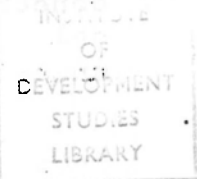


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THE NEED FOR AREAL STUDIES IN
ECONOMIC PLANNING IN EAST AFRICA

BY

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It should be said at the outset that this paper represents the start rather than the conclusion of a research project. It may also be a case of "fools rush in ..." since it is presented by a geographer yet it concerns a field which many would regard as the preserve of the economist. However, the field seems to have been largely neglected by economists in East Africa; and if it has been left to the geographers as being their concern, this represents an attempt to take up the challenge.

To judge from the records of proceedings in parliament, the areal distribution of economic development in general, and of various economic activities in particular, is of great interest to East African politicians. Much time is spent on discussions of "why there?" and "why not here?" Frequent reference is made to the richer and the poorer parts of each country, although such references rarely have any statistical basis. It is generally acknowledged that a prerequisite for economic planning is a knowledge of the existing structure of the economy: surely this applies equally to the location of future economic development. Most forms of government expenditure involve a decision on the areal distribution of such spending: similarly economic planning requires many decisions on location, whether these are made with care and attention or not.

How much attention is in fact given to these matters? An examination of the Development Plans of the East African countries reveals remarkably little discussion of the areal pattern of either present or proposed development within each country. Thus the Uganda Five-Year Development Plan 1961/2-1965/6 includes no figures of any type broken down on a regional or district basis, and provides very little indication of where within the country each form of development is expected to take place. The only plans which make reference to particular places are those for specific localised schemes in such fields as irrigation and road construction.

A superficial glance at the Tanganyika Five Year Plan 1964-1969 suggests a rather different approach, for it includes three maps. Yet although these provide useful background information, here again there are no figures of present regional income, nor of the distribution of production of any commodity except fish. Similarly in most fields there is little indication of where expenditure is to be undertaken or where development is anticipated, although a close examination of volume II allows one to learn rather more about this than in the case of Uganda.

These comments do not apply to the same extent to the Government of Kenya Development Plan 1964-1970. This notes the need for planning on a regional basis, and provides some information on the regional distribution of income. But even though the need to consider these matters is recognised, the amount of attention given to the subject in the plan is very small. Even for Kenya, apart from certain specific schemes, there is little information on where the £132 million involved is to be spent. Income per head is expected to rise by 2.1% per year for the country as a whole, but whether the same rate of increase is anticipated for the people of Nyanza or of Coast Province we do not know.

It is interesting to note by way of comparison that the Outline of the Transitional Development Plan for Zambia was concerned "to present as graphically as possible the geographical spread, by province, of the development work which will be undertaken"¹.

In academic circles much attention is being given by economists to the distribution of wealth on a world scale, with particular reference to the contrast between the 'developed' and the 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' countries. Much less attention has been given to the areal distribution of wealth and of economic development within these countries. This appears to be particularly true of East Africa. As an illustration of this one might consider the papers published in the East African Economics Review. Out of 87 papers published between 1956 and 1964 only 5 were concerned even in part with areal patterns.

Linking the academic and the practical planning spheres is perhaps the EDRP programme. Among current research projects only that being undertaken by Mr. Nixon is primarily concerned with the areal distribution of economic activity. Among the topics suggested as being of highest priority for future study in Dr. Newlyn's circular of 15/11/65 none is so concerned. One topic listed is 'income distribution', but this is intended to be distribution as the word is most often understood among economists, i.e. distribution among sectors of the population and sectors of the economy; it is here suggested that the geographical distribution of income is also worthy of attention.

Does the lack of attention given to areal differences, especially in planning represent merely a failure to use known information, or does it reflect a lack of information in this field? To a considerable extent the latter appears to be true. In Kenya, for example, no data on the distribution of income among the present Provinces is available.

Much effort has been put into refining the Gross Domestic Product figures, and also into producing comparable series to show variations over time. Yet the only figures ever published on the variation of income from place to place are for the total monetary GDP in 1962 of the seven Provinces then existing.² Data by industrial origin for the Provinces have never been published, while there seems no prospect of official data being produced for Districts, even though the contrasts between even neighbouring Districts are often very great.

