in Providing New Information
Types of rains and what they mean for planting seasons	The changes taking place due to global warming	How to respond to the changes	Investigate how ongoing farming practices can be adapted to suit the ongoing changes
Soil types and their capacity	The rate of depletion of nutrients	The practices that have been used to sustain the capacity of the soils	Explore how nutrient capacity can be sustainably maintained
The value of mixed cropping	The effect on yields of mixing crops in one field	The actual contribution of these practices to enhancing food security	Identify practices that enhance mixed cropping and crops that can grow together and benefit soil quality
Livestock systems: available resources, including forage and other animal feeds	Potential uses of improved, exotic, or unfamiliar seeds	Contribution of familiar and unfamiliar feeds to livestock productivity under all production systems	Assess productivity with local feeds under specific production conditions Identify role of new feeds within existing feeding systems

Approximate performance of indigenous livestock on locally available feeds	How to improve performance	How to improve performance under field conditions	Diagnose nutrient balance in diet Identify feed combinations that improve the nutrient balance of the diet
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Source: Author and also adaptation of Mwilawa et al 2010:98

Framing or revisiting the question of outsiders (extension officers) in rural development in such a way opens up possibilities for (i) connecting the discourse with earlier findings that raised the importance of acknowledging multiple ways of knowing and (ii) identifying a broader role for extension beyond agriculture toward sustaining democratic practices within communities. New thinking, especially within rural social movements, suggests that extension needs to reimagine itself or, where possible, to be reconstructed so as to create new spaces and scope for learning from its clients, the smallholder farmers, and work toward facilitating community processes aimed at developing sustainable farming and related production systems. Indeed, this shift could be seen as a threat to experts who have invested years in learning and perfecting their craft within defined ways of training and who have developed expert knowledge that is packaged in a certain way. Lessons from Chambers (1983) and Paolo Freire (1994) only serve to reinforce the need for another approach, especially given the complex nature of rural production. There surely can be no single source of information, but rather, there is need to create spaces that nurture open deliberative processes of problem solving.

Such an approach potentially opens up new spaces for extension within the current shifting concerns from demand-based approaches of food security to supplier-focused forms of food sovereignty that are centred on possibilities of reimagining rural autonomy, new forms of civic agency such as collective production, community-owned seed banks, et cetera. Efforts have been made in Malawi and Zimbabwe to facilitate change of the traditional approach to extension by empowering farmer groups. The recently completed National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP) in Malawi prioritizes a coordinated agricultural transformation approach

for 2017/18 to 2022/23. Strengthening Farmer Organisations (FOs) and rural structured trade mechanisms (RSTM) is one of the activities to be supported in the NAIP, primarily under the programme area of Policies, Institutions, and Coordination for Results. The total budget of the NAIP over the next five years is US \$3.216 billion, of which US \$15.8 million (0.49%) is for development of FOs. (FODS, Government of Malawi, February 2018). In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Farmers Union runs a program entitled the Zimbabwe Agricultural Competitive Program (Zim-ACP) aimed at providing technical support and establishing autonomous, self-motivated, and innovative farmers who are well coordinated and organised. In such a discourse, instead of giving center stage to the extension worker in informing rural farming practices, the common citizen working with others, takes center stage through renewed forms of civic agency in pursuit of food sovereignty and a more holistic form of democracy.

NORMS OF INTERACTION: EXTENSION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

There is an inherent tension within the extension function. On the one hand, as a teacher, the extension officer is an expert source of information; on the other hand, as a facilitator, he or she can bring together existing community resources and help a group build sustaining capacity (Raison, 2010:2). Admittedly, the latter role has always been muted, especially within developing contexts. Extension agents usually take responsibility for processes of changes either based on a mandate imposed through an act of government (especially government departments) or through their own self-interest and perceived expertise in the area. The norms of interaction with rural communities are best placed along a continuum where, at one end, there is limited consultation, and at the other, there are organizations continuously engaged in a process of consultation and cocreation with rural communities. The point of engagement is very critical for our understanding of the extent of rural democracy. In many instances external agents do not see themselves as potentially contributing to enhancing or curtailing democracy because they interpret their roles from a purely technical perspective. They do not have a broader understanding of the wider effect of their interactions, nor do they attempt to understand how different approaches could positively influence wider processes of politics and create civic energy to carry the proposed initiatives. Take for

instance an NGO focused on improving livelihood capacities through the intervention of new innovations or diversifying into new income projects. Its selection of beneficiaries, in most cases arbitrarily, through already defined measurements of wealth, has the potential of not only fostering exclusion but also new identities and new forms of political conflict that did not exist before the intervention.

TRENDS AND POLICY REFORMS IN EXTENSION IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Presently, the public extension system in most of the developing region is going through an uneven recovery from more than two decades of neglect. By the close of 2009, most sub-Saharan countries were investing only about 7 percent of public revenues in agriculture. The amount of Western aid targeted at agriculture in Africa had also fallen by three quarters between 1980 and 2006 (Economist, 2009, 13). In 2010, of the 44 countries in Africa for which data is available, only 9 have reached or exceeded the target of allocating 10 percent of public expenditure to agriculture. Concomitantly, the rise of regional integration and sector-based policies has served to speed up the structuring of Farmer Organisations (FOs) at the sub-regional level; nevertheless, FOs remain fragile and cannot replace public services supporting agriculture. Even though their networks were increasingly recognised as key partners and integrated into various engagement processes by the public authorities at the national, sub-regional, and continental levels, the FOs moved a step further to form the Pan African Farmers' Organization (PAFO) in 2010. Economic institutions are lacking in Africa compared to other parts of the world, especially in the financial and insurance sectors. This hampers farmers' ability to take more risks and to increase investment. (NEPAD Agriculture in Africa, 2014). Furthermore, public agriculture extension is in the midst of a funding and identity crisis, suffering under bureaucratic centralized management structures. And in cases where decentralization has taken place, it has not been supported by actual budgetary allocations. Its monopoly has been eroded by the arrival of nonstate-based extension models that are mostly driven by NGOs and private sector companies that are engaged in contracting services with smallholder farmers. What then should be the role of public extension? At the same time, there is a growing demand for agricultural extension services

to be responsive to the ever-growing challenges of agricultural production and to show a quantifiable impact on food production.

As already mentioned there is a renewed interest in agriculture across the globe but it's more pronounced in Africa. The African Union (AU) has through the 2003 Maputo Declaration (renewed in 2013 through the Malabo Declaration) pushed member states to allocate at least 10 percent of their national budgets toward agriculture. The AU declared 2014 to be the year of agriculture and food security. There is also renewed interest from the donor community in promoting agricultural development and varied attempts at national levels to revive extension so that it can play a role in revitalizing agricultural production. However, the process seems to be influenced by narrow and short-term production-enhancing concerns on the farms, raising fears of the expansion of top-down, teacher-student approaches in extension despite their limitations. In the rest of this subsection, I will focus on policy-based attempts at reviving extension in selected Africa countries. I will end the subsection by highlighting some of the opportunities and gaps in the new zeitgeist around agriculture and extension.

Malawi

With a population of approximately 17 million, Malawi is one of the smallest southern Africa countries both in terms of population and the size of the economy; it has a gross domestic product (GDP) of US \$3.3 billion and GDP per capita of US \$252 (RBM, 2009). Malawi also has the lowest literacy rates; approximately 50.2 percent of the total population is illiterate (2012 CIA, World Fact Book). The majority (approximately 60 percent, or 3.5 million households) of the population lives in rural areas. Rural livelihoods are mostly derived from smallholder agriculture. Malawi's agriculture is divided into two subsectors; large-scale and small-scale. The smallholders cultivate on small landholdings averaging between 0.2 ha and 1.5 ha, and 56 percent of the smallholders have a landholding of 0.5ha. The smallholder sector produces 80 percent of the country's food requirements. Despite the significant contribution of smallholder-based agriculture to the national economy, the sector is often overlooked by policy. The challenges smallholders face range from a shortage of farm inputs and draught power to vulnerability to changing weather patterns.

The provision of public agricultural extension services in Malawi dates back to colonial times (1907), but it was mostly targeted at large estates and was essentially designed to increase productivity and production. In the 1970s, the government of Malawi (GoM) introduced a supply-driven system of training individual farmers. The system worked effectively but was soon overwhelmed by a growing farming population, collapse of the farmer club system, deaths and retirement of extension workers, inadequate training of new workers, limited retraining of existing workers, and declining resources allocated to the agricultural sector.

Huge financial constraints also impeded the implementation of the program. In the later 1980s to the 1990s, the GoM implemented public-sector reforms that involved downsizing and streamlining public-sector organizations under the assumption that lean organizations are more efficient. This exercise led to the shedding of some extension officers and the actual resizing of the government's agricultural extension services. Ever since, it has been very difficult for the public sector to continue providing quality extension services to local communities.

The GoM has been one of a few African governments that has consistently allocated more than 10 percent of the national budget to the agricultural sector as per the Maputo Declaration of 2003⁶. However, the actual allocation to extension is in some cases as low as 3.38 percent of the total agriculture budget. The agricultural policy launched in 2000 sought to accommodate growing concerns for a more dynamic and pluralistic extension service. The policy advocated for demand-driven and decentralized extension services and ensures that agricultural extension services are more inclusive to allow other service providers such as farmer-based organizations, the private sector, and intermediary NGOs to take active roles in the delivery of extension services. However, as of 2005, a national survey revealed that only 13 percent of agricultural households got advice from an agricultural adviser on crop and input management (NSO, 2005). There are approximately 2,175 extension workers spread across the country.

6 The 2003 Maputo Declaration has two key milestones: allocating at least 10 percent of the national budget to the agriculture sector and attaining 6 percent annual agricultural growth.

