# INTRODUCTION: FARMERS, HERDERS, AND THE STATE

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This special issue of *Rural Africana* originated at a session of the 1982 Conference of the African Studies Association in Washington, D.C. Three of the papers produced here, by Kabwasa, Kelly, and Williams, were presented there, together with others by Schoepf (1984) and Koehn (1982). The authors were new to one another and had researched in and written about countries in different parts of Africa. Williams's paper summarizes the general case "against rural development."

The crisis of agricultural policies in Africa was a major concern of the conference. Many participants singled out African governments as the villains of the peace, identifying the damaging consequences of overvalued exchange rates, state marketing monopolies, and low producer prices for the production of crops, state revenues, and foreign exchange resources. However, these policies were not the exclusive responsibility of African governments. International agencies have variously promoted, tolerated, or colluded with the policies they now criticize (Williams 1985; Raikes 1986, pp. 170-71). Our concern is primarily with development projects, forms of government intervention which are typically funded by international agencies.

## PROGRESS, PEASANTS AND PASTORALISTS

Projects have started from a set of "modernizing" assumptions. The World Bank, in blissful ignorance of the precolonial and colonial histories of Africa's people, defines the task of "rural development" as "the modernization and monetization of rural society, and…its transition from its traditional isolation to integration with the national economy" (World Bank 1975, p. 3). In the colonial period, African peasants adopted new crops and expanded the production of crops for sale for export and local consumption dramatically – where governments did not prevent them from doing so. Since that time there have been agronomists who have tried to demonstrate the good sense of African farming systems and the capacities of African farmers to manage their environment (Richards 1983, 1985). Similarly, the history of rural development projects and their failures to increase peasant production, improve rural living standards, or protect the soil from erosion goes back to the colonial period.

As Kelly points out in here paper, the long-discredited view of African pastoralists as "irrational," accumulating large numbers of cattle in defiance of economic calculation, is still prevalent among "experts" and administrators. Hyden has recently argued that "the African personality is full and wholesome in a sense that does not tally with the demands of systematic rationality" (1983, p. 150). Hyden attributes this lack of "rationality" to its roots in "the economy of affection" characteristic of "the peasant mode of production": "In this organic environment, there is little understanding and tolerance of experimentation and limited scope for problem-solving of the kind that we associate with an inorganic environment" (Hyden 1983, p 5). No evidence is offered to support this extraordinary assertion. Its absurdity has been demonstrated by Paul Richard's studies of farmers in Sierra Leone and Nigeria (Richards 1985, p. 110 and passim). For Hyden, progress is only possible if the peasant mode can "be conquered by another mode," a task which the colonial powers attempted; however, they “failed to complete their mission” (Hyden 1983, pp. 29, 195). Hyden’s remarks exemplify the way in which developmentalists have picked up “the white man’s burden.”

The assumption that progress can only be brought to rural dwellers from above is shared with international agencies by governments of both the right and the left. As Galli says in her paper, “the leaders of Guinea-Bissau have confounded politics with control.” Governments find it difficult to tax peasants and to direct them to do what they want. As Hyden (1980, p. 205; 1983, p. 50) puts it, they must be “captured,” either by “the state” or by “the market,” or rather by both.

One form of control is to make rural people live in nucleated villages. Williams’s paper draws attention to the origins of villagization in Africa in the plans for “betterment” and “closer settlement” in the “native reserves” of South Africa. From there it was exported to Kenya during the Emergency of the 1950s and to Zambia (Bates 1982, p. 41), before being transformed into versions of rural socialism in Tanzania and Mozambique.

