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COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND POWER AS FACTORS AFFECTING
THE EFFICIENCY OF GOVERNMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION:
A CASE STUDY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

East Africa has a notorious history of 'plans that failed'. The
£5 million Kongwa Groundnut Scheme, the abandoned settlement schemes,
reclaimed bushland after bush clearing, washed away dams, terraces and
contour bands etc. are but a few examples. The area from which some of
the study results presented in this paper are drawn has a long history
of sporadic <u>ad</u> <u>hoc</u> campaigns, mainly of a rather coercive nature. There
have been anti-goat campaigns, compost making campaigns, latrine digging
campaigns, communal dam making and terracing campaigns, cattle shed cam-
paigns, anti-famine root crops campaigns, the nappier grass campaign and
even anti-witchcraft-anti-agricultural rituals campaigns. The most re-
cent ones, since 1964, have been the cotton block cultivation campaign
and the Katumani maize campaign for the same area.

However, studies and official reports (for no rigorous evaluation
of these projects has ever been done) show that most of these pro-
grammes collapsed as soon as the financial and administrative support
and pressure were removed. Our task is to understand what led to this
pattern, and what we can learn from this past history.

This paper examines the role of governmental bureaucracies as spear-
heads or 'leaders' in rural development. The validity of the assumption
that the bureaucratic arm of the government monopolises power and leader-
ship will be examined in a theoretical context and in terms of an East
African case study approach. Some methodological issues into the research
on community leadership will also be examined.

THE SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL SETTING

Of the thirty-one million people living in the three East African
countries, over eighty per cent of them live in the rural areas and on
the whole have not physically changed their traditional setting since the
1800s. They still occupy tribal and clan owned lands, and each individual
is, to some extent, a part of the traditional kinship based social system.

Thus a problem which has puzzled those who believe in the socio-
economic transformation approach has been: what beliefs, values and
practices; what boundary maintaining activities etc. give permanency,
continuity and consistency to an apparently impractical traditionally
sanctioned land tenure system; bride service and bride wealth; the
extended family and the widespread kinship obligations; the apparently
impossible and fragmentory inheritence patterns; the shared family
labour distribution; the delaying of control of factors of production
such as land, capital and family labour through a rigid age category
and a religoous set of taboos etc., etc. These scholars have also been
forced to ask themselves why and how have traditionally legitimized local
social organizations and power groups made a shambles out of well
tailored agricultural programmes and continue, to this day, to sap
the morale of change agents. The problem has hitherto been studied
through the empirical testing of propositions derived from a given
theoretical approach with its own set of assumptions. We shall
examine one such approach first.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL BIND APPROACH

Consistent with the evolutionary and neo-evolutionary approaches
of Spencer, Lester Ward, William Sumner and the more acclaimed work
of Max Weber - Protestantism, rationality and capitalism - has been the
view that social structure, more specifically the degree of differen-
tiation of status-roles, reflects or is a function of the degree of
mastery over the physical environment. The argument, validated by
historical accounts, shows that the environment controlled the de-
gree of technological advancement, which in turn influenced demo-
graphic factors such as population densities, mobility and settle-
ment patterns; and that these in turn influenced the nature of social
organizations, and economic activity and the emergent symbolic patterns
of communication, behaviour etc.

Within East Africa, studies using this approach and leading to

the empirical demonstration of a 'vicious cycle of poverty' or stag-
nation or the Oscar Lewis 'Culture of poverty', or Sol Tax's 'penny
capitalism' etc. exist. It has been very fashionable to analyse value
systems and behavioural patterns in an effort to demonstrate a cultural-
structural bind which owes its existance to a technological and
ecological bind.

This approach, in particular, reinforces the assumption of
ideal economic and social homogeneity within tribal societies, and it
is easy for one to slip into the conceptual lethargy of treating
vallagers and rural people as 'masses'; a diffuse mass of illiterates
who can be molded and ridiculed to an awareness of their position,
and thus $\quad$ rejuvinated to $\quad$ / $\quad$ a sense of relative deprivation, frustration and
innovativeness. The impacts of history, the diffusion of ideas and
practices and the social dynamics of group life are ignored.

The above observations can be re-examined through a detailed
theoretical and empirical analysis of the concept of power and its
application in actual action situations.

It is suggested in this paper that agricultural programmes,
whether legitimized on economic, social or political grounds tend
to be limited and carry a large risk of failure. They tend to be
characterized by limitations in the conceptual premises and assump-
tions on which they are built, and also by a lack of knowledge about
the empirical realities in rural East Africa and thus how they can
best be implemented. Consequently, it can be readily seen that
achieving plan targets within such limited agricultural programmes
may not be a positive step forward.

'SOCIAL POWER' IN COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Comparative analysis in the social sciences is undertaken with
the basic intent of testing existing generalizations concerning human
behaviour by establishing time and space as control or modifying vari-

ables (Suchman, 1964, p. 125). The contribution of comparative analysis
to sociological theory - specification, explication, replication and
generalization - (March, 1964) assumes, as a prerequisite, a concep-
tual body of thought capable of objective application in differing
socio-cultural situations.

The concept of social power, when abstracted from a given frame
of reference, loses much of this necessary capacity to generate the
meaningful hypotheses tested in comparative research. It is suggested
here that in community power studies the community serves merely as a
level of analysis and that the study of power in a social collectivity
does not implicitly embody one or more particular sociological theories
but rather identifies a concept, power, and a level of analysis,
community. Moreover, an approach to power at the community level
of human interaction poses issues of concept correspondance in the
cross-cultural context.

SOCIAL POWER AS A CONCEPT

The ambiguity created in the attempts to develop a universal
definition of power by extracting the concept from specific theor-
etical orientations has caused at least one social scientist to note
that "While power and the power structure of society are central to
social scientists, no concept is more troublesome as to what it means"
(Bierstedt, 1950, p. 731). Lynd notes that the sociologist, confronted
with the problems of social stratification, examines power in a class
context and from this perspective turns to the study of status groups
and elites. The social psychologist also emphasizes the group but
focuses upon questions of power as they relate to personality types.
Finally, he notes the concerns of political science as primarily with
institutionalized or legitimate hierarchies of power (Robert Lynd in
Kornhauser (ed.), 1957, p. 21).

Although each academic area implies concern with different sets
of conceptual problems, many respected scholars of each area express

similar basic definitions of power. All reduce power to the individual
level of analysis. Thus power "is an interpersonal situation; those
who hold power are empowered. They depend upon and continue only so
long as there is a continuing stream of empowering responses" (Lass-
well, 1948, p. 10). Power is "a relation, it is a relation among
people" (Dahl, 1957, p. 203). Power is "the chance of man or number
of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against
the resistance of others who are participating in the action"
(Weber in Gerth and Mills, 1958, p. 180). Though well intentioned,
this form of definition reduces power conceptualization to an amor-
phous condition. As Weber notes, here "every conceivable combination
of circumstances may put someone in a situation where he can demand
compliance with his will" (Secher, 1966, p. 117).

The above highlights the point that, without a particular theor-
etical frame of reference or conceptual problem within which to
focus upon the phenomena of power, definitional statements are
meaningless.

The second related definitional problem suggested by the pre-
ceeding discussion is one of reductionalism. Clearly, if one takes
a Durkheimian approach (where, in essence, the social whole is
larger than the sum of its constituent part, or at least a different
entity), and prefers to work at levels of analysis greater than the
individual level, reduction of power to a relation between individ-
uals becomes operationally impossible.[1]

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[1] The definitions cited above are obviously taken from context. There-
fore they have lost much of their theoretical relevance as origin-
ally intended by each author.

It must however be noted that many social scientists do deal
explicitly with notions of power at structural levels of analysis.
Blau, for example, traces power from the basic notion of interpersonal
exchange and builds to institutional levels of society, carefully
avoiding the reductionist fallacy of ignoring emergent properties
(1964). Parsons (1963) and Porter (1965) both deal with power on a
systemic basis, as it is expressed in the institutional subsystems
of the society.

An emphasis upon legitimate, institutionalized power expressions
has, however, tended to ignore divergent, non-institutional power
forces representing broad areas of sentiment. To the political scien-
tists (if I may indulge in mud slinging), the isolated political
act tends to take on full meaning only when regarded in the frame-
work of the totality of political relations in the society. (Key,
1959, p. 5). Lipset has commented that the concern for 'good govern-
ment' in political science has led to an emphasis upon the bureau-
cracy as a cause of increased efficiency and stability for the ad-
ministrative process. The extent to which this is tenable in the
East African context should be subject to our discussion.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

It was stated earlier that most students of power postulate that
it has a probability function and also an activity aspect. This kind
of approach calls for indentification of those who hold power - or
influence. Following French and Ravens classification of the basis
of power (French and Raven in Cartwright and Zander (eds.), 1960,
p. 607), power and hence leadership is seen as one based on rational
choice. It is assumed that there is maximum flow of information and
feedback between the actor and recipient of power. Thus, if one
asks a local Machakos farmer "Who runs this sub-location?", one
expects the respondent to have certain issues in mind, to evaluate
certain holders of power resources, to review certain incumbents of

important offices and come out with a balance sheet which shows the top dog. When we conclude that the local bureaucratic arm of the government wields the maximum power and obtains unchallenged compliance, from such an exercise, we commit the fallacy of insufficient statistics. Even limiting ourselves to a single administrative decision - say distribution of x thousand bags of fertilizer to Y villages in time for planting, we cannot assume a priori that because the government sends in persuasive change agents, so many cinema vans, free bags of fertilizer or a company of the army that so much fertilizer will be accepted.

But aside from the overriding implication of rationality to the concept of power, there is also the basic assumption that the community is relatively central and solidary vis a vis the national scene. It is not readily seen that the national power structure may be very different from the emergent local power structure. A community power and leadership study based on the positional, reputational and decision making strategies may by-pass or ignore such power bases as witchcraft, ritual expertise, kinship hierarchies and opinion leadership.

Therefore, given the inherent ambiguities in the use of the concept of power, and the multiple power relationship within any given rural community, one almost hesitates to present any results from any study on power and leadership.

The data presented is a simple illustration of the conflict of power hierarchies in any one setting. Three power hierarchies, discriminated on their bases, were identified for the communities studied in East Kenya. The first hierarchy based on force power, expertise, economic control and political legitimacy was headed by (a) government officers, (b) politicians, (c) local entrepreneurs, teachers and older city men, and (d) christian church leaders. The second hierarchy, based on traditionally sanctioned compliance was composed of (i) clan leaders, 'ithe ma Mbai', (ii) village councillors and government chiefs, (iii)

large cattle owners and men in charge of extended families. The third

hierarchy, based on traditional expertise was composed of (1) the ritual

leaders 'atumia ma ngondu', (2) the medicine man, (3) the rain doctor

'mundu wa mbua' - the expert on crops to be planted etc. Table I is

a summary of the above.

<div align="center">Table I. Power Base in Rural Areas</div>

Leaders	Base of Power*	Reference Group
Traditional	(a) Reward power - inheritance - cattle, land, blessings of ancestors.	All kinsmen and tribesmen.
	(b) Referent power - pomp, dignity and leisure.	Localite groups
	(c) Expert power - ritual leaders, anti-witchcraft, medicine etc.	
	(d) Traditional order, legitimate power - legitimizes keepers of social tradition. They are to be obeyed.	
Government Officials and other experts	(a) Coercive power.	A higher authority cosmopolite groups
	(b) Legitimacy in planned action.	
	(c) Reward power - subsidies, loans, commendations. Limited	
	(d) Expert - modern technology.	

It is an accepted sociological fact that social groups do overlap in

that members of one group will also be members of another group. In

the rural context, farmers will have multiple reference groups depend-

ing on the variability of social and activity situations. The same

will be true of government officials. Therefore, any single power

act may pose a problem of choice of groups. Therefore the above

table does not show the dynamic relationship between power base,

the frequency of its use and the probability of choice of any refer-

ence group. This is a problem for the next stage in our research.

Table II shows the dispersion of leaders and their possible

influence on administrative decision areas.

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* Adapted from French and Raven, op. cit.

Table II. Community Projects in Four Communities

Decision Area	Group Origin of Decision	Participants	Period	Remarks
1. Construction of Harambee High Schools	Clan leaders in consultation with community development officials	Clans, family heads, individuals, & women age-groups	1964	Successfull in all four communities
2. Building maternity clinic	Women leaders, clan leaders, officials	Clans, family heads, individuals, mainly women	1964	Successful
3. Compost making campaign	Extension Officers	Communities, farmers	1948	Couldn't replace cattle manure – failed
4. Destocking	Government officials	Communities, homestead heads	1946–1960	Failed
5. Resistance to destocking & terracing	Local cattle owners and homestead leaders	Communities, family heads	1948–1960	Successful in all four
6. Adoption of cotton communal plantations	Government	Communities, farmers and their households	1965–1967	Failing
7. Maintaining irrigation channel	Government	Communities, individual plot owners and their households	1956–1960	Failed
8. Adoption of early maturing maize	Government researchers	Communities, individual farm households	1962–1967	Successful
9. Maintaining irrigation Channel·	Village committee	Community, households	1966	Progressive
10. Land Allocation to immigrants	Village committee	Community, 'village committee'	1956	It works

The above table appears to support the old community development truism, "Get the community and its leaders to think it is their idea, that it is their baby". Yet anyone who is familiar with the informality of community action knows that what is portrayed above is not only a conflict of leadership but a conflict of definition of goals, strategies

and degree of involvement between bureaucracies and local interest groups. Also the term 'government official' gives a mistaken picture of interdepartmental co-ordination on any given programme. Hidden are the jealousies, competition, conflicting expert prescriptions and the uncertainties arising from undefined strategies for achieving any given goal. For example, in one of the communities studied, agricultural experts recommended the use of fish in their irrigation channels. The following month the health officials sprayed DDT on the water to stop mosquito from breeding. All the fish died. Obviously, a local man witnessing this stupidity will be hard put to remove his hat next time he meets an 'officer'. Table III shows the structure of community consultation on important problems.

Table III. A Measure of Community Consultation
on Agricultural Problems

Community	Consulted Chief/ Agric. Officer	Local Farmer	Kinsman/ Friend	Himself
Machakos Central	30	25	30	15
Machakos New	56	20	22	2
Mbere New	50	10	35	5
Mbere Central	20	25	36	19

CONCLUSION

Research techniques into the nature of rural leadership and the impact of governmental intervention must be based on a broader definition of power relationships. This is mainly in order to tap the extra-institutional expressions and legitimate local groups. In an adaptation of the Weberian probability definition of power with the added support of Websters New World Dictionary, Saul Alinsky states that power is, most simply, "the ability to act" (Cornell, October 1968). So defined, power is not confined to the legitimate, institutionalized sectors of the community. It includes new coalitions of dissenting collectivities or what Young calls 'reactive subsystems' (Young 1968). It is also broad enough to be meaningful, in cross-cultural research.

The preliminary results from the 1966-68 study in East Kenya
should provoke professional students of public administration to take
a closer look at the rural scene, away from the national planning
headquarters.

Some of the relevant issues in this context are:

What are the different types of rural ecological conditions in
terms of power relationships in which administrative action takes
place and how do they affect the rate of change, if any?

What are the implications of socialist policies on admini-
strative structure and strategies in rural East Africa where,
presumably, there is an active discouragement of elitism and monopolies
of power at the individual level?

What is the cultural transferability of theoretical concepts
such as 'power', 'leadership' etc. in the absence of all embracing
generalized scientific paradigms of frames of reference. What does
this spell out for research designs in an East African context?
How can plans based on such shaky ground be evaluated?

At what level sof analysis are studies of 'power' and 'leader-
ship' most meaningful heuristically and for planning purposes?

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