The new policy advocates for changes in resource management by involving stakeholders and promoting participatory planning and implementation of agricultural programs. The policy also promotes equalization in provision of agricultural extension service through advocacy of gender, empowerment, poverty, environment, and HIV and AIDS concerns. The new agriculture extension policy has contributed to an increase in the number of extension service providers. Now different types of service providers pursue different purposes and objectives. They include private-sector organizations, such as companies that supply farm inputs to farmers and whose objectives are purely to serve their private interests and promote the production and marketing of their products for the purposes of profit maximization; NGOs, which in most cases pursue philanthropic interests; and public-sector organizations interested in serving public interests. The diversity of these organizations' origins, interests, and objectives are evident in the diversity of their approaches to service provision.

The new extension policy proposes a bottom-up and participatory strategy for planning interventions. This approach entails extension service providers (of which the majority still remain public) working with farmers to identify priority extension needs, which are then channelled upward to inform policy formulation, policy practice, and planning processes. According to a NASFAM report (2012), the clear and intelligent thought-through process of a participatory extension process articulated in the 2000 Agriculture Extension Policy has not yet been put into practice, and the smallholder farmers whom it seeks to serve have no knowledge of the new provision of extension service delivery. Whilst the system was designed to help bring together key actors to collectively define the policy agenda and work toward common goals, the practices on the ground remain expert driven. Interaction between public and private sectors is virtually non-existent even though there are cases of bilateral coordination with some NGOs or farmer organizations. The extension policy envisaged the creation of District Agricultural Extension Coordinating Committees (DAECCs) to help facilitate collaboration between state-based agencies, NGOs, and private-sector players at a very local level. The DAECC is meant to represent all actors in the agricultural sector, including farmers, farmer organizations, and NGOs. The major roles for the committees are to provide a forum for dialogue where farmers can demand service directly from both private and

public service providers and ensure that the quality and standards of the service are maintained. However, its impact in shifting current agricultural extension practices remains very limited.

Uganda

In Uganda agriculture contributes approximately 30 percent of GDP. It employs about 80 percent of the total workforce and accounts for 48 percent of exports (UBOS, 2008). Approximately 73 percent of Ugandans depend on agro-based activities for their livelihoods (MAAIF, 2009). While agriculture remains the mainstay and most significant sector of the Ugandan economy, national statistics indicate a consistently declining trend in the performance of the sector from 7.9 percent in 2000 to 0.9 percent by 2010/11. This decline is manifest in all three subsectors of agriculture: crops, livestock, and fisheries, with a negative growth of 2.9 percent for cash crops, while food crops grew marginally by 2.7 percent.

The history of extension services in Uganda can be divided into distinct stages. The first stage was the early colonial period (1898-1907). During this period, importation of cash crop planting materials, namely coffee, cotton, rubber, and tobacco, took place (NAADS, 2004). Research stations were established to carry out agriculture and forestry research in Uganda.

The second stage was the extension service through chiefs (1920-1956). Chiefs, assisted by a few expatriate field officers and African instructors, carried out extension work. The emphasis was on distributing planting materials for major cash crops and simple messages on how to grow those crops. This was coupled with enforcing by-laws requiring households to grow certain crops in accordance with agricultural practices, such as soil conservation and storage of famine food reserves. The chiefs' status and influence made farmers use good husbandry practices and proper land use and ensured household food security. The extension approach was based on coercion, using sanctions and punishments rather than education.

The third stage (1956-1963) was associated with extension through the more successful farmers (commonly referred to as 'the progressive farmers'). The expectation was that improved performance of progressive farmers would have a demonstration and multiplier effect for increased agricultural production and productivity (NAADS, 2004). The approach was effective in situations where the number of trained extension staff

was limited. Some farmers were successful in influencing their peers and served as the beginning of improved farming. However, the criteria used for selecting progressive farmers were questionable and produced mixed results (Aturinde, 2012). Many of the selected farmers abused the special support given to them in the form of credit and subsidized inputs. Some farmers were not cooperative nor willing to serve as contact farmers for educating others. Other farmers looked at progressive farmers as a privileged group. The same kind of system is currently being reimplemented with the focus on six progressive households within each county, but it faces similar challenges as in the past. From 1964 to 1972, Uganda's extension approach changed to 'helping farmers to help themselves'. This educational process was facilitated by use of tours to farmers doing well. However, during the same period, extension drifted into selling inputs to farmers to the neglect and detriment of delivery of services. This state of affairs, together with the lack of an agricultural extension policy, led to disorganization, dormancy of extension services, and low productivity experienced during the years of political turmoil from 1970 to 1980.

The period 1981-1991 was regarded as the 'recovery period'. In the early part of this period, there was marked emphasis on infrastructure rehabilitation and restoration of basic services (NAADS, 2004). Until 1991, there were parallel extension services in different ministries and NGOs and little improvement in extension services due to duplication, conflict, and confusion. Later, a new policy on agricultural extension services, supported by the World Bank in 1990, was put in place. It was characterized by the merger of the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Animal Industry and Fisheries and is now called the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF). This approach emphasized use of dialogue to promote participation. This way farmers' indigenous knowledge was generated through use of participatory approaches with facilitation by researchers and extension officers.

From 1992 to 1997, the government introduced agricultural extension education reforms. This is the period when many international NGOs came onto the scene with external funding. NGOs used different methods and approaches for extension delivery. This is also the period when radical reforms, such as decentralization, liberalization, privatization, restructuring, and retrenchment were being implemented. Retrenchment led to a reduction

of staff in the field, and districts lacked the capacity to steer the extension role. As a result, staff lost morale and farmers' access to extension services reduced considerably. Coupled with this, negative farmers' perception of extension staff hindered adoption of new technologies (Kibwika and Semana, 1998). It was during this period that the formulation of the Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) was launched. In the process the World Bank withheld further support to extension and research in favour of PMA.

The period from 1998 to 2002 is referred to as the 'Crossroad and Possible Future Solutions Period'.⁷ During this period, the funding and delivery of the services was neither efficient nor sustainable. Generally, the extension system was heavily centralized and characterized by too much bureaucracy. A number of options and approaches were considered in the reform of extension service systems. One option was for the government to continue injecting resources into the ministry-based extension system. This, however, was ruled out due to other policy reforms that had been carried out in the agricultural sector. The government had committed itself to public-sector reform and downsizing of the extension system in the country.

The new policies of the day emphasized liberalization, decentralization, privatization, and private-sector-led economic development. The ministry-based approach was incompatible with the new policies. During this period, there was a gradual withdrawal of international NGOs from direct service delivery to working through government and community-based organizations. Donors increased their support to the government to ensure that the reform policies, including PMA, worked as required.

Agricultural extension services in Uganda gained renewed prestige with the establishment of the PMA. The ultimate goal of the PMA was to address the factors that undermine agricultural productivity, among which was limited access to technical advice (Tizikara, 2008). The need for reforms in the national extension systems led to the establishment of National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)⁸ as the main driving element

7. At the time, evaluation of the agricultural extension projects showed that the unified agricultural extension was unfocused, reached only 15 percent of the farmers, and its messages and approaches were neither effective nor provided value for money.

8. At the same time, the National Agricultural Research System (NARS), mainly

behind the implementation of the PMA. NAADS provides scope for the shift from public to private extension service provision and gives smallholder farmers access to relevant services by outsourcing (Tizikara 2008:83). Private-sector-based service providers, including NGOs and registered individual extension workers, are contracted to provide agricultural extension services. It requires the formation of farmers' organizations to register at various levels. They mobilize farmers to form farmers' groups (FGs) that are then facilitated to farmers' organizations at parish, subcounty, or district level. Their organizations are registered with the district under the NGO statute. By the end of 2006, the NAADS outsourcing program was operating in 532 subcounties located in 64 districts. By 2005, more than 12,000 FGs in 280 subcounties had been registered through the program, while 73 percent of the FGs reported receiving outsourced agricultural advisory services (Byekwaso, et al. 2004). By 2005, up to 400,000 households representing 30 percent of the total households in Uganda were estimated to have benefited from the NAADS programmes (NAADS 2005d, Tizikara, 2008).

However, the performance of NAADS has been disappointing, especially in terms of reaching out to the supposed beneficiaries. The few extension professionals in the system are poorly motivated, unskilled, and lack appropriate competencies in participatory skills, knowledge, facilitator mind-sets, and related behaviour required for working with farmers in a demand-driven manner (Lindley 2000).

Current strategies are still insufficient to promote intra-group resource mobilization to reduce capital scarcity within the FGs. In the 2009/2010 budget, the minister of finance argued that emphasis would be placed on consolidation of the agricultural extension service through the restructured NAADS, integrating it with the provision of inputs to farmers. The government of Uganda planned to provide integrated support to six farmers per parish, with an estimated total of 30,000 farmers annually. These farms are intended to serve as demonstration sites to others and to support them to graduate into commercial farmers (MOFPED, 2009; 14). However, this plan has been hampered by the limited budgetary allocation to agriculture.

represented by National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), was also reformed.

Zimbabwe

Despite the bad reputation and ‘pariah state’ position that Zimbabwe has occupied for years, it is one of a few countries in sub-Saharan Africa with an enviable record of providing extension services. The history of government extension dates back as early as the 1920s. The influence of extension officers as agents of development was already self-evident by then. Alexander (2006:6) notes that since the 1920s, it was not the chief with his customary garb who stalked (reigned in) the countryside; it was the technocrats of the Native Affairs Department and fellow experts from extension and development, armed with the authority of Western science and an unshakeable belief that what they were doing was good for the Africans (Alexander, 2006:6). Notable extension interventions at the time included the introduction of contour ridges to avoid soil erosion, establishment of group development areas since 1972 in response to a government programme to deliver extension advice on a group basis, and cattle population controls based on scientific analyses of cattle carrying capacities (Bratton, 1986:371). These measures were introduced mostly through coercive measures that included payment of fines or imprisonment if one failed to comply with these new measures. The practice continued into the post-independence period although the quality of the service was skewed in favour of the tiny white minority that was farming on large-scale commercial farms.