## WHO DESTROYS THE ENVIRONMENT?

Colonial administrators blamed African farmers for soil erosion. “Betterment” schemes in South Africa, the Rhodesias, and Kenya were intended to force Africans to adopt farming practices which would increase production and protect the soil without dealing with the scarcity of grazing and arable land caused by settler appropriation. Kelly draws attention to a similar approach to grazing land in Kenya. East African pastoralists adopt cycles of transhumance to avoid overgrazing. Their capacity to do so has been threatened by the grabbing of high potential farming and grazing land all over Kenya by a relative minority of individuals and companies, pushing small-scale farmers and pastoralists into ecologically fragile areas. Pastoralists are then blamed for the degradation of the reduced grazing areas with which they are left. Irrigation projects have excluded Orma and Somali pastoralists in Kenya from access to grazing and water. As Koehn tells, us, irrigation schemes in the Awash Valley forced pastoralists to grace their herds on more limited and less fertile lands, leading to mass starvation in the drought of the 1970s. In Nigeria, peasants who protested at being displaced from their land by the Bakalori irrigation scheme were shot and killed.

Koehn further draws attention to the damage to the soils caused by mechanized farming, compounded by the unrestrained application of chemical inputs in Ethiopia and Nigeria. Van Hear (1982) shows how the expansion of capitalist rice farming in northern Ghana amounted to a form of soil mining. The Bakalori irrigation scheme bulldozed away fertile topsoil and tree cover. Irrigation schemes in Kenya and Nigeria stopped farmers downstream from cultivating floodplains.

## CONTROLLING BENEFITS

Irrigation schemes typically prefer to control land, water, inputs, and even the market for produce. They can then impose their choice of crops, usually for export or urban markets, and of farming systems on their tenants. Resettlement and nucleus estate-outgrower schemes are similarly designed to secure managerial control over farmers, as Williams's paper point out. Kelly reminds us that large-scale irrigated farming was initiated in Kenya to resettle political detainees.

In 1974 the revolutionary government in Ethiopia carried out radical land reforms and created local peasant associations. By 1977, however, they had shifted their policies toward their predecessors' combination of irrigation schemes (concentrating on cotton and sugar for exports), mechanization, and chemical fertilizers, albeit on state farms and resettlement schemes. Galli similarly points to the tight central control of the USAID-funded Contobuel project in socialist Guinea-Bissau.

Williams argues that rural development projects have been most successful in supporting and subsidizing capitalist farms and firms. In the cases of irrigation projects and support for capitalist farming in northern Ghana and northern Nigeria, subsidies have simply drained money into the hands of contractors, military officers, politicians, civil servants, and businessmen. Among rural communities themselves, projects allocate inputs disproportionately to wealthier farmers and rural traders, as Koehn's examples show. Kelly points out that investors in commercial ranches in the Tana River District typically included a few influential members of the local community, urban traders, and government administrators. Even in Guinea-Bissau the distribution of irrigated land on the Contobuel project favoured the better off and reinforced existing structures of authority.

At Contobuel, more intensive production raised rice yields significantly. This was done only by adding significantly to the labour burdens of women, who were also unable to continue earning income through various other activities. Kelly notes that on rice schemes in Kenya and the Gambia women had to work harder but did not benefit proportionately. She also points out that irrigation schemes increase the spread of diseases caused by parasites and that loss of access to dry season grazing by pastoralists has particularly damaging nutritional consequences for women.

"Development," Kabwasa says, has become a "new gospel" and its foreign agents its "apostles." The fruits of this new gospel have proved bitter. Kabwasa contrasts this to the achievements of the *Savoir Vivre* movement initiated in Idiofa, Zaire, by a local carpenter, Fabien Mbelabwin, based on a philosophy of community self-reliance. After the rebellion of 1965 led by Pierre Mulele (Fox et al. 1968) the aims of the movement were pursued under the auspices of the Catholic diocese through the *Developpement Populaire* (DPP). Like the Bachil Center in Guinea, described by Galli, it is based on Paolo Freire's philosophy of "Conscientization." DPP has established several substantial co-operative enterprises which have given local producers access to expanding markets for their produce. By contrast, Bachil has not succeeded in raising the productive capacity of peasant producers along with raising their consciousness. That had only reached the point of making demands on the center, thus bringing about a new form of dependence also visible in the successful institutions created by DPP, whom both the Zaire government and foreign nongovernment organizations are looking to as "a model of self-reliance."

## THE POLITICS OF PATRONAGE

Olurode's paper examines the politics of patronage in Iwo, a rural town in western Nigeria, between 1976 and 1983. Politicians promised their supporters access to state resources and were rejected at the polls, not for enriching themselves, but for failing to share their good fortune adequately among their constituents. Factional disputes within the two parties broke out over the filling of offices and consequent expectations of rewards. In the 1979 elections, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) "attracted the 'big men' …in Iwo." The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) "could be regarded as the party of the less well off in Iwo." However, they can best be understood as the party of the excluded, those denied access to the rewards in the hands of government.

Olurode emphasizes the weak position of all the participants in Iwo politics. Few benefits trickled down to most citizens. Neither the *oluwo* and chiefs of Iwo nor the Iwo National Development Council could exercise much political influence. Local politics turned on the question of access to national resources and came to reflect conflicts in national parties over who would control those resources. It could do little to affect the fluctuations of the oil revenues which provided most of those resources.

Patronage politics is central to understanding how development projects do or do not work. Bates (1981, pp. 110-15, 1983, pp. 125-30) points out that governments prefer paying for projects to improving producer prices because of the opportunities projects create for patronage. This argument needs to be extended to the preference of the World Bank and other aid agencies for financing projects rather than just transferring cash. Among the clients of the aid agencies are the corporations and consultants benefiting from the lucrative markets provided by aid contracts (Williams 1981a, 1985).

Bates (1981, p. 3) further explains why governments adopt "public policies that have harmful consequences for the societies they govern" by identifying who benefits from them. The beneficiaries are a "'development coalition' … of the workers, the industrialists, and the state, in league with their rural allies, the large farmers and the tenants on government development projects" (Bates 1983, p. 133). This coalition of interests favours the taxation of export crops produced by smallholders and government monopolies of food marketing and food importing to keep prices down for urban consumers. They favour protection of local industries through tariffs and import licensing to raise profits and wages and maintain jobs at the expense of higher prices for consumers. They maintain overvalued exchange rates, which reduce the price of export crops in local currencies. They also reduce the price of importing goods, which are rationed through import licenses and foreign exchange controls. The beneficiaries of this licensing regime then profit from selling these scarce imports for high prices. Price controls, like measures to enforce state purchasing monopolies, create protected private monopolies for favoured officials and traders.

These policies have wreaked havoc on government revenues by reducing the volume of crops legally exported. Low food prices for producers create high prices for urban consumers by discouraging production, encouraging smuggling, and burdening the consumer with the costs of state marketing organizations and black market operations. Governments can only keep consumer prices down by drawing on their vanishing revenues and foreign exchange resources. Industries cannot acquire essential materials and have to operate at a fraction of their capacities, further increasing prices, the required levels of protection, and the profits from smuggling. The results have been the combination of rampant inflation, collapsing currency values, scarcities of food and other essential items, public corruption, and government bankruptcy which have afflicted several African countries (Bates 1981, p. 129).

**WHO BENEFITS**?

The question remains, then: Why do governments follow such self-defeating policies? Large profits are to be made from managing foreign exchange and import licenses and from protecting and engaging in smuggling and black market transactions. These profits may be converted into foreign assets. The creation of controlled shortages continues to enrich and confer power on those able to provide people with or exclude them from access to resources (Bates 1983, pp. 129-30; Dutkiewicz and Shenton 1986, p. 111). Those with access to government officials will be better able than others to protect themselves from the consequences of disastrous policies. But the actual beneficiaries of these policies have clearly been far fewer than the members of Bates's development coalition.