In Tanzania calculations of Gross Regional Product have been made, and figures for 1962 were published in The National Accounts of Tanganyika 1960-62. These are of considerable value, but here again data for the new smaller Regions created in 1963 would be even more useful. It has been suggested³ that such data does exist, and furthermore that regional development plans based upon them have been made; but for some reason neither the data nor the plans have been published.

In Uganda only one exercise has ever been undertaken in this field.⁴ Estimates of the income of African households by District were made for the year 1957; but this has not been repeated for a more recent year, and no attempt to estimate Gross District Product has been made.

The main concern of this paper is with the areal distribution of income and the areal element in planning; but certain inadequacies of our knowledge of the distribution of specific activities might also be mentioned, for both assessment of Regional or District income and areal planning depend on this. To take a single example, the writer finds that his students without exception assume that the facts of the distribution of manufacturing in East Africa are known.

This is not so: or at least if the information does exist it remains largely in the confidential records of the Statistical Bureaux. Recent censuses of industrial production for both Kenya and Tanganyika provide some valuable information on the distribution of industry, but in neither case in sufficient detail for the pattern to be mapped. The Uganda Survey of Industrial Production 1963 includes one table providing a breakdown by Region. But there are only four Regions, and as pointed out in the text, 5 boundaries are such as to make this division unhelpful. There are no figures which would permit comparison between Kampala and Jinja as industrial centres: nor can one discover the extent to which Tororo or Mbale have developed as minor centres. In this field an example of a pioneer contribution by geographer is M. Safier's paper on Industrial Location and Economic Integration in East Africa, presented to the 1963 Nairobi Conference on public policy but unfortunately not published in the resulting book.⁶

In relation to agriculture the situation differs greatly both from country to country and from crop to crop. In Kenya estimates of sales of crops from small farms are made on a District basis, but they are not published. It is extremely difficult to establish the location of sisal production in Tanzania beyond a crude breakdown into a few broad zones. For Uganda it is very disappointing to learn that the FAO census will provide the absolute minimum of information on areal differences in agricultural systems and production. A full analysis of the availability of data on agricultural distributions would, however, require a lengthy paper of its own.

In many fields where areal data exist they are much less readily available than they might be. In the Statistical Abstracts, for example, such information is very fragmentary, while the quarterly Economic and Statistical Review of EACSO does not provide even a national breakdown of most data.

Despite the problems of obtaining data it should be possible to make some estimates for Gross District Product in the East African countries. At the very least an indication of the cash income of the people of each District could be provided by using existing, if inaccessible, figures for sales of crops and other produce and for earnings from employment in the manner of the Uganda exercise for 1957. Estimates of subsistence income could also be made, although since economists do not appear to have found any entirely satisfactory method of doing this it is doubtful whether a geographer will achieve great success in this field. Not all the figures that might be desired exist, even for very crude estimates of District income, but there are probably enough to yield results of some value, and to provide the basis for studies of the factors contributing to the uneven distribution.

If Regional or District income data could be provided for a number of years it might even be possible to establish which parts of each country were enjoying the most rapid economic growth. Whether it is government policy to encourage development in those areas which have already shown their potential for it, or to direct development to those areas at present suffering from stagnation, such information would surely be of relevance. At the same time it might add to the evidence available for the academic debate on whether or not there is a tendency towards a widening gap between rich and poor areas.

The need for areal studies exists at three levels. The first concerns basic data on the distribution of economic activities and of income, involving merely the question 'where?'. The second concerns the explanations of the patterns so discovered as far as this is possible, thus centering on the question 'why there?'. The third concerns decisions on where new forms of activity should take place and on where investment is either most needed or most likely to be productive.

Such decisions are now of necessity being made, even though the knowledge on which they should be based, even at the first level, is grossly inadequate. It is difficult to see how a greater knowledge of present patterns of activity and income, and also a greater understanding of the factors contributing to the present patterns, could fail to assist the making of such decisions. From the practical as well as the academic point of view, therefore, there is surely a need for more areal studies in economic development, whether undertaken by economists or by geographers.

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