At independence in 1980, extension support to the smallholder sector was also increased and the new measures reduced the extension officer farmer ratio from 1:1000 in 1980 to 1:800 in 1982. Furthermore, extension moved away from the individual farmer approach to group approaches. The Master Farmer training initiative, which had begun in the 1930s with the objective of spreading modern scientific farm production methods, was expanded, and a new qualification of Advanced Master Farmer was added to the training. Besides training, extension support also provided a framework through which smallholders were organized into functional groups in order to gain access to production resources, such as credit, inputs, marketing services, and information on government development programmes (Mlambo, 2002:1). The post-independence spread of extension services is credited with the high adoption rate of innovations such as the use of hybrid seeds and fertilizers that contributed to notable increases in

farm yields.

In 2002, Zimbabwe adopted the fast-track land reform⁹ programme. One of the significant initiatives in the aftermath of these reforms was the Ministry of Agriculture's expansion of extension services. Within a space of seven months, the ministry had recruited more than 2,000 new extension officers in addition to the approximately 3,000 extension officers already in service (Mlambo 2005:7). By the end of 2008, approximately 2,900 extension officers (graduates from the University of Zimbabwe, Bindura University, and other agriculture colleges) had been recruited. In fact, the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) was so desperate for extension officers that it had to lower the entry level requirements for this post (interviews with Zvimba District Extension Officer, August 2009). Whereas previously one had to have at least two passes at A-level and a diploma from a recognized tertiary college in the period, after fast-track resettlement, the GoZ recruited into the position of extension officer even those with only five O-level subjects as long as one of these was agriculture.

Besides the lack of personnel, the department faced numerous challenges summarized by Mlambo (2005:8) as including but not limited to 'increasing budgetary constraints, poor remuneration and conditions of services and lack of transport and equipment and the fact that extension officers are expected to provide services over too wide an area'. As part of measures to address these challenges, the Ministry of Agriculture took the decision that extension officers involved in field demonstrations should be allocated land in the newly resettled areas they cover.

During the period of fast-track resettlement, extension officers worked with officials from the Ministry of Lands and the Surveyor General's office in the official demarcation of the new plots. The roles of the extension officers in the aftermath of land allocations included training on improved farming methods, assisting the newly resettled farmers in obtaining necessary farm inputs, and monitoring the proper usage of received inputs on behalf of the government (interview with Acting Zvimba District Extension Officer, September 2008). Extension officers are responsible for

9. These reforms were very significant. First they redistributed the majority of remaining large-scale commercial farms to blacks. They altered land tenure regimes and, in the process, transformed the relations of production within these former commercial farms (see Moyo and Yeros, 2005, Murisa, 2009, Moyo et al 2009 and Scoones et al. 2010).

relaying information to farmers on crop prices and other changes to the marketing of crops and livestock.

Current extension support methods in the newly resettled areas remain limited by insufficient knowledge of the training needs and land use preferences of the newly resettled beneficiaries. The newly resettled households are comprised of different training and professional backgrounds, literacy levels, skills, and resource endowments. The Department of Extension has not yet undertaken proper research on the specific needs of these communities. Furthermore, the actual methodologies of extension are highly inappropriate. The majority of the extension officers still use top-down methods based on the transfer of knowledge, which have been challenged because they do not adequately consider indigenous knowledge (Mlambo, 2005:8). The methods preferred by extension officers, which include securing treated hybrid seeds and the use of inorganic fertilizers, increase the farmers' dependence on the agricultural supply markets.

Despite these shortcomings, locally based extension officers have been at the forefront of introducing innovations in social organization aimed at enhancing farm production, such as the establishment of structured local farmers' groups. The extension officers carry out their extension work within these groups, and they facilitate the acquisition of farm inputs from the GoZ.

TOWARD BEST PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WITHIN COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

The case studies in the preceding subsection are insightful; there is currently no focus on embedding extension within wider processes of what one can call a democratic development compact. Rather, extension is still seen, and maybe rightly so, as a tool for enhancing agricultural growth. One of the most common crosscutting similarities is the obvious underinvestment in the sector. Can we surely expect more from such an under-resourced function? Extension has, unfortunately, been a victim of more than two decades of underinvestment in agriculture. In cases where allocations are improving, such as in Malawi, there is no coherency within the planning ministry on how to embed extension within community practice. Another challenge is what I call the 'culture of entitlement' that is becoming increasingly apparent within poor rural communities. It emerges from a

history of multiple project-based external interventions providing a variety of benefits but, in the process, reducing communities' own forms of agency in resolving local problems. For instance, where communities had over the years developed their own coping mechanisms in cases of seasonal food shortages, the food aid industry has entered and, instead of buttressing local coping mechanisms, they have offered handouts. These are made available only to households that can show evidence of crop failure. Eventually, some communities have come up with ways of avoiding toiling in the fields, given the knowledge that NGOs and others in the food aid industry will eventually assist with their subsistence needs. In such cases the rationale or desire to intensify production is limited, and extension alone cannot provide sufficient motivation to build communities' resilience.

Furthermore, and unfortunately, there is no silver bullet when it comes to the best approach in providing extension, but it's clear from the literature that change is needed. Current practices suggest that extension has gone too much along the demonstration farm model—focused on purely increased yields but with the wrong foundations. The demonstration farm model was based on the thinking of Seaman Knapp (1831-1911). He viewed rural farmers as basically uneducated and developed the demonstration farm model that employed the better-off local farmers showing new and successful practices to their neighboring farmers (Raison 2010:2). Scott Peters and others are in the process of reviving the ideas of Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858-1954), viewing extension's mission from a community-building or development perspective. He believed that extension needed to facilitate helping a community understand the role of agriculture to sustain community life (Raison 2010:2). However, even then, 'facilitation' may not necessarily be the silver bullet, especially in instances where farmers need new forms of knowledge.

Embedding deliberative approaches within extension may be the currently missing bridge in the organization of this important function. Deliberative approaches potentially contribute to deepening democratic practices and provide scope for the widening of extension from a purely expert-driven process to one that integrates and embeds extension knowledge within discussion forums that do not necessarily recognise only one form of knowledge. Rather the envisaged processes should be more holistic in approach, accepting the existing ways of knowing within communities but

also acknowledging the value of modern science. More important, the new forms of extension should take cognizance of the resource constraints within governments and communities. The extension officer cannot afford to take a back seat but rather should actively engage with communities (especially their leaders) on what they know and what they need to know. Working with others from the community facilitates a process of integrating different forms of knowledge in an inclusive process that enhances local democracy and provides for a broader envisioning of community food systems. When viewed from such a perspective, extension assumes a different responsibility, away from concerns of preserving certain 'scientific methods' of agriculture development toward engaging the community in the process of development through cocreating not only new forms of community-based knowledge but also by facilitating a renewed sense of civic agency. Rather than focusing on dispensing solutions, extension should work with communities to help identify what problems need expert intervention and what communities can do on their own. A secondary goal of this process would be to facilitate people 'within community settings to create their own forms of economic development with a greater degree of democracy and community control and a higher environmental sensibility' (Peters et al 2005:12). Indeed, at the heart of this reflective process is an attempt to reprioritize communities' collective agency in responding to local issues.

CONCLUSION

Extension can play a big role in affecting local communities. Firstly, the approach of disseminating the extension message itself by establishing smaller groups for the transmission of new ideas. Secondly, the framing of the extension message has for years created the impression that there are no viable alternatives or other complementary processes that can be gleaned from what communities have been doing over generations. Rather, the extension message ensured the integration of farming communities into commodity chains over which they have no control. The Zimbabwean case study has demonstrated the extent to which extension has been at the forefront of influencing local processes of collective action but in the process has narrowed the agenda of such formations. Thirdly, extension has indirectly contributed to an increased dependency on inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and treated seeds at the expense of knowledge systems

developed over years.

The discussion in this section has argued for rethinking and repositioning extension to be part of community development processes that integrates local knowledge systems (public wisdom) with modern science. A deliberative approach to decision-making can be a viable vehicle for achieving such a delicate balance. The discussion on cooperative extension, especially the resurgence of deliberative processes, suggests that scope exists for opening up the process of equitable coproduction of knowledge.

Chapter Four

NGOs and Their Influence on Rural Life

INTRODUCTION

Beyond extension there are other nonstate agents that have penetrated Africa's countryside. Unlike the Tocqueville-inspired vision of associations, a new and different kind of structure has emerged to dominate the civic landscape: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Barker 2010:8). The practice and discourse of rural development has in recent years come under the modernizing influence of external agents such as NGOs, church organizations, and political parties, which seek to 'speak' for the rural poor (Moyo and Yeros, 2005:41). Alexander (2006) has argued that it was not the chief running the countryside in the colonial era, but a wide range of state officials. One can also argue that in the post-independence period, it was not only the chief and the newly established local structures in charge of the countryside but also a variety of other nonstate organizations such as farmer unions, churches, and NGOs engaged in various livelihood-improving projects. The discussion in this section focuses on the role of NGOs, using

examples mostly from Zimbabwe with implications for Africa. It analyzes the manner in which NGOs contribute to the reorganization of rural social relations of production and consumption.

ORIGINS AND ROLES OF NGOS

Globally, NGOs are a relatively recent organizational form, particularly when compared to deeper social arrangements such as religious institutions, political movements, governments, and transnational networks of various kinds (Bebbington et al., 2008:6). Until the late 1970s, NGOs were little recognised in the implementation of development projects or in policy influence. However, they have since become a ubiquitous feature of development interventions, especially in Africa (Moyo et al, 2000: ix). They have increasingly become a transnational community, itself overlapping with other transnational networks and institutions (Townsend, 1999). In the last 30 years, the number of NGOs in the world has exploded from 4,000 to nearly 60,000, an increase of 1400 percent. One explanation for their growth and increased influence (and at times domination) is the ideological ascendancy of neoliberalism accompanied by the rise of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that were rolled out across most of the developing regions. These SAPs had the effect of reducing public expenditure and eliminating state-provided services. Within these radical reforms, the market replaced the state as the centre of development strategies, and in the process the poor lost their position as an explicit concern. It was suddenly believed that through the trickle-down effects of economic growth poverty would somehow disappear. There was also a huge shift in funding patterns from donor countries to NGOs on the back of a growing mistrust of Global South governments. The increased investment in the work of NGOs was also part of an attempt to improve prospects for the modernisation project through improving structural relationships and economic incentives as the major means for creating prime conditions for development. The period was also associated with a refocusing on and reformulation of institutional relations, defining the roles of economic actors, state actors and civil society based actors in socio-economic development. NGOs began to emerge as a one of three centre actors in development (Mushonga, 2019). They were christened as the magic bullet (Vivian, 1994) that could unblock the disappointment, disillusionments and deadlock that had characterised the

world of development (Lewis and Kanji, 2009:24).

Increasingly, aggregate NGO budgets covering a wide array of social activities equal or surpass national budgets of some of the countries in which these organizations work (Bebbington et al. 2008:4). They disperse new forms of development discourse and modes of governance, as well as resources throughout the Global South. NGOs are increasingly being recognised as specialists in arranging alternative ways of financing and designing small projects through micro-finance, project planning, and service delivery (Bebbington et al. 2008: 5). They are largely perceived as possessing capacity and resources that add value to the process of rural change (Create 2002: 3). They are viewed as flexible and willing to introduce new innovations (Helliker, 2008: 240). Barker (2010:9) argues that they are 'the most organized entities of civil society . . . thought to be potentially able to direct large-scale financial resources towards social risks without expanding government'. Thus, despite being a very recent phenomenon in Africa, NGOs (having begun to appear in the late 1960s) have over the years carved a niche for themselves as vehicles for delivering development change, especially the transfer of modernising technologies, in the communal areas. The growth of NGOs is highly linked to the belief that these entities, as an integral part of civil society, can advance human and economic development while engendering democratic development. However, the ability of NGOs to simultaneously fulfill the twin roles of strengthening democracy and advancing development remains an open question. Critics of NGOs argue that they have an adverse effect on governance, especially at the local level. When they step in mainly to fill gaps in service provision, citizens tend to stop holding governments accountable for such tasks, thus delaying the task of democratisation.

NGOs generally function to serve underserved or neglected populations, to expand the freedom of or to empower people, to engage in advocacy for social change, and to provide services'¹⁰. NGOs can be grouped into five different categories: (i) community-based organizations, (ii) intermediary NGOs, (iii) service NGOs, (iv) trusts, and (v) unions. Intermediary NGOs, the subject of this discussion, are organizations that exist to facilitate activities

10 Background paper on GONGOs and QUANGOSs and Wild NGOs by Natalie Steinberg, 2001.

of smaller groups or to mediate between such groups and government and funding agencies. Service NGOs basically provide a wide range of support services on behalf of donor agencies, regional groupings, other NGOs, and some government institutions. Back in the 1980s, it was argued that NGOs could improve access to social goods such as water and sanitation facilities, primary health services, and credit support. However, it is not clear what happens to these communities once the NGOs leave. Examples of service NGOs include Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT), Farm Community Trust, SEND-Ghana, and Environment Development Activities (ENDA). International NGOs engage in collaboration or coordination with local NGOs; examples include Oxfam, World Vision, Save the Children (UK, US), and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

According to Mbaya (2001), NGOs can be divided according to function into three broad categories. Firstly, they can be referred to as welfare organizations, devoted primarily to assisting individuals who have failed to achieve the basics of a decent life on their own, e.g., orphanages and AIDS counseling organisations. Secondly, there are development organizations engaged in income generation and capacity building for communities to promote sustained economic growth, e.g., Plan International and micro-lending organisations such as CONCERN and Zambuko Trust. Thirdly, and more currently, is the civil organization, which is involved in governance (such as human rights issues) and policy formulation and implementation. Mushonga (2019) has also come up with a five-mutually reinforcing role categories framework (see Table below) which provides a more nuanced understanding into how NGOs actually function.

TABLE 4-1 ROLES OF NGOs

Role	Description
Implementer	Mobilising resources and rolling out programmes in response to existing challenges
Catalyst	Inspiring groups and communities to respond to a challenge and initiate change
Partner	Working with others (individuals, groups, communities, etc) to respond and resolve existing problems
Intermediary	Connecting other players or levels of operation
Resource Distributor	Mobilising and distributing resources where they maybe needed the most

Source: Adapted from Mushonga (2019)

The above classifications are not exhaustive or entirely distinct, but they provide a richer understanding of how NGOs are formed, their strategies, and their areas of focus. In most cases NGO activities have justified their expansion on perceived needs within beneficiary communities that are a result of the failure of the state, which paradoxically would have been weakened by the international trade system promoted mostly by the donor countries. Most of the countries in the underdeveloped region have been incapacitated to the extent that they cannot provide an adequate policy framework that deals with poverty alleviation initiatives. In the process an opportunity has opened for NGO activity in ‘. . . employment creation, food security programmes, the provision of adequate social services and improvement of access by the majority to basic needs such as water and sanitation’¹¹. In turn, the growth of NGOs has been facilitated by donors who perceive states as generally incapable of effectively using their aid and who view NGOs as more capable vehicles for development delivery. In the 1990s, there was a growth of NGO activity within the policy advocacy sector as a strategy to resolve the complex development challenges that the country faced. Most of the NGOs claimed to be developing new approaches to development matters through slogans such as ‘community involvement

11 Moyo, et al., 2000

and control', 'decentralisation of decision-making', 'micro-level planning', and 'participatory planning'.

However, it has not been smooth sailing for NGOs. Michael Edwards (2014) has argued that NGO dependence on donor resources makes them susceptible to their funder's influence on programme choice, design, duration and coverage. Even though the space and role of NGOs has begun to receive critical analysis, the studies remain very diverse, and the few major critiques that are available have largely condemned them for their international linkages. Scholars steeped in the traditional structuralist political economy frame of analysis tend to be less sanguine about the agenda and role of NGOs; they perceive them as the 'soft end' or 'foot soldiers' of imperialism (Shivji 2006: 16). Most of the critique is centered on dependence on external funding rather than social mobilisation for sustainability. Furthermore, the donor communities have become very vocal about how their funds are used, implying that NGOs are more accountable to their funding partners than to the beneficiary communities. Consequently, NGOs have, instead of developing their own agendas, bent backwards to develop project interventions that suit their donors' interests.

NGOs are also accused of accepting the current status quo and assuming an ahistorical and non-theoretical stance toward the causes of poverty in the Global South and East and inequality between the West and the rest of the world. NGOs would like to see themselves as 'non-political, nonpartisan, nonideological, non-academic, non-theoretical, and not for profit making'. However, they are, in fact, engaged in a fierce ideological battle of sustaining the market ideology and have recently taken up a political position ostensibly under the governance mantra where many NGOs have emerged to promote and defend human rights (Shivji, 2006: 1).

Critically, NGOs are normally run by middle-class bureaucrats who tend to favour establishment of systems of accountability at the expense of representation. One extreme comment about NGOs is that they are 'handmaidens of capitalist change, modernizers and destroyers of local economies'¹². NGOs rarely question the many contradictory outcomes of dominant economic paradigms (e.g., reference to private property, economic scale of production, development of market forces, and dependent consumer

12 Mary Kaldor, 2004

ethics) and the implanting of a uni-model Western political system elsewhere. According to one observer, NGOs have sought to divide the exploited and oppressed into sections and identities, for example, gender (women versus men), age (youth versus elderly), and minorities versus majorities.

NGOs AND THE DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

The African countryside has played host to a legion of NGOs that range from local to national and international in scope. However, there is limited literature that analyses their rural development efforts and the outcomes. For instance, the position of NGOs on land reform in Zimbabwe has not been systematically analysed, but what is evident in the literature is that NGOs have been somewhat influenced by prevailing rural development approaches. During the 1980s, many NGOs were involved in rural development projects that sought to ensure that communal farmers remain productive *in situ*¹³. Zimbabwe, at last count, had more than 1,000 formal NGOs, which included local and national level NGOs (Moyo, 2005:45). In the 1990s, NGO presence, through a variety of community development projects, was pervasive in the rural areas. One community in Mhezi ward (Chiduku District) was dealing with at least 15 NGOs. Another study by Makumbe (1996) notes that the respondents in one ward were dealing with more than 7 local and international NGOs (Moyo, 1995:45; Makumbe, 1996:75). In addition, some of the NGOs are not membership-based but position themselves as vehicles of innovative interventions in rural development, and in the process they become intermediaries between donors and local communities.

Several reasons explain the ascendance and prevalence of the NGO sector, but some of the major reasons have to do with the failure of bloated state bureaucracies to deliver essential social services and the seeming advantage of leaner and easier to run organizations (Moyo et al., 2000). Historically, rural-development-focused NGOs in Zimbabwe have responded to four interrelated challenges affecting rural communities: (i) declining

13 This approach was in conformity with that of the World Bank, which deemphasized the need for land reform and sought to promote peasant productivity through new farming methods, nonfarm income-generating projects, etc.

land quality as a result of continuous use and soil erosion, (ii) declining agricultural yields, (iii) inadequate farm-based incomes, and (iv) inadequate social service provision. The NGOs design a variety of interventions, some of which are influenced by integrated rural development programme (IRDP) philosophies.

The NGOs active in the rural terrain are engaged in interventions that have the potential to alter prevailing forms of agrarian social relations of production and in the process affect prevailing forms of organization and agency in order to attain developmental goals such as food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. In response to the declining quality of agricultural land, NGOs have introduced a variety of environmentally friendly land management support services that potentially mitigate the declining quality of the land and related resource base to ameliorate potential household reproduction crises. The most dominant approach has been 'conservation farming'.¹⁴ In responding to declining farm yields, NGOs have gone beyond promoting conservation farming to mobilizing the necessary inputs through direct input acquisition support, including the purchase of seeds and fertilizers and the promotion of locally occurring nutrient-enhancing manures. Organizations that prefer the provision of direct input support are very few and mostly local NGOs such as the Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT) and the Zimbabwe Project, while many international NGOs such as Care International, Red Cross, and World Vision have in the past seven years restricted their interventions to famine relief service.

In order to arrest declining farm-based incomes, NGOs have come up with interventions that either seek to intensify land use, such as through the provision of irrigation equipment, or through promotion of diversification from dependence on farm incomes alone. Prior to 2000, a number of international NGOs, such as Pump Aid and Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) now known as Practical Action, and local NGOs provided communities with infrastructure for improved water

14 Conservation farming is an old approach. It is essentially a suite of land, water, and crop management practices used to improve productivity and sustainability. Its main tenets include minimal tillage of the soil, performing other operations (planting and weeding) on time, keeping the soil covered with crop residues or other organic material, and mixing and rotating crops.

harvesting and, in some instances, assisted them in building boreholes and other innovations for storing water for market gardening. Nonfarm diversification strategies promoted by NGOs include providing material support in the establishment of market gardens that function throughout the year, as well as cottage industries, beekeeping ventures, craft making, and woodlot development (Makumbe, 1996).

Multinational NGOs such as World Vision and Care have been engaged in initiatives that are focused on transformational development through integrated rural development programmes. Their areas of activity include water and sanitation, dam construction and irrigation, housing, health, and technology transfers in agricultural production. Others, such as Practical Action, emphasize community-based management of projects and train village community workers to ensure a sustainable technological and maintenance programme once the project is complete.

IMPACT OF NGO PROGRAMMING

As mentioned above, there are very few critical studies on NGOs. However, existing literature shows an increasing disappointment with NGO programming. At the international level a collection of essays published in a book entitled *Do NGOs Really Make a Difference?* (Bebbington et al., 2008) has raised the need to bring the NGO model under closer scrutiny. They argue that it's difficult to see international NGOs pursuing an alternative strategy separate from what their host country is pursuing. Others have dismissed the thrust of NGO programming as status quo oriented and in many instances serving to depoliticize and co-opt rural grievances into welfarist projects, maintain their own selves in business by means of external funding, and indeed, serve as the new vehicles of 'indirect rule' (Moyo, 2001). Furthermore, many NGO activities are accused of creating a dependency syndrome amongst the populations and have thus delayed any potential for community-based forms of transformational development, leading instead to what I call a 'culture of expectation'. Others (for instance, Makumbe, 1996) have argued that NGOs do not have the capacity to articulate a national development agenda due to their localised approach to fashioning interventions and their frequent failure to coordinate their activities on a national scale.

NGOs are mostly an externally driven and unstable phenomenon that

threatens the development of organic and sustainable forms of civic agency and has served to distract attention from more community-based initiatives. Their capacity to pursue alternatives has been constrained by the fact that most of the NGOs based in Africa are donor-funded and dependent, and this has led to the questioning of their status as organic elements within civil society (Helliker, 2008). Their dependency on project funds has led most of them to be internally focused on self-preservation. The Harwood/Creighton report found a

“profound and air tight gestalt inwardness, planning and professionalism. [T]he overwhelming central imperative for nonprofit executives is the stability of the organization. Their dependency on time-bound project funds also limits their capacity to foster, nurture and sustain alternative ideas or approaches to rural development and instead some resort to developing small pilots with the hope of replication on a larger scale”.

However, Mathews (forthcoming) argues that the basis of NGO programming, piloting at a smaller level with the intention of replicating successful model, leads only to imitation rather than innovation.

Thus, at best, NGO projects temporarily relieve vulnerability but do not necessarily address the structural causes of poverty or energize civic agency within communities to sustain innovations established during the lifespan of a project. Development literature is full of stories of how after the expiry of an NGO project (at times perceived as successful), communities have abandoned the innovations such as the community boreholes in preference for their river sources [or even community gardens that were aimed at introducing exotic horticultural products]. Furthermore, a central contradiction concerning NGO ‘alternatives’ is that the huge increase in NGO activity during the 1980s was driven to a significant extent by the unfolding economic restructuring agenda common across Africa that entailed the contraction of the state and the expansion of the market. In this new context the NGOs uncritically took the intermediary role and sought to provide social services that the state had been restricted from providing (Bebbington et al., 2008:5). Within such a context NGOs can be more accurately seen as corporate entities acting according to the logic of the marketplace, albeit a marketplace in service provision (Stewart, 1997

and Uphoff, 1999).

NGOs have affected many facets of rural life, especially the norms of production and accumulation. For instance, the importance of kinship networks in organising production and welfare has been weakened in communities where NGOs have made significant project investment requiring inclusion of local groups established as the vehicles of project implementation. In such instances inclusion within NGO-established circles of association has become crucial for the attainment of social goals of well-being such as food security.

NGOs AND RURAL AGENCY

The manner of implementing NGO interventions has influenced rural social organization and agency in a profound manner. The criteria used for selecting participants in NGO-based projects vary from area to area, and NGO to NGO. Those that provide direct agricultural support such as inputs use a combination of factors, such as vulnerability, gender (often seeking high representation of women-headed households), and access to land. Those focused on introducing new farm or nonfarm innovations search for certain skills within the beneficiary community, such as the proximity of the group or claims that members of the community might make on a natural resource that forms part of critical resource for the 'development project' such as a dam (Interview with Norwegian People's Aid Programme Officer, 2008). In certain instances, project beneficiaries and consequently members of a CBO self-select or are selected by influential members of the community such as traditional leaders. These processes tend to exclude poorer households, leading to heightened social differentiation (Ridell and Robinson, 1995:242). Furthermore, forming local CBOs leads to the redefinition of identities on the basis of inclusion within a certain formation and its attendant benefits and the exclusion of other groups on the basis of unclear frameworks of beneficiary selection.

SPRINKLINGS OF BEST PRACTICE

NGOs are not necessarily bad. They start off with good intentions, and in most cases the actors involved are convinced of the good they are doing for society. It is only the effects of their practices that expose the inconsistencies. One of the critical questions is When will NGOs learn

and correct their practices? In my studies I have come across very few interesting and dynamic NGOs, but I believe many more fall within this category. These organizations have focused on building and sustaining local partnerships with rural communities and, where possible, nurturing the establishment of local CBOs. Their emphasis has not necessarily focused on facilitating donor funds but rather, through an ongoing iterative process, assisting communities to identify their own assets and find ways of creating or strengthening their civic agency.

A good example is the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE) based in the Western Cape province of South Africa. It was originally called the Trust for Christian Outreach and Education. TCOE's roots are in the black consciousness movement, which emerged and grew after the death of Steve Biko, and in Liberation Theology. Their initial programmes were in response to the education crisis following students' protests and boycotts against "gutter education" in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In the transition to democracy, TCOE resolved to move away from the "welfarist" moorings that characterized the 1980s to a more "developmental" approach to working with communities. TCOE adopted a strategy with origins in Bangladesh called People's Participatory Planning (PPP), which emphasizes the need to involve poor communities in all aspects of their development, including planning. TCOE started off by supporting rural communities to access education denied to them by the apartheid government. However, through internal reflections, the organization soon realized the inadequacy of their approach and broadened their scope to include community-based development projects initiated after community consultations. These were mostly targeted at rural women to make them more self-reliant, enterprising, and skilled.

Since 1999, TCOE has also been involved in building and strengthening farmers' associations and women's groups in more than 200 villages for improved use and management of land for food production and sustainable livelihoods within a food sovereignty framework. It has, in partnership with rural communities, facilitated the establishment of community-based associations and forums of small farmers' associations and agriculture collectives. They include Mawubuye (let the land come) Land Rights Forum in the Western Cape; Makukhanye (let there be light), Sundays River

Small Farmers', and Garden Association (Eastern Cape); Rural People's Movement (Eastern Cape); Ilizwi Lamafama (the voice of the farmers) in the Eastern Cape; Mopani District Farmers' Union and the Rural Women's Forums in all the districts where the organization is active. The process of nurturing these local platforms also involved facilitating community-building training and networking them with one another. There was a strong focus on the "poorest of the poor", in particular building capacity and local leadership with a stress on community ownership of development initiatives.

The processes promoted by organizations such as TCOE have not necessarily been easy in many countries. South Africa is unique: the protracted struggle for liberation and the marginalization of the majority blacks was a catalyst for the emergence of collective forms of resistance. The onset of independence, as in many other African countries, also threatened the civic energy generated from the days of resistance. Organizations such as TCOE, Sikhula Sonke, Women on Farms, and Inkunzi Development Association have been at the forefront of ensuring that communities remain engaged with issues affecting their well-being.

CONCLUSION

The discussion has demonstrated how NGOs working in the rural space operate and what the effects of their practices are on communities' own forms of civic agency. Beyond just affecting agency, these structured and formal entities have contributed to a reconfiguration of social organization, especially regarding the criteria of inclusion and exclusion. In many countries NGOs have limited or stunted the growth of agency as rural actors' activities and lived realities were subordinated to measurable project goals, such as increased household food security or improved literacy and sanitation. Given the complexity of the issues at play, with regard to rural poverty, NGOs have fallen into the trap of professionalization as a response to problems of scale and complexity, which has resulted in a division between citizens and specialized, credentialized experts—a common culture of top-down planning and professional management. Unfortunately, this, compounded by weak state interventions, has led to the worsening of rural social reproduction opportunities and increased differentiation, especially between project beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries, and the demobilization

of the countryside from imagining forms of collective civic agency.

Furthermore, the democratization project that NGOs were initially assumed to champion has also not fared well. Rather, NGOs have, like governments, become more specialized than ever before and in the process have created a disconnection with citizens. Barker (2010) argues that

‘... [L]ike government agencies, NGOs have structural incentives to demonstrate visible successes. They too may be inclined to focus on discrete programs at practical problem-solving efforts with quantifiable results at the expense of larger efforts to strengthen the capacity of communities to solve their own problems’ (2010:12).

NGOs and the projects they support target only part of society, and an analysis of rural development based only on the impact of their programming is potentially misleading given their exclusionary nature. These NGOs tend to be exclusive due to the different criteria they use for recruiting members. NGOs use various criteria to select beneficiaries for their projects from the communities as resources are rarely adequate to cover all members.

Chapter Five

Restating the Agenda for Rural Community Development

INTRODUCTION

Whilst agriculture has been thoroughly inserted into, and operates within the logic of, international capitalism in terms of input and supply chains, the countryside remains on the boundaries of state-led capitalism (especially in the post-economic reform era), where neither the state nor capital is taking direct responsibility for the support of reproduction of rural labour and rural production. In essence, the countryside produces for a market that has abdicated responsibility for maintenance of the suppliers of produce. The state is going through its own convulsions with regard to what its role should be in development. The adjustment era withdrawal from agriculture and broader social policy is yet to be adequately resolved. Several attempts have been made to reinsert the state into the centre of policy and

development. But most of the attempts remain incoherently integrated into other processes, such as the mobilization of necessary resources for such a process, an unclear decentralization framework, and weak extension policies.

In the meantime, rural-based communities find themselves on their own or in the company of NGOs that have invested very little in understanding their capacities and their needs. As mentioned, most NGOs and the donors who support them mean well, but they have caused harm in many more ways than previously assumed. They have not adequately listened to communities and have, instead, sought to deploy interventions they think are suitable, based on their assessments of needs. However, whilst there are definitely a lot of success stories, NGOs have in the main not invested in systems that will sustain communities beyond the lifespan of the project. The partnerships with communities have been weakly framed; in most cases they have been designed to show the success of the NGO's project rather than to create communities' own forms of resilience.

The ongoing conversations within rural communities and sympathetic scholars (see, for instance, food sovereignty conference papers available at www.yale.edu/foodsovereignty/html) suggest the need to rethink ways in which external agents such as extension and NGO workers enter into partnerships with communities. Cases of best practices are very few. In areas where farming communities have high levels of organization, the process of entry is slightly different. In places such as rural Brazil, the MST has established communities. The NGOs that are willing to work with them go through detailed, open conversations with communities. However, in many cases, due to earlier neglect, rural communities are eager to embrace external agents of development at times even though they are not convinced that this is based on real needs. In such a context, upon what then should the interaction between agents and communities be based?

There is evidently inadequate analysis of what should be, as far as the issues raised in the preceding chapters. The state of flux, in which agriculture is being re-imagined, suggests the scope for a bold engagement in a process of reimagining what rural development should look like. Processes that engender alignment between what development actors do and the aspirations of communities must be inclusive and democratic. They should contribute to transformational development. It will take a new kind of

thinking that seeks to unlearn previous ways of working and preparedness to learn from the supposed beneficiaries of development to ensure that the political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights of all citizens are protected. The envisaged democratization process will depend on how we redefine the role and place occupied by external agents to foster and nurture communities' own civic alliances and energies. These civic alliances are a vital part of sustaining change. The availability or non-availability of these synergistic relationship not only contributes to the quality of the democracy therein, but also potentially improves prospects for resolving poverty and inequality within the rural areas. The ecosystem is sustained by an engaged citizenry through participatory processes, and this provides the lifeblood of democracy itself. The subsections below discuss in more detail the core elements of an inclusive democratic system and provide a basis for broadly rethinking the different elements necessary for inclusive and democratic rural development. Firstly, I focus on the need to pay attention to the unique circumstances that each country faces, and then I proceed to discuss the broader elements that need to be considered to attain the vision of food sovereignty.

DIVERSE STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

It is imperative to guard against a one-size-fits-all approach; Africa has 54 diverse countries with different national specificities and levels of development. The efficacy of any agricultural development strategy should address the identified systemic nature and source of the agricultural problem. Each country needs a comprehensive agricultural development programme premised on state intervention and aimed at productive outcomes in agriculture and rural development. Current agricultural development plans are broad and diffuse. They attempt to cover multiple regions and sectors without devoting sufficient resources to the effort (Sanghvi et al., 2011:2). Others, such as the Mckinsey Institute and Japan Development Aid (JICA), seem to be pursuing an agricultural model based on comparative advantage or emphasizing geographical regions perceived to have production potential, such as 'development corridors' in which commercial farms and facilities for storage and processing are concentrated. Japanese aid in countries such as Malawi and Tanzania is pursuing the One Village One Crop (OVOC) approach, with the attendant dangers of unsustainable mono-cropping.

There is definitely commercial value in the agricultural development corridors, but the most obvious limitation is the selective nature of such projects within a context of resource scarcity. Agricultural policy reforms should be rooted within principles of equity and sustainability. It is imperative, therefore, that resources availed to agriculture be equitably distributed to the majority of smallholders, lest a new state-based agrarian elite is created at the expense of the smallholders. Such resources and other forms of support must be deployed in a manner that ensures the development of the sector beyond dependence on subsidies or grants. This will ensure that those who have been unable to share the benefits of growth and development, perhaps through lack of entitlements, can now operate within viable markets and secure livelihoods and opportunities for improvement. Despite the obvious attraction of commercially oriented production, there is a need to focus on ensuring household food security through the promotion of growing staples such as maize, cassava, and wheat (in wetter regions). Also, raising rural incomes by promoting a diversified portfolio of income activities, including but not limited to livestock breeding, is essential to household food security. A sustainable agricultural strategy should minimise foreign exchange costs and enhance local small-scale farming in order to increase local auto-consumption and trade. This will potentially create social synergies that are critical to broad-based rural development.

REPOSITIONING THE STATE

Agricultural development remains a state function. Internal measures need to be taken by individual governments in order to accomplish successful agricultural transformation (especially within the smallholder sector). Political will is a prerequisite for success. However, this process should not be at the mercy of the vote-seeking political elites. It should result from grassroots platforms of citizens demanding a development agenda that imposes a local production form of food sovereignty as an integral part of a political contract. Within such a perspective, the achievements of the Malawian government must be embedded and purposefully integrated within a value-based political framework that emphasizes the right of communities to produce and consume food that is culturally acceptable. Any subsequent regime voted into office will be obliged to ensure that such a right is upheld. Implicit forms of such a political contract existed

in Tanzania soon after independence when it was still a one-party state. Members of parliament still had to contest for seats and had to ensure sufficient food levels in the constituencies they served. Failure to do so would have been equivalent to ceding power or position. A more explicit form of political contract on famine exists in India today and predates the colonial era.

Given the accountability structures created by democratic reforms, there is a need to increase demand on the state to reclaim its policymaking and implementation role within the agricultural sector. The current practice in which nonstate actors such as NGOs have taken a central place in effecting an agricultural recovery strategy underpinned by welfarism, although necessary, needs to be complemented by a competent developmental and democratic state. A developmental state is one that has the capacity to deploy its authority credibly, legitimately, and in a binding manner to design and implement development policies and programmes for promoting transformation and growth, as well as for expanding human capabilities. The developmental state should not undermine the diverse political freedoms available in a democratic state, including regular free elections and freedom of speech. Rather, these should be seen as an integral component that allows citizens to contribute to the development project.

Democratic reforms (especially political and civil rights) alone cannot bring about food security. States need to break away from the neoliberal logic of the supremacy of the market and invest in agriculture, especially within the smallholder sector, in a more systematic manner. Priority areas include increasing allocations to a new form of extension that is embedded within communities' practices and that integrates new scientific knowledge with local practices and ways of knowing. Current efforts have not adequately interrogated the role and space of extension in agriculture and community development and pose the risk of constraining communities' own practices in favor of a defined official approach. Rather than focusing on increasing the number of extension workers, the discussion should focus on clarifying the role of that intervention and identifying ways of sustaining it, given the resource constraints apparent in many African countries.

RETHINKING FORMS OF LOCAL ORGANIZATION AND RURAL PRODUCTION

Despite the seemingly technical nature of the problem surrounding

smallholder agriculture, the organization of production remains embedded within social networks based on autochthonous relations. Existing forms of social organization provide the broad ecosystem for rural production and democracy. In many countries they provide a more viable and largely uncontested approach to the organization of production and institution of social controls and welfare. The forms of land ownership, of access and use embedded within a lineage framework, allocate a hierarchy of land rights that range from the political and territorial rights held by the lineage leadership to usufruct rights held by individual households within the lineage group. Such forms of land rights have been under attack for more than three decades. In 1968, Hardin wrote a very influential essay entitled 'The Tragedy of the Commons', focusing on shared resources. In the essay Hardin persuasively argued that a shared village grazing pasture would tend to get overused and eventually destroyed because people would use the common grazing ground without paying to maintain it—a phenomenon known in economics as free-riding. In essence, this was a direct challenge to the manner in which not only natural resources were common in many parts of Africa but the actual bedrock of collective action with rural communities. Based on this thinking, many African governments and multilateral development agencies such as the World Bank introduced new land titling methods in places such as Kenya, Mozambique, and Zambia that they claimed would encourage improved investment in the land.

Beyond land titling, the Hardin essay inspired a transformation of thinking about the commons that also negatively affected the scope of collective decision-making. The commons have never been just about access to common resources; they have always provided a platform for collective decision-making and action. The removal of the common resource negatively affected the sense of community and the structures within it. It was only in 2009, when Elinor Ostrom won the Nobel prize in economics, that we began to see a significant rethinking of the importance of commons property management systems. Ostrom's work suggests that far from a tragedy, the commons can be managed from the bottom-up for a shared prosperity, given the right institutions. In her study 'Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action' (1990), based on numerous case examinations of user-managed fish stocks, pastures, woods, lakes, and groundwater basins, Ostrom observed that resource users frequently develop

sophisticated mechanisms for decision-making and rule enforcement to handle conflicts of interest. She also characterized the rules that promote successful outcomes. On this premise, she proceeded to propose eight 'design principles' of stable local common-pool resource management, most of which are similar to those already in place in the pastoral commons of the Sahelian regions of Africa. Because of the endorsement by the Nobel prize committee of Ostrom's contribution, I believe her work will be treated with a reverence similar to that which Hardin's work was received.

Customary-based forms of tenure, the closed approximation of common property management systems, previously under threat from the land titling movement, may have found some respite. Inherent within customary-based forms of tenure are subsystems of organising and collective decision-making about farm production, consumption, and welfare. Members belonging within the lineage group devise means of sharing the productive assets they have access to for production, and in many African countries ownership of land and other natural resources is never individual but a gift from the ancestors to the present generation, as well as a responsibility of the present to safeguard it for the next generation. Based on this thinking, a number of very complex common property management frameworks have been devised. In the process these systems provide a bedrock for thinking about community democracy and development.

In addition to customary-based forms of organization, various social organizations such as cooperatives, farmer groups, savings associations, and unions have emerged. These do not necessarily seek to contradict common property management systems but rather are engaged in improving the capacity of land use. Some of them are actually embedded within the already existing structures of managing common resources. External agents such as extension and NGO workers need to thoroughly understand these complex relations and processes in order to avoid creating new structures that do not have community legitimacy. In fact, rather than establishing links with external agents, empirical evidence suggests that many membership-based associations are preferring to connect with national unions of farmers or social movements (discussed below).

New Social Movements

Parallel to the more visible and structured organizations are less structured

and underground formations that have recently achieved a more significant impact on agricultural policy reform, especially at an international level. On many occasions these are transnational networks of rural organizations and communities of peasant producers and a rural landless or near landless proletariat focused on achieving food sovereignty. Others are of the opinion that what now passes as rural associations must be located on a larger landscape of new rural social movements that are less concerned with defending ways of life or blocking the intrusions of the state than delineating new political and cultural spaces (Webster 2004:2, Petras 1997 and Moyo and Yeros, 2005). Similarly, Petras (1997) notes the 'rising influence of peasant movements' that operate autonomously from political parties, have a national (not just rural) agenda, and seek to forge alliances with urban trade unions against neoliberal regimes.

The organizational form of these social movements combines the lineage framework and the immediate associative networks to defend their social reproduction rights. They are mostly driven by the agency of the rural poor, which is considered central to achieving changes in the practice of politics and policies at local, meso, and macro levels (Veltmeyer, 2005). Within this paradigm these social movements of the rural poor are seen as strategic in nature, often possessing a degree of coherence and agreement with respect to their aims and objectives and serving as a means through which to change development processes and outcomes to the greater benefit of the poor.

Recently, these mass social movements, especially in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru have been at the forefront of the struggle to develop or maintain alternative crops as a source of livelihood in the face of market-oriented policies that emphasize cash crops and importation of non-staple, cheap foods (Veltmeyer, 2005:303). They have opposed some or all of the neoliberal restructuring measures, such as privatization of land and other natural resources, and strongly challenge the structure of agricultural commodity markets as defined by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Their politics is not necessarily progressive; at times, they conform to the demands of organized civil society or confront them outright. But more important, the smallholder remains a significant factor of social and political change in rural society (Yeros, 2002). Some of these social movements are at the forefront of promoting a new vision of food sovereignty.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A NEW IDEOLOGY?

The evolution of food sovereignty has a longer history than acknowledged by its current proponents. The ongoing quest for food sovereignty reconnects with an earlier era of rural production. Meillasoux (1973:82), writing about West African agriculture, demonstrated that one of the features of rural communities was self-sustenance: the community produced to satisfy its own needs and found within its reach the necessary objects and instruments of labour and the necessary raw material. Food sovereignty (or a variant of it) has always focused on processes of delinking from global commodity chains. At its independence Tanzania implemented the strategy of Ujamaa. In Ujamaa the government sought to introduce new forms of village organization meant to promote collective action and food sustainability as central pillars of the philosophy. The cooperatives (collective farms) movement also formed an integral part of this thinking of autonomous production and import substitution. State-led agriculture and land reform policies implemented in places such as Zimbabwe, although not articulating it that way, were also part of this broader state-led processes of seeking self-sufficiency in food production.

The World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 was probably one of the most significant moments for the congealing of the vision of food sovereignty at an international level. During this phase, the push for food sovereignty was dominated by rural social movements such as MST in Brazil, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and La Via Campesina¹⁵. These movements have been instrumental in bringing land reform and agriculture back to public attention. They have over time congealed into a formidable anti-systemic force, and they are very clear on their demands and strategies, which include land occupation for the MST in Brazil and armed confrontation for the Zapatistas in Mexico. These have an influence on broader political issues in their countries. In the current phase, the idea of food sovereignty has developed largely through La Via Campesina, a transnational coalition devoted to the struggles and rights of peasant farmers (especially women)

15 La Via Campesina was formed in 1993 in Mons, Belgium, at a meeting of farm leaders from around the world. It was formed with organizations mostly from the Americas and Europe but has since expanded to include more than 150 rural movements, from more than 79 countries, including 12 countries in Africa (Holt-Gimenez, 2010:203).

in the Global South, fighting corporate agriculture and global trade in agriculture. In this phase, food sovereignty was developed with the objective to challenge the neoliberal¹⁶ forms of globalization being promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

However, despite the dominance of these very powerful social movements, the idea and framework of food sovereignty does not have a single origin. It emerges from diverse sets of contemporary grassroots production practices, struggles, and political approaches (Wittman, 2011). It is not a coincidence though that the food sovereignty framework gains global popularity in the post-2000 period under the leadership of anti-systemic global movements that have, since the World Social Forum in Porto Allegre, reimaged consumption and accumulation patterns through the lens of an alternative framework. The movements behind the promotion of food sovereignty directly challenge the neoliberal architecture of global food production and supply by pairing local and regional ecological agriculture with the large-scale organization of campaigns to challenge the corporate food regime (Alkon, 2013:2). In the past, food sovereignty activists have used direct action to disrupt meetings of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other transnational institutions supporting trade policies that undermine communities' abilities to determine their own food and agriculture policies.

The Food Sovereignty Vision

Since 1996, there has been a coalescing within La Via Campesina but also and notably within other social movements and activist communities, including academia, around the need for an alternative food-systems order under the broad banner of 'another world is possible'. The food sovereignty vision has grown in influence largely because it offers a different way of thinking about how the food system could be organized. The food sovereignty vision prioritizes (i) local agricultural knowledge practices, (ii) production to feed people within communities (in contrast to an export orientation), and (iii) improved and secure access to land, water, and factors of production such

16 According to Harvey (2005:2), neoliberalism is a 'theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.'

as seeds and organic fertilizers. At the center of food sovereignty thinking are new ideas focused on enhancing local food production for local consumption at fair prices using environmentally friendly land use patterns. It is in opposition to the current paradigm of pursuing increased inorganic fertilizer and hybrid seed use to increase yields.

The 2007 Nyeleni declaration on food sovereignty was one of the key moments in popularizing the need for an alternative framework of food production. The social movements gathered at Nyeleni (in Mali) declared the need to urgently prioritize local agricultural production in order to feed people and secure access to land, water, seed, and credit. The declaration demands the right of family farmers and peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, how, and by whom it is produced. It urges the reintroduction of trade control at the country level by demanding that states protect themselves from low-priced agricultural and food imports from the developed regions. Implicit within the agenda is the need to reclaim ownership of the production processes through the development of local seed banks and use of organic fertilizers as a response to the insecurity posed by large multinationals responsible for seed production. The chart below provides a paraphrased summary of the declaration made at Nyeleni.

BOX 5-1 PRINCIPLES OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

A focus on food for people: The right to sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate food for all individuals and rejection of the proposition that food is just another commodity.

The valuing of food providers: It values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men who grow, harvest, and process food. It rejects those policies and systems that undervalue them and threaten their livelihood.

Local food systems: It puts food providers and food consumers at the center of decision-making on food issues.

Local Control: It places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, and livestock and fish populations in the hands of local food providers and respects their rights to use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways. It rejects the privatization of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts, and intellectual property right regimes.

Knowledge and Skills: It builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organizations that conserve, develop, and manage localized food production and harvesting systems.

Cooperation with Nature: It uses the contribution of nature in diverse, low external input agro-ecological production and harvesting methods that maximize the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience. It rejects methods that harm ecosystem functions by depending on energy intensive monoculture, livestock factories, and other industrialized production methods.

Thus, at the core of the food sovereignty vision is the search for and imagining of a paradigm shift in the economic and social organization of agriculture. The new thinking within food sovereignty is characterized by dissatisfaction with the manner in which business has restructured agriculture production for purely economic benefits (profits) without

due consideration of the well-being of producers, consumers, and the environment. Although not yet common, others who hold different variants of the food sovereignty vision, such as Campbell and Feenstra's (2005:47) 'community food systems', seek to restructure the market by influencing the dynamics of consumption and sustainable use of the surplus value of produced commodities past the farm gate. They state that community-driven food systems should work toward 'the development of agriculture-related businesses that create jobs, reduce leakage of dollars from the community or in other ways contribute to the community's economic development' (Campbell & Feenstra 2005:47). They also urge communities that surround agricultural areas to buy local, and a number of economic equations have been developed to justify how the purchase of locally produced goods will contribute to the development of the local economy and create upstream jobs.

The vision for food sovereignty, whilst seemingly focused on how we should produce and consume food, has embedded within it is the emphasis on political self-determination. It advances a notion of self-determination that pairs ecological farming with participation in a social movement intent on overhauling the corporate regime from its roots (Alkon 2013:7). McMichael (2006:408) notes that the movement behind the goal of food sovereignty is a 'highly politicized movement on a world scale to confront the international power and socio-ecological impact, of capital'.

Implications of Food Sovereignty for Agency and Development Mediators

Embedded within the calls for food sovereignty is the assumption that people are able, willing, and free to use their individual and collective rights. This assumption raises questions such as (i) What kind of rights do people have over land? (ii) What forms of access to other natural resources such as water exist? and (iii) To what extent can relations with market-based players be restructured, for instance, in the area of agricultural inputs, to enable the producers to develop their own supplier chains of seed through community-owned seed banks? At the center of this is the quest for a new democratic order. Lodhi (2013) puts it this way:

the achievement of food sovereignty may require a different kind of democracy—one that does not acquiesce to the power of vested class interests but which rather facilitates the capacity of women and men to

exercise the autonomy necessary to fully claim their individual and collective rights.

Authority structures, especially the hereditary forms of power common across Africa, and their hold on land will have to be revisited and reformed to allow for such a vision. However, food sovereignty as imagined by social movements does not seek to throw away culture but instead seeks an accommodation of it. It will be interesting to see how practices of patriarchy currently endorsed as a part of culture will be addressed, especially when they negatively affect the rights of women.

NGOs and other external agents have in the past run roughshod over rural communities (discussed later) in determining development practices and introducing innovations. They will have to re-embed their approaches within communities' own practices and allow for genuine participation, instead of the tokenism common within many development practices. In its full manifestation, the food sovereignty vision foresees a time and place where communities in the absence of outsiders can reorganize their systems of production, consumption, and accumulation. Whilst definitely not imposing collective cooperatives at the scale witnessed in Soviet Russia, there is consensus that some functions need to be reimagined as part of a collective commons, such as the establishment of community-owned and community-run seed banks. Most likely there will be a fusion of both collective centers of production and individually run household farms. Whatever the case, it needs to be a result of a bottom-up process of consensus building.

One of the biggest weaknesses of the food sovereignty movement is its lack of power to sanction public decision-making. Besides the existence of pressure from below for food sovereignty, the attainment of the vision will depend upon political will on the part of the state to implement broader economic and sector-specific reforms to accommodate the new forms of reorganizing agriculture. Whereas under neoliberalism the state had shifted from its developmental stance into a facilitator of market activity, and from the provision of basic services and entitlements to a privatized, entrepreneurial approach, it will need to recast itself as developmental and democratic.

There is, indeed, an emerging body of literature that is rethinking the state in the post-Washington Consensus period. Many scholars (for

instance, Mkandawire, 2010 and Edigheji, 2010), based on the unending development challenges confronting Africa, are calling for a democratic developmental state. One of the first tasks for such a developmental state would be to break away from the neoliberal logic of the supremacy of the market and invest in agriculture, especially within the smallholder sector, in a more systematic manner. Breaking away will allow such a state autonomous policy space, based on the apparent consensus that development requires autonomy of the state and that autonomy requires a new conciliatory foundation, together with effective planning bureaucracies (Edigheji, 2010). Such a state is one that has the capacity to deploy its authority, credibility, and legitimacy in a binding manner to design and implement development policies and programs for promoting transformation and growth, as well as for expanding human capabilities.

Such a state should ensure that resources availed to agriculture are equitably distributed to the majority of smallholders, lest a new state-based agrarian elite is created at the expense of the majority smallholders. The resources and other forms of support must be deployed in a manner that ensures the development of the sector beyond dependence on subsidies or grants.

In addition to direct support to agriculture, the state should also provide an enabling environment for what I will call 'food sovereign citizens'. The developmental state should not undermine the diverse political freedoms available in a democratic state, including regular free elections and freedom of speech, but rather should deepen these as they become an integral component that allows citizens to contribute to the development project. Oftentimes, regimes in the developing regions have held onto power based on their monopoly over an opaque form of welfare support, which in many instances promotes what others have called patron-clientelist relations and which keeps the majority of the citizens passive and highly dependent on these unstable forms of support. Political elites, on the other hand, have benefitted immensely from such a state of affairs and may not be ready to let go of the skewed relationship between them and rural communities. The food sovereign citizen will continuously demand new opportunities and spaces to engage with elected officials and, given his or her knowledge of restructuring unfair power relations, will probably not hesitate to seek entry into local and national politics. We have already seen examples of this in

places like Brazil where the ruling PT party is an alliance of not only urban workers but also of rural workers (in the form of the MST).

RECONSIDERING NGOs AND COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Whilst the discussion has so far painted a very negative picture of NGOs, it is probably time to rescue them. There are many typologies for NGOs, but I have restricted the discussion to two forms, the intermediary organizations and the advocacy-focused NGOs. The intermediary forms are focused on direct service delivery and have been discussed in the previous section. Advocacy-focused organizations concentrate on the political levels of decision-making. Most of the pro-poor shifts that have taken place within agricultural policymaking are a result of concerted advocacy action by NGOs. In many instances NGOs (at times working with social movements) have called for improved budgetary allocations to agriculture, better prices for farmers, and the continued importance of smallholders to the policy agenda.

A loose international compact on land and food rights seems to have emerged around promoting the food sovereignty agenda. The food sovereignty agenda has emerged (or reemerged) as a potential counter-process and narrative on reimagining local food production and delinking. Indeed, many other concepts and ideas, such as community food systems and local food systems, animate the search for a more sustainable alternative to the multinational global agriculture regime¹⁷. Three intervention strategies are common within the food sovereignty movement: (i) promoting local production of food through food fairs and food markets, (ii) creating worker-owned businesses that, while still market-centric, challenge typical capitalist relations of production, (iii) invigorating urban organic agriculture and (iv) campaigning for highly nutritious food in public schools. It is worth noting that, although different in origin, these new ways are an attempt at correcting an anomaly within the current agriculture regimes.

At the center of the search for alternatives is the concern for local production of local staples, establishing linkages with local markets, preserving the environment through the use of organic inputs, and

17 Given the similarity of core elements of the alternative approaches, I will discuss these under the broad banner of food sovereignty.

encouraging local ownership of necessary inputs such as seeds, rather than depending on the ones produced and distributed by multinationals. These approaches are also accompanied by concerns for invigorating the local as a space of production not only of agricultural commodities but also of knowledge, culture, and other norms of coexistence. However, the technological advances around communication, trade in commodities, and other innovations suggest that a pristine form of isolated and autonomous existence can no longer be the case. Instead, viable food systems have to take into consideration the interconnected nature and interdependencies amongst global communities whilst emphasizing the importance of the local.

Furthermore, the many global campaigns on agriculture, especially around the World Social Forum's 'Another World Is Possible'¹⁸ and more recently the La Via Campesina, have driven the vision of food sovereignty. Advocacy-focused NGOs have played a major role, through policy studies, dialogues, and campaigns, in exposing inconsistencies of global and national policies. Through their transnational networks, they have persuaded policymakers at national and international levels to open up policy decision-making to afford nonstate actors space to influence official processes. African initiatives such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) have created scope for the participation of nonstate actors at regional and national levels. One of the conditions for the approval of the CAADP-aligned national investment strategies is evidence that nonstate actors were engaged in the process.

However, African NGOs and related networks need to tread carefully within the international food sovereignty advocacy agenda. Farming systems are highly differentiated according to regions. In the Global West most of the farmers have managed to mechanize their production systems and are recipients of subsidies from their governments. On the other hand,

18 The World Social Forum (WSF) was built around the slogan of 'Another World Is Possible'. The formulation of the slogan is designed to communicate the availability and possibility of alternative systems of social and political organisation and even an alternative to the system of capitalism and neo-imperialism, promoted under the guise of economic reformism and naked militarism of the United States and Great Britain. The WSF has attracted the participation of activist intellectuals, NGO practitioners/activists, and grassroots rural movements (especially from the Americas).

African smallholders still rely on outdated technologies, are neglected by their governments in terms of subsidies, and face the brunt of the globalised commodity market. Forging relations of solidarity within such a context is difficult but should not necessarily lead to disengagement from the issues currently curtailing the development of agriculture globally. The networks should adopt a more multipronged approach to policy advocacy that seeks both to reform the globally imposed structural constraints and to influence their governments to adopt a more heterodox approach to the development of smallholder agriculture in which the state takes on a more leading role in funding agriculture.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, due to a combination of other factors, including weak state capacities and unfulfilled potential of the market, the African rural space is currently not made up of one coherent public space, nor is it determined by any single organising principle. The post-colonial subject mobilizes not just a single 'identity' but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required. The government's own extension workers and NGOs are among the different external formations actively involved at a very local level and making an impact upon rural social organization and agency. In the process they have significantly influenced not only the livelihoods but also the quality of social interactions and democracy within the rural space.

Finally, all the various elements—the African states, NGOs, and local communities—urgently need to find ways of working together in which each plays its role in fostering a new conversation that charts a new process of smallholder-focused agricultural reforms and community development. These reforms must focus on redirecting production to the local and national markets and creating dynamic synergies with domestic wages, while broadening domestic demand for industrial goods and services. Such a strategy should lean toward small (and in other instances) middle-sized farms, realising their employment potential, and through this, redirect production to the home market (Moyo, 2010:302). More specifically, such a development strategy has the advantage of low financial (foreign exchange) costs. It should devote more attention to enhancing collective civic action,

with local consumption and demand for manufactured goods. The state also needs to invest in its capacity to effect the desired policies, together with the effective mobilization of popular social forces in support of the vision of food sovereignty. Box 5-2 below captures the principles of such a policy framework.

BOX 5-2 PRINCIPLES OF A SUSTAINABLE SMALLHOLDER-LED AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

THE VISION

A sustainable smallholder-led agricultural system that aligns with farmers' traditional and local experience with affordable and reliable scientific knowledge and innovation aimed at ensuring equitable access to healthy and nutritious food.

VALUES DRIVING THE VISION

Inclusion: Ensure that men and women have equal access to the means and forces of production.

Collaboration: Ensure that experts reorient how they engage with rural communities.

Diversity: Allow for diverse sets of ideas to influence the development of agriculture.

Accountability: Build a new global governance system that takes into consideration the interests of peripheral states and smallholders in particular.

Equitable: Ensure that previously marginalized people are properly integrated within policy allocations.

Agency: Promote local innovations and responses to production challenges.

Resilience: Ensure communities take ownership of the challenges they face and can sustain change.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

Increase and sustain allocation of budgets for investments in agriculture.

Amplify the voice of smallholder communities to make demands for policy change.

Reconsider the role of extension beyond narrow production concerns in agriculture.

Ensure production is reoriented to serve local community needs.

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