It is hard to find evidence that urban workers have done well from these policies or have proved effective in advancing their interests in most independent African countries. In many cases workers did succeed in obtaining a significant increase in real wages in the late colonial period and/or just after independence. This was variously a result of workers' action, political pressures, expanding wage employment, rising government revenues, and a shift from a policy of paying single (migrant) wages to paying family wages. Since that one-time gain workers have rarely been able to maintain the value of their earnings. At best they have temporarily regained their immediate post-independence earnings.

Governments have responded to workers' demands for wages to catch up with rising prices by adopting policies to try to force down urban food prices (Bates 1981, pp. 32-33). They have usually succeeded only by resorting to imports, and workers have naturally resisted rises in the price of food when the government could no longer afford to import it cheaply. Workers have used the resources at their disposal to try to protect themselves from the consequences of government policies. They have had little say in shaping those policies.

Bates 91981, p. 95) cites the examples of Kenya and the Ivory Coast to make the point that "countries with greater numbers of large farmers will tend to have agricultural policies that offer more favourable prices to farmers." South Africa has even larger numbers of large farmers and an enviable record of providing them with subsidies and services. Since independence small maize producers in Kenya and Zimbabwe have benefited along with the dominant capitalist farmers from high prices.

However, as Bates (1981, pp. 61-72) points out for Kenya, capitalist farms were created in the colonial period by denying Africans access to the land and the opportunity to cultivate and graze stock on it and by paying them less than settlers for their produce. Settler farmers turned to maize when export prices fell in the 1930s and, in Rhodesia, again after UDI in 1965. In independent Kenya, maize farmers have been better protected from fluctuating prices than have producers of such export crops as tea and coffee. Smallholders produce a larger share of export crops, while large-scale farmers produce more maize. Bates (1983, p. 114) cites a 1977 report that “in Kenya…estates receive no less than 90 per cent of the world market price for coffee whereas smallholders receive no more than 66 per cent.” In northern Nigeria, when the Grains Marketing Board has offered prices greater than the local market, it has bought grain from a few larger farmers and favoured traders. The revenue constraints on governments give large farmers every reason to exclude others from the benefits of state subsidies. Capitalist farmers and ranchers limit the access of peasants and pastoralists to land and water resources. Smallholders are unlikely to benefit from piggy-backing on the policies of agricultural protectionism favoured by their capitalist brethren.

As Bates (1981, p. 82) says, peasants farmers may “use the market against the state.” They may, as Hyden (1983, p. 166) suggests, prefer not to sell their produce if the terms are inadequate, but these are second-best solutions for peasants. Black market prices for the goods they buy and sell are less favourable than prices would be in unregulated markets. Peasants throughout Africa depend on what they can sell to pay for a variety of commodities, including a large share of their food. African peasants have resisted government exactions and controls on their activities. They have been unable to influence directly the government policies and changes in world markets decided outside their own immediate arenas of action.

**WHY DO PROJECTS FAIL?**

Bates has shown convincingly the relevance of economic interests and the political instruments for pursuing them for the explanation of state agricultural policies in Africa. As Kelly says of ranch management schemes, “perhaps they were not really intended to succeed.” Economic interests, however, do not provide a sufficient account of people’s motives and their choices of courses of action. In particular, they do not explain why “reasonable men” continue to adopt self-defeating policies and to repeat the failures of previous development projects.

Part of the story is sheer ignorance on the part of developmentalists, who lack and are unaware of both the local knowledge possessed by peasants and pastoralists and the broader history of past state interventions. Such ignorance is not fortuitous. It results from their intellectual training and their transnational mode of operations. It is shaped by the assumptions of the ideology of development which identifies progress as something brought, usually by governments and aid agencies, to rural people from without, replacing their outdated ways of doing things with better and more modern practices.

Policy makers, experts, and officials cannot think how things might improve except through their own agency. Although their control of the actions of rural people may be tenuous, they are unwilling to surrender the few instruments of regulation and direction they have. The desire to control an unpredictable environment combines with an interventionist ideology to sustain policies in the short-term interest of a few at the expense of the many.