

# THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS

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## AFRICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE RHODESIAN ECONOMY

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## **FACTORS INFLUENCING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS**

**A. K. H. WEINRICH\***

I have just published a book : "African Farmers in Rhodesia" (International African Institute, London, 1975) which deals with the very topic I have been asked to speak to you about. I shall therefore give you in this lecture the conclusions I arrived at after studying for several years various agricultural communities.

It is seldom possible for sociologists to carry out experiments with the same degree of accuracy as can physical scientists; the closest we can come to a laboratory-like situation is to carry out controlled observation. This is the method I used. I chose two tribal trust lands, two purchase areas and two irrigation schemes in the same tribal area and in the same ecological region of Rhodesia so that all extraneous factors which might affect productivity were held constant. Within this framework I looked for one successful and one unsuccessful agricultural community of each type. This strict selection was hampered in the case of one irrigation scheme, because Government did not give me access to the scheme I had selected, claiming that there was political unrest in the area, and suggested another scheme to me. This suggested scheme, Chikwarakwara at the Limpopo river, was inhabited predominantly by Shangaan and its natural region also was very different from that of the other communities in the centre of Rhodesia. However, by the time I studied this scheme I had established that these differences were not the significant factors influencing productivity. The communities chosen are the following: Chilimanzi and Victoria tribal trust lands, Zvinyaningwa and Tokwe purchase areas and Gove and Chikwarakwara irrigation schemes. Here are my findings :

### **1. The Effects of Government Policy on Peasant Development**

Unlike most developing third world countries whose Governments have formed development plans, the Rhodesian Government believes in free enterprise and does not have any overall development plan. But this does not mean that African peasants are free to cultivate the land where and how they wish, for movement from one of the three land categories I mentioned to another is strictly controlled by officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and within each settlement type Africans are subject to specific rules and regulations which circumscribe their agricultural activities.

This inability of Africans to choose freely where to live and how to cultivate their land is due to the government policy of separate development, as expressed in the division of land into racial blocks, coupled with a pheno-

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menal population increase due to good medical facilities. The population problem is felt most acutely in tribal trust lands which have to absorb the surplus population from any part in Rhodesia, whether they are capable of doing so or not. Already in 1967 over 47% of all men in the tribal communities studied were landless, and in the age group under 30 this percentage was as high as 81%. With the high replacement rate of 2,6 in these areas, the problem of a rural landless proletariat is building up at a very fast rate. As a result of this population pressure on limited land resources, the per capita income from the land of Rhodesia peasants fell by 50% between 1958 and 1970. (The Rhodesia Herald, 28.7.1971). There are as yet few opportunities available in tribal trust lands for men to earn a living a part from agriculture.

South Africa, which resembles our country in many respects, is facing a similar problem, and Magura estimated that by 1980 only 2,14 million out of 8 million people living in the Bantustans will be able to earn a living from the land.

The ministry of Internal Affairs, which is primarily responsible for tribal areas, has decided that the problem of overpopulation can best be overcome through irrigation schemes. In 1971 the deputy secretary for Internal Affairs said that it was his Ministry's policy "to place as many people on as little land as possible." (R.H.14.7.1971). Irrigation schemes, because of the very intensive cultivation methods practiced on wet land, give higher yields per acre than does dry land farming. Unfortunately, Africans are not enthusiastic about moving to irrigation schemes, because their freedom of action is greatly curtailed on these schemes. They also have other objections: for although the yields per acre of irrigated land are high, the production costs are high as well, so that the actual profit of the individual plowholder is only moderate.

The only settlements free from population pressure are the purchase areas because government does not allow a subdivision of the farms and orders all married dependents of farm owners, who are not heirs, to leave the farms. The aim behind this policy is to create an African middle class that earns its living from the land. This aim has to some extent been achieved. At present, farm owners are the most satisfied section of rural Africans.

Yet purchase areas face two dangers. It is likely that, should the population pressure in tribal areas increase still further, government might decide to subdivide the farms. A move some years ago to put purchase areas back under the ministry of Internal Affairs, removing them from the ministry of Agriculture, was taken by many as a pointer in this direction. The second danger arises from the very success of some purchase area farmers. For as some of these farms become highly productive, European farmers begin to fear competition. Should this competition become acute, steps might be taken

to safeguard the European market. As Gann and Duignan well write, throughout Rhodesian history, Africans have only been advanced "as long as their advancement did not conflict with powerful white interest groups." The assurance to European farmers, some years ago, by the chairman of the Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation, that Africans will not be assisted in growing crops which might compete with those grown by European farmers, proves that this is still a powerful factor. (R.H. 24.9.1970)

To conclude the section on government policies affecting African peasant farming it can be stated that government will only support those developments and changes in African agriculture which prevent the rural population from falling drastically below subsistence level, and which will not enable them to become an economic challenge to white farmers.

## 2. The Effects of the Administrative System

Government control is tightest in those areas in which population densities are greatest, a situation which may be deemed necessary in the interests of national security. Irrigation schemes, which have the highest population density are the most closely supervised, and they are also the most disliked of all settlement types — apart from protected villages where the population density is still greater. Very often the scheme manager, always a European, knows little about irrigation farming and still less about African peasants so that tensions between him and the people are often acute. Moreover, plot-holders feel extremely insecure, for if they fail to comply with any of the many regulations governing their lives, they can be expelled from the schemes. This insecurity is reflected in the very poor huts they erect for themselves and their often stated conviction that their stay on the scheme is merely temporal.

Since irrigation schemes are very expensive to establish and run, high output is essential. In the successful scheme of Gove, the average annual family income from the plots was \$304, but on the unsuccessful scheme of Chikwarakwara it was only \$64. If the average family is taken to consist of five to six members, it will be seen that the annual per capital income is exceedingly low. These figures include the value of all crops grown, eaten as well as sold. The dominant reason for the differences in success between these two schemes is that Gove consists of young plottolders with higher average education, who had all been employed in the cash economy for many years and who had become completely independent of their chiefs. Chikwarakwara plottolders, on the other hand, had hardly been to school at all and were still deeply imbued with tribal values. Their tradition of pastoralism and attachment to a chief who lived outside the scheme made them most uncooperate irrigation farmers. In fact, when we revisited the scheme last year, we found that it had closed down, though when we did the survey it had almost a hundred plottolders. The investment here has certainly been wasted.

In tribal lands external supervision is less strict than on irrigation schemes. The peasants enjoy a relative freedom and this is one reason why they are reluctant to move to irrigation schemes. Moreover, since the average master farmer in a tribal trust land has an annual net income of \$256, which is only \$48 less than that of a plowholder on the successful irrigation scheme, there is little reason for him to leave his kinsmen and move as a stranger among strangers to a tightly controlled irrigation scheme.

Obstacles to the development of tribal areas are partly increased by a return of responsibility for the land to African chiefs, the most tradition-bound group of tribesmen. I know that in saying this I say the opposite of what government says, but my own experience prevents me from changing my stand. My research has amply demonstrated that the stronger a chief's influence over agriculture in his community is, the less likely is it that development work will take place. In Mafuba, a local community in Victoria TTL, where progressive peasant cultivators repeatedly tried to organise themselves in order to increase their production, all efforts were crushed by the chief. I could give you many other examples. In June 1971, the Rhodesia Herald wrote: "It is useless to say, as the Prime Minister has done, that the Land Tenure Act has placed the problem of the TTL's 'squarely where it belongs', with the inhabitants of these areas (especially with the chiefs). You might as well expect slum dwellers to tackle and finance slum clearance schemes." (RH 28.8.71.)

I found in my research that in our Rhodesian situation it is mainly those who are marginal to the tribal system and who want to move out of it, such as master farmers, who make the fullest use of the land and earn the highest income, so that it is those who have freed themselves from tribal values who become successful cash croppers. I think that this is due to the elitist character of our society and of our extension services. If Paulo Feire's methods of critical consciousness were encouraged among our peasants, the picture might look very different from what it is today.

Yet the artificial preservation of tribal values is not the whole problem. The tight control by the ministry of Internal Affairs over all development works is equally harmful. Though my research was concluded before the technical and administrative functions were again united in the hands of district commissioners, a streamlining of extension work had already begun. For example, the agricultural youth clubs, started by missionaries in Chilizanzi TTL and supported by extension staff, were absorbed on the instruction of the District Commissioner into the national movement of Young Farmers' Clubs, with the consequences that all closed down. The results of the study of the two tribal areas indicates that progress is fastest where individuals who show a strong interest in peasant progress are allowed to take a lead in development and are left free to carry out their plans, and

that bureaucratic administration, which insists on uniformity, stifles whatever initiative there is.

Farmers in purchase areas are free from many of the handicaps under which irrigation plottolders and TTL peasants suffer. Their freedom to administer their own communities gives them great satisfaction. These farmers see themselves as free men who, if they want to make a good living from the land, are generally able to do so. Their great interest in agricultural progress has given rise to many voluntary associations in Zvinyaninwe, a progressive PA, and it is clear that self-administration in this community has greatly stimulated production.

Yet in purchase areas where farmers have been selected on other criteria than farming ability, as in Tokwe, this freedom is likely to result in negligent farming and low output. In fact, the failure of Tokwe P.A. can be attributed to two factors: firstly, only a small proportion of the men were master farmers, and secondly, over 78% had come from an adjoining overcrowded TTL and allowed to take up the farms in order to alleviate the population pressure in that tribal area. Hence these farmers continued in the purchase area their tribal way of life and showed little interest in moving into the cash economy. They regarded the farms as a security for their old age.

### 3. The Effects of the Wider Cash Economy

Members of the most successful farming communities which I studied have given up labour migration. Only ordinary peasant cultivators still derive about a third of their total annual income from salaries and wages. The absence of these men temporarily relieves the population pressure in the TTL's and their earnings allow their families to live slightly above subsistence level. On their own, however, the wages of labour migrants are too low to support the families of the workers. Consequently the system of labour migration is inefficient because it lowers the efficiency of individual men. Only a permanent rural population achieves high agricultural success, as my findings indicated. Labour migration brings advantages only to employers who require cheap and unskilled labour, and to those Africans who have access to tribal land. Since the great majority of Africans will soon no longer have land in the TTL's, they will depend exclusively on their wages to feed and clothe their families. Their wages must therefore be living wages, and unless the men become permanent and skilled labourers, few employers will pay them adequately. The recent PDL study has shown how high the cost of living is for Africans in urban areas.

Yet until recently labour migration has brought advantages to tribal areas. Not only did it decrease population pressure and inject money, it also introduced urban values into the country and so acted as a strong force making for social change. This social change also affected peasant attitudes

towards agriculture, because villagers who are weaned from tribal values are more ready to experiment with modern farming methods.

Since farm owners in purchase areas are not allowed to seek urban employment, only their sons can work in towns. Hence the urban influence is less strong in PAs than in TTL's. However, peasant farmers have an important link with the wider economy through the marketing of their surplus crops. The average Zvinyaningwe farmer sells \$135 worth of crops annually, about half of which find their way into the national economy, the rest into TTL's, and he also sells cattle worth \$114 a year.

Irrigation schemes are even more geared towards the national market than are purchase areas. Since maize is the only locally consumed crop grown on irrigated land, the other crops, like wheat and cotton, are sold outside the local communities. Moreover, plottolders are not only tied to the wider cash economy through their own sales, but also through their great purchases of seed, fertiliser and insecticides. P.A. farmers could do without the national economy, because their crops can be sold to African peasants, but irrigation plottolders dependent utterly on the wider economy.

All the communities I studied derive the greater part of their income from the land, but their degree of dependence varies. Plottolders on irrigation schemes derive about 92% of their total income from cultivating the land, PA farmers 70 to 80% and TTL cultivators 57%. Moreover, apart from ordinary peasant cultivators in TTL who are not master farmers, all the others receive their additional income from the sale of cattle or other agricultural produce, such as the sale of eggs or fruit. Hence it is only the poorest of Rural Africans who supplement their income by wage labour. (The average net family income of master farmers in TTL's is \$256 per annum, that of ordinary cultivators \$125, that of Zvinyaningwe farmers \$469 and that of Tokwe farmers \$224.)

#### 4. Factors making for High Agricultural Incomes

In conclusion I want to summarise the factors which make for high agricultural incomes. The studies of the communities outlined and the case histories of individual men in these communities show that the most successful men are younger than their neighbours, better educated and often strongly influenced by Christian beliefs, that they possess special training in modern agricultural methods and that they come from tribal communities with traditions of land cultivation. Almost all of them have emancipated themselves to a large degree from tribal values, especially from an attachment to chiefs.

Men who possess these personal characteristics are likely to earn more money even outside agriculture than those who lack these qualities, and so they are able to acquire better farming implements, larger herds of cattle and often also more land. But access to larger acreages of arable is not, in itself,

one of the more important factors making for a high farming income.

There exists a most striking correlation between agricultural success and the possession of a master farmer's certificate. It is therefore a great pity that master farmer training schemes have in some areas been discontinued. In TTL's and purchase areas the incomes of master farmers are twice as high as those of men who lack this qualification, and on the irrigation schemes master farmers have five times as high a farming income than their neighbours. Expenditure on seed, fertiliser, insecticides and hired labour is closely related to the possession of a master farmer's certificate, and the use of these items is a clear indication that a man has broken with tribal values and adopted modern approaches to farming.

I suggest that people who are interested in the development of rural areas pay prime attention to social factors, for technological help, however, essential, will not be accepted unless an atmosphere of trust has been established between the people and those who work with them. Recent reading has convinced me that only the methods of Paulo Freire are likely to bring about vital changes and a revitalisation of our rural areas.

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