

Colonial Agrarian History of Sanyati (Zimbabwe): Prelude, Debates and Innuendoes of Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation (TILCOR) Decentralised Development, 1948-1979

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Abstract

This article examines the colonial agrarian history of Gowe-Sanyati Communal Lands in Zimbabwe between 1948 and 1979 paying attention to the context, debates and innuendoes of Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation (TILCOR) decentralised development. TILCOR, renamed the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, is a parastatal agency formed in 1968. It was entrusted, inter alia, with identifying, initiating, promoting, evaluating, planning, co-ordinating, financing, developing, implementing and administering new industrial and agricultural development projects such as irrigation schemes, new settlement areas and growth-points (rural service-centres). After the Second World War the then settler colonial government had 'encouraged' urban employment of semi-skilled Africans in the manufacturing sector, but with the inception of TILCOR emphasis shifted to keeping Africans in the rural areas to discourage massive rural-urban migration. It was envisaged that hordes of people in search of employment opportunities would cause a "socio-political-human problem" or "inevitable flooding" of the urban centres. This fear or premonition gave rise to the pre-formulation of a decentralisation policy and later its full implementation under TILCOR. The initial stage entailed initiating a State-engineered rural development process designed to keep Africans on the land. The paper argues that such State-directed development was not without its own problems as it was achievable on the basis of settling and absorbing Africans not in so-called

white enclaves, but in semi-urban, rural and irrigation agricultural enterprises. Using the Gowe-Sanyati area as a case study, this paper, therefore, explores the implications of the evolution of the decentralisation philosophy against the backdrop of scholarly debates and development perspectives of the colonial State in order to understand the operations of TILCOR and their impact on the African peasantry who were the intended beneficiaries of the policy.

Introduction

This article examines the colonial agrarian and economic development¹ history of Gowe-Sanyati Communal Lands in Zimbabwe between 1948 and 1979. It documents and analyses the history and innuendoes of TILCOR decentralised development in a period spanning three decades. This was a period when the decentralisation debate was either in a nascent stage or decentralised development had not reached full implementation in the pre- and post-Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation (TILCOR) days. Apart from its white orientation, a major concern with the Corporation was its colonial perception as being top-heavy and lacking a depoliticised decentralisation structure. This is how talk of decentralisation from below began, although it was not pronounced in the formative years between the end of the Second World War and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). The prelude to decentralisation was characterised by debates about the process after World War II.

Historically, both water and land have been, and remain, the core of Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political development. In the contemporary era, as in the colonial period, rural development, whether of a decentralised or non-decentralised nature, has been premised on the agro-industrial sector. The sector and related sectors have always depended on these key natural resources and how they are allocated for human use and livelihoods. In colonial Zimbabwe, Europeans used their control over land and water to secure economic and political dominance for themselves (Palmer, 1977). Economic polarisation, colonial land alienation, the inequitable distribution of water, and the absence of water rights among African farmers in the then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) were some of the chief causes of peasant agrarian unrest in the countryside.

The Land Apportionment Act (LAA) of 1930/31 and the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1950/51 became paramount policy issues for

¹ Development does not only include man's material needs, but also the improvement of the economic and social conditions of his/her life. It entails growth-plus-change i.e. social, cultural and institutional. For this definition of economic development see P. Alpert. (1963) *Economic Development: Objectives and Methods*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, p. 1.

denying access to and use of water and land by rural areas targeted for resettling hordes of people being moved from white-designated areas under the Acts (Nyandoro, 2008: 128). Africans were to be kept in the Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs)² as rural to urban migration was discouraged in order to preempt the supposed “socio-political-human problem” or “inevitable flooding” of the European-dominated urban centres by job-seekers from the peasant sector (Ibid). The idea was not to create a differentiated peasantry, yet differentiation emerged as an unintended outcome of government policy, especially with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. In colonial Zimbabwe, allusions to decentralised rural development only started to surface initially with sporadic, and later regular, references to community development between 1948 and 1956. The policy of community development which is frequently taken to be synonymous with decentralisation (Bratton, 1978; 1980), but not peasant differentiation, was gradually designed to allay African and some white groups’ opposition to the entrenched economic supremacy of a white minority. This is why and how the debate on decentralisation began, and was to become TILCOR’s major focus since the Corporation’s formation in 1968.³

Decentralisation Context, Policy and Thrust

The Decentralisation Debate

Several scholars have contributed to the economic development and decentralisation debate in a significant way. While Sharma (2006: 49-64) contends that there is no universally acceptable definition of decentralisation, known as federalisation in other contexts, decentralisation was a regional development policy aimed at promoting a wider and more balanced distribution of economic activity in the nations where it was applied. Mutizwa-Mangiza and Passmore (1985: 26; 1972) perceive decentralisation in pre-independence Zimbabwe as synonymous with the rural land policy of Community Development. Bratton and Holleman (1978: 6; 1969) similarly share this view. Community Development, described by early Native Commissioners (NCs) as “good administration” (Howman, 1969: 5), entailed giving people of each community responsibility for their own development. The responsibility could only be discharged through communal organisation, formally and informally, for democratic planning and action.

2. Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) were renamed communal lands or communal areas after Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980.

3. National Archives of Zimbabwe, Records Centre, hereafter referred to as NAZ (RC), 348063, R24.9.6.4F, ADA/POL/1 Part 1: Formation of ADA, “Notes on Functions”, 1969. TILCOR changed names over time to ADA, and ultimately ARDA.

In analysing community development and decentralisation, it should be emphasised (contrary to white settler thinking) that the lure of this development theory was counterweighed by the reality that situating development in the small and outlying areas was not always the answer. Small self-help decentralised irrigation agricultural projects designed for the rural areas in Sanyati faced challenges which led to failure. As illustrated for the USA, India and the Philippines by Immerwahr (2015), the history of development has seen constant, but failed, experimentation with community-based and participatory approaches to economic and social improvement. Concurring with this view, Brand (1991: 83) questions the capacity of decentralisation to enhance local participation.

Indeed, to a large extent, the State in Zimbabwe in general, and Sanyati in particular, imposed severe limits to decentralisation. Such limitations demonstrate that “going small is [not] always better than going big” as communal organisation in rural Sanyati was compromised by the existence of a much stronger colonially-oriented institutional framework which dominated and tried to influence any local organisation to its advantage (Ibid). The State, for instance, had the mandate to allocate irrigable land to select individuals (master farmers), enforce synchronisation of irrigation activities, manage both arable and grazing lands, and oversee the provision of government services such as irrigation equipment, input loans and other infrastructure, including extension and community services. Perceived as vital interventions, all these involved massive intrusions into the lives of rural communities for the State, according to Munro (1998: 281), believed it had the obligation to determine and organise the basic institutions of people’s daily lives, including the spatial organisation of community life itself.

One key feature of decentralisation is thus its institutional character, that is, the institutions that define decentralisation. For example, these institutions were Provincial Councils in the new *2013 Constitution* (pp. 122-123) or those outlined in the Prime Minister’s Directive which was later enacted into the *Provincial Councils and Administration Act* in 1985. The District Commissioner’s (DC) Office was the major administrative arm of government in the pre-TILCOR period, especially when debates about decentralisation started. The institutional dimensions for understanding the outlines of the TILCOR policy in Sanyati were broad as demonstrated by its decentralised operations in the area.

TILCOR Decentralised Operations in Gowe-Sanyati

TILCOR’s decentralised development operations in the Gowe-Sanyati area were specific, but neglected in the existing literature and analysis. TILCOR was one of the regional development authorities which operated in the three major provincial divisions of Manicaland, Matabeleland and Mashonaland.

In the colonial period Gowe-Sanyati (a drought-prone frontier region and the chief supplier of permanent out-grower labour for the Main TILCOR Estate established in 1974) specifically fell under Mashonaland South and after independence it was placed in the Mashonaland West Province. TILCOR's explicit jurisdiction in the area after 1968 was over the Core Estate, the Gowe Irrigation Scheme (which for administrative purposes and in reference to the precise phases of scheme development, was divided into Gowe I and II),⁴ the TILCOR Growth-Point — with infrastructure such as privately-run banks, shops, parastatal boards like the Cotton Marketing Board (CMB), now the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (COTTCO), and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB).

TILCOR's powers under farming operations included the setting up, acquisition and management of farm stores like Takwirira Trading Stores and the building of farm roads. Nearby, Edziwa, Kusi, Neuso and other surrounding dryland villages (under chiefs Wozhele and Neuso) were not directly under TILCOR management, but they benefitted and/or were affected by the inception of Gowe in 1967 and the Estate by deriving fresh and dried produce from the schemes and, in turn, providing casual labour during peak growing and harvesting periods. The Gowe-Sanyati Smallholder Irrigation Scheme also became tied to labour arrangements with the TILCOR Main or Core Irrigation Estate, and was turned, albeit against its will, into the Core Estate's main labour repository.

At the State level, TILCOR was supervised directly by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but through the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC), Provincial authorities [comprising the Provincial Commissioner/PC and the Provincial Agriculturist (PA)], the DC, the TILCOR Executive Board of Directors and the TILCOR Estates management (*TILCOR Annual Reports*, 1968-1979). These structures worked hand in hand with agricultural demonstrators and Land Development Officers (LDOs) as well as extension agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Extension (CONEX mainly responsible for agricultural extension services in the white commercial farming sector) and the Department of Agricultural Development (DEVAG in charge of communal area extension services (*CONEX Annual Report*, 1949: 1; Pazvakavambwa, 1997; 2004).⁵

⁴ NAZ (RC), 158098, C.19.10.7R, "Gowe Irrigation Scheme", 22 Dec. 1967, p. 1; NAZ (RC) 158098, C.19.10.7R, Gowe Irrigation Scheme, "Preliminary Project Report, 1968", p. 1.

⁵ Also interviews with Simon C. Pazvakavambwa, Technical Co-ordinator - Water Resources Management Strategy (WRMS), Harare, 2 April 1997; & Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement, Harare, 10 September & 15 November 2004. Interviews for this article were carried out in Harare and Gowe-Sanyati between 1997 and 2006.

Agricultural extension work has an important and long history in Zimbabwe. Among African farmers, the Rhodesian government's tradition of extension entailed using this service to enforce government rules and 'teach' general management skills without much consultation with the African recipients of this advice, which in itself was a recipe for resistance. From the 1960s to independence in 1980, there was increased use of extension services for the management of irrigation and grazing schemes, for land-use planning in resettlement and communal areas, and for the enforcement of conservation rules. At the scheme level, extension agents interacted closely with the local TILCOR irrigation structure and institutional hierarchy; that is, Estate managers, the Smallholder Irrigation Committee headed by a Chairman with a Secretary, committee members, plot-holders, co-operative societies and extension workers. Each had a special role to play in the operation of the scheme.

From a Government point of view, rural agriculture was to be improved through the engagement of the Native Department which was directly responsible for the appointment of agricultural demonstrators and extension officers. Through institutional development agents such as demonstrators, extension officers and LDOs, the Agriculture Department was designed to provide material services and advice to the African peasantry throughout the country⁶. This department also maintained official control over certain aspects of agricultural production. For example, registration of cotton growers' numbers which was utilised to facilitate marketing procedures, and the disbursement of cash to farmers who had delivered their crop to the CMB in Gatooma. The two departments actually became the best collaborators of governmental action. The focus of early extension efforts was on crop separation, crop rotation, and manure use, through demonstration plots and the training of master farmers. However, these technologies were of limited value. As long as the African DEVAG and European CONEX services remained separate, the sharing of agricultural knowledge was not feasible, and this militated against development.

Other institutional factors facilitated production. Sanyati farmers' cotton cultivation skills were boosted by their close proximity to the Gatooma Cotton Research Institute, an institution established in 1925 by the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation (ECGC) and taken over in 1947 by the Government to develop more productive seed strains tailored for local growing conditions and to respond more effectively to changing international markets. In the ECGC's vicinity is the Cotton Training Centre (CTC), born out of efforts begun in 1972 by the Commercial Cotton Growers Association

⁶ NAZ, S160/DG/105/2/50, Gatooma District, LDO's Monthly Report, 5 February 1951, p. 25.

(CCGA) to train field supervisors and pest scouts for white farmers. It was just before independence that its mandate was dilated to include the training of small-scale cotton growers, the majority of whom were black farmers who became a small class of rural capital accumulators although this was an unintended outcome of governmental action (Nyandoro, 2008: 315; Raikes, 1978; Ranger, 1985; Phimister, 1988). Under the auspices of the CTC selected farmers, extension workers (including TILCOR/ARDA Settlement Officers), university students, and even foreign agricultural officers, went through intensive residential training courses in crop, pest and conservation management. Field Recorders too attended cotton refresher or production courses at the centre. These structures reveal how inter-connected the farmer/plot-holder, irrigation system, scheme management, market, the surrounding dry-land community, and the State and its many institutional facilities were.

The formation of TILCOR impacted the development of the Gowe Smallholder and Sanyati Main Irrigation Schemes as well as the adjacent dryland area. A major concern with the Corporation by the intended beneficiaries of the policy (Africans) was its white orientation, its top-heavy and non-depoliticised decentralisation structure. TILCOR illustrates how various institutional factors like the availability of loan facilities and extension personnel determined the tempo of development, as well as how the inaccessibility of these facilities hindered development and threatened State decentralisation policy. For example, at Gowe-Sanyati successful Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT), which was the only known form of decentralisation in the irrigation sector, was deterred by the State's failure to address the following problems besetting African agriculture: (a) history of dependency on the Main TILCOR Estate after 1974 (b) high irrigation costs (c) absence of credit, input and output markets (d) land tenure issues (e) irrigated land holding size (as stated in the 1967 TILCOR/ARDA lease contract), and (f) institutional support systems for sustainable farmer-managed irrigation.⁷

Thus, the State placed institutional barriers that obstructed genuine decentralisation whilst the irrigation plot-holders fought for the removal of all institutional barriers to decentralisation to facilitate development. Notably, chiefs who were expected to promote bottom-up democracy were part of the institutional structure manipulated by so-called 'modernisers' and 'community developers' to dominate Gowe-Sanyati development. Far from eliminating deprivation and attacking the social status quo, bottom-up community development projects carried in consultation with the chiefs

7. Sanyati Main Estate, ARDA, Monthly Reports (Various-Years), "ARDA-Sanyati Estate", 15 November 2001, p. 1.

(local leadership) often reinforced white supremacy (Alexander, 2006). In fact, so-called 'modernisers' were usually white officers who invariably served the interests of the State. The hubristic efforts of the 'modernisers' resulted in catastrophic consequences for the African farmers they were designed to benefit. The irrigation plot-holders who were allotted two to four hectares of land each at the establishment of the Gowe Smallholder Irrigation Scheme in 1967 were the biggest losers to the colonial economic development endeavours.

Such an institutional arrangement based on community or communal organisation but presided over by the State, however, least served the Gowe-Sanyati people as they felt there was no democratic consultation of the would-be beneficiaries of the irrigation project, and that both development and decentralisation were often dictated from above, either through selfish TILCOR or Ministry of Internal Affairs officials. This was predictably so because the community development strategy was directly influenced by Apartheid South Africa's twin policies of 'separate development' and land alienation which Sanyati and other affected communal areas detested. The view of the Africans was that coerced development through demonstrators, community development officers and others had the effect of alienating the State from the people.

According to the *Economist* (1964: 273)

at the core of [colonial Zimbabwe's] problems of underdevelopment lies the modernisation of agriculture [but] ... the literature available for serious study of this central problem is still very inadequate and in some measure reflects the relative lack of priority [African] farming has suffered in the elaboration of development strategy.

For Arensberg (1967: 67), "A self-declared felt need ... is better than imposed betterment; enlisting local leadership ..." and that "peasants prove very ready to innovate when they really experience an improvement they can value themselves". Thus, the engagement of TILCOR in the manner the State did between 1968 and 1980 affected production and was often resisted as it tended to create barriers to development. Just like in Tanzania following the 1974-76 resettlement and villagisation programmes (Nyerere, 1968; Lühring, 1974; Samoff, 1979: 163-69; Samoff, 1981: 279-306; Fortmann, 1990), the effects of disruptions on agricultural production caused by *Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA)* evictions in the 1950s from the Rhodesdale Estates,⁸

8. Rhodesdale was a vast ranch owned by the British Multinational Company (MNC), LONRHO. It was land designated as European and Crown Land by the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) of 1930/31. The immediate post-WWII period ushered arguably the three largest waves of "immigrants" into Sanyati, compulsorily removed from Rhodesdale by the Responsible Government in 1950, 1951 and 1953 respectively.

and coerced relocation programmes were numerous although they were often seriously underestimated. For instance, in the aftermath of forced resettlement in Sanyati, production levels were adversely affected for several seasons while the people were preoccupied with re-establishing themselves in a new, but frontier territory (Kinsey, 1982).

Some African growers generally viewed TILCOR (when it was created) as an organisation that was responsible for the underdevelopment of Sanyati due to its adoption of the controversial community development programme. Nevertheless, for the State which implemented the programme in spite of local resistance, Community Development was still closely associated with economic development. This explains why significant State financial and manpower resources were committed towards implementing the decentralisation policy through Estate officials. Officials employed by the Sanyati Estate and other TILCOR estates comprised European overseers, permanent African staff and casual labourers employed at certain times of the year. The deployment of such resources was based on the idea that the decentralisation policy would stimulate economic growth.

Introduced in the 1950s and operated effectively up to the 1970s, decentralisation aimed to transfer power from a central authority to local/grassroots authorities. According to Cheema and Rondinelli (1983: 45) the concept involved the transfer of planning, decision-making or administrative authority from central government to its field organisations, which did not quite materialise in Sanyati except during the time the DC was in charge. The World Bank (2004) states that the most important principle of decentralisation is that the lowest level of government should provide public goods and services. This perspective, nonetheless, concentrates on the technical and administrative aspect of decentralisation at the expense of the political aspect, implying that decentralisation was not only contextual, but understood in different forms and criteria.

In many states decentralisation was motivated by various factors. For Gowe-Sanyati and the North-western quadrant of the country, the policy was spurred by the State's desire to limit peasant accumulation and differentiation. For example, the government planners of the day tended to limit the acreage (access to land) and level of production of individual producers in line with the quality control and technical criteria set by the State. Most irrigation farmers in Sanyati were allocated plot sizes by the State which ranged between two and four hectares (Nyandoro, 2008: 25). The Gowe farmers cultivated small-standardised plots (plots of the same size), a situation synonymous with egalitarian land-holding.

The situation illustrates that the State, through the enforcement of strict racist land-alienation procedures, was reluctant to promote the emergence of a wealthy African class thereby authenticating the claim by a large body

of scholarly work that Africans in settler colonies were deliberately economically marginalised by colonial land policies (Nyandoro, 2008; Cheater, 1975; Alexander, 2006; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Andersson & Green, 2013). Cowen (1976) suggests in another context that the aim of such State measures was to generate the development of an undifferentiated middle peasantry, producing high-grade export crops (cotton in the case of Sanyati and Gezira) under "controlled and increasingly technically advanced methods of production and to avoid the uncontrollable aspects of rich peasant differentiation" (Cowen, 1976: 285-325; Gaitskell, 1959).⁹ Whatever accumulation of wealth that was experienced by the Sanyati peasantry (irrigation-plot-holders) and the rise of commercially-oriented rural Africans, these were unintended consequences of State policy as the farmers used their own initiative to accumulate wealth.

Because development entails the fulfilment of economic and non-economic needs which include expansion of real income and the satiation of non-material needs to foster improvement of the social conditions of life, land alienation deprived Africans of a cherished economic and social good. By virtue of this, decentralised development did not just preclude Sanyati from attaining a reasonable standard of economic growth, but also denied the frontier region growth plus social, cultural and institutional change. This attests to the fact that the settler regime was not inclined towards ushering genuine development for the Africans within the context of an economically sound decentralisation policy. Overall, development was State-directed as the central government was clearly dominant and sub-national authorities were merely agents of its will. In essence, state-controlled development flew into the face of the Sanyati peasantry who, in the irrigation sector, demanded that power be transferred to autonomous units governed independently and separately without the direct control of the central government. In short, Africans were clamouring for more genuine decentralisation than the government was willing to give. In the irrigation sector such a system is known as irrigation management transfer, often taken by Fleurke and Willemse (2004: 523-544) to be a form of decentralisation, which bestows significant farmer participation.

The local farmers concurred. Their argument was also in conformity with development theories¹⁰ which advocate that the management of change requires full participation from those affected by the change. When people are allowed to participate in development-initiatives they are likely to modify

^{9.} This form of development of commodity production was preferred by international capital, yet obstructing any tendencies towards formation of an autonomous national bourgeoisie.

^{10.} These are theories which challenge modernisation development theories.

their behaviour and carry out decisions they have helped make (Pieterse, 2001: chp 1; Fleurke & Willemse, 2004). Individuals take ownership of the decisions that have a direct impact on their day-to-day activities, and this promotes sustainable development. For WWAP/UNESCO (2003: 278), in development, key aspects of sustainability include the empowerment of local people, self-reliance and social justice. One way of incorporating these principles into decentralisation discourse and real-life management is to move away from conventional forms of governance which have usually been dominated by top-down approaches and professional experts in the government (politicised development) and move towards the bottom-up approach, which combines the experience, knowledge and understanding of various local groups and people. The latter would be analogous to genuine decentralisation. Sanyati, thus, preferred a depoliticised type of decentralisation and a TILCOR that was less top-heavy as evidenced by the voices of the people, who arguably were the beneficiaries of the decentralisation policy.

Outgrower sentiment against TILCOR and its institutional framework was strong as the Corporation revealed racist tendencies and an obvious reluctance to allow decentralisation to develop based on popular local demands. The organisation allowed itself to be dominated by whites. TILCOR was accused of being top-heavy from a managerial point of view as it failed to integrate the people (the grassroots) without whom decentralisation essentially became meaningless. According to some of the pioneering members of the Gowe Irrigation Scheme, Norman Savata Gwacha (1997), former Gowe plot-holder and Secretary of the Gowe Irrigation Co-operative, and E. Munengami (1997) who joined the scheme in 1967 and 1968 respectively, a white DC had been tasked by TILCOR and the Ministry of Internal Affairs to "fully operate the scheme on behalf of the Gowe irrigation tenants".¹¹ The sentiments expressed by these early 'settlers' have been confirmed by primary literature. Writing to the DC-Gatooma on behalf of the Provincial Water Engineer, K. F. Solberg stated that Gowe was intended to be a training pilot scheme "for the local inhabitants", yet "an experimental scheme for a larger project" as "the promotion of future development in the area" (DC's File: Gowe Irrigation Scheme, Plans, 9 November 1966, p. 1.) based on a larger irrigation estate was envisaged.¹²

From the onset, the need to involve local participants in the scheme was acknowledged, but it was mixed with the realism that communal land was

11. Interviews with Norman Savata Gwacha, Communal Farmer and Former Secretary of Gowe Co-operative Society, Sanyati, 8 January 1997; E. Munengami, Gowe Plotholder, Gowe, 8 January 1997.

12. NAZ (RC), 158098, C19.10.7R, DC's File: Gowe Irrigation Scheme, Plans, 9 November 1966, p. 1.

State land. Despite Sanyati paramount chiefs Neuso and Wozhele, having approved the Gowe Scheme, they preferred plots that were allocated on an individual basis. This did not materialise as the designated irrigated land was owned by the government and, therefore, had to be held on a yearly lease-holding system (TILCOR lease agreement) since 1967 (Westcott, 1997).¹³ The system denied the smallholder irrigators permanence of tenure. The farmers used this to question the genuineness of the decentralisation process, a situation which was exacerbated by TILCOR's white orientation. Several TILCOR reports testify to this as they reveal that the organisation's Board of Directors, with no notable exceptions, comprised white settler representatives, known in local parlance as 'varungu' (Europeans), in the name of W. A. Bailey (Chairman), W. H. H. Nicolle, W. A. Pittman, J. A. M. Smith and W. D. Walker among others.¹⁴

A TILCOR *Development Magazine* (1977) in a section headed: "... The men behind the scenes", refers to TILCOR's white-only executives as Ron Cox (Group business manager), Arthur Davies (Group systems manager), Hugh Gaitskell (Group accountant), Mick Green (Group irrigation engineer), Hamish Harvey (Executive secretary and executive committee member), Don Norris (Public relations officer), Errol Tillet (Development or projects executive), Pat Hawkins (Planning executive), Fred Ridler (Finance executive), Ron van Zyl (TILCOR's buyer), Ken Hopkins (Group development engineer), Terry Sullivan (TILCOR's group secretary) and John Wright, Group agriculturalist.¹⁵ In spite of the rhetoric of decentralised development, these managerial bureaucrats hardly ever consulted the Gowe-Sanyati community on project implementation plans. By their own admission, TILCOR in 1977 had "to increase efficiency on all existing projects, to bring new schemes into viable production and to make a determined effort to 'force' the pace of urban development wherever possible" (Ibid). For Gwacha (a former Gowe irrigation farmer) and like-minded outgrowers, forced decentralisation was not, therefore, the best way to unpack development. In their view, decision-making processes and the TILCOR Executive Board itself needed to be decentralised (Gwacha, 1997; Munengami, 1997),¹⁶ and they were right.

This scepticism was one of the signs that decentralisation was often talked about in State corridors of power and in official debates, but was

13. Response to Questionnaire, Westcott to Nyandoro, 6 May 1997.

14. NAZ (RC), 158089, C19.6.8R, LAN 9 TTLs General, Sanyati, "Minutes of 45th Meeting", 20 October 1972", p. 1; TILCOR. (1968-1979) *Annual Reports*. See also ADA/ARDA, *Annual Reports* (1972-86).

15. See also NAZ (RC), 158089, C19.6.8R, LAN 9 TTLs General, Sanyati, 9 May 1973; Parliament of Zimbabwe, hereafter referred to as POZ, Box FR 2126-2136, File: FR 2134/46952, TILCOR, p. 22.

16. Interviews with Gwacha; Munengami.

rarely practised through consulting the beneficiaries of that development. Regrettably, the government of Rhodesia had not learnt this important lesson by the end of the 1970s. It merely believed that a State or TILCOR-oriented decentralisation programme was sufficient to encourage economic growth in the rural areas. Specifically, in adopting the decentralisation strategy, the government was driven by two related but selfish objectives. On the one hand, it was impelled by the desire to promote, *inter alia*, the production of surplus food crops (principally wheat, tea, maize and sometimes sugