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 ad hoc 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 campaigns, anti-famine root crops campaigns, the nappier grass campaign and even anti-witchcraft-anti-agricultural rituals campaigns. The most recent 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 programmes 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 spearheads or 'leaders' in rural development. The validity of the assumption that the bureaucratic arm of the government monopolises power and leadership 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 inheritance 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 religious 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 differentiation 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 degree of technological advancement, which in turn influenced demographic factors such as population densities, mobility and settlement 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 stagnation 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 existence 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, rejuvenated to and thus / 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 assumptions 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 conceptual 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 correspondence 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 theoretical 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. 27).

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" (Lasswell, 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 amorphous 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 theoretical 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 preceding 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 individuals becomes operationally impossible.\(^1\)

\(^1\) The definitions cited above are obviously taken from context. Therefore they have lost much of their theoretical relevance as originally 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 scientists (if I may indulge in mud-slinging), the isolated political act tends to take on full meaning only when regarded in the framework of the totality of political relations in the society. (Key, 1959, p. 5). Lipset has commented that the concern for 'good government' in political science has led to an emphasis upon the bureaucracy as a cause of increased efficiency and stability for the administrative 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 identification of those who hold power - or influence. Following French and Raven's 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 com-
pliance, 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 govern-
ment 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 commun-
ity 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, dis-
criminated 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 Mhaki’, (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.

Table I. Power Base in Rural Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Base of Power</th>
<th>Reference Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>(a) Reward power - inheritance -</td>
<td>All kinsmen and tribesmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cattle, land, blessings of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Referent power - pomp, dignity</td>
<td>Localite groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and leisure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Expert power - ritual leaders,</td>
<td>A higher auth-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anti-witchcraft, medicine etc.</td>
<td>ORITY COSMO-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Traditional order, legitimate</td>
<td>polite groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>power - legitimizes keepers of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social tradition. They are to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be obeyed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>(a) Coercive power.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials</td>
<td>(b) Legitimacy in planned action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and other</td>
<td>(c) Reward power - subsidies, loans,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experts</td>
<td>(d) Expert - modern technology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 depending 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 reference 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.

* Adapted from French and Raven, op. cit.
Table II. Community Projects in Four Communities

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

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 inter-departmental 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Consulted Chief/ Agric. Officer</th>
<th>Local Farmer</th>
<th>Kinsman/ Friend</th>
<th>Himself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Machakos Central</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machakos New</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbere New</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbere Central</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Webster's 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 administrative 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 of analysis are studies of 'power' and 'leadership' most meaningful heuristically and for planning purposes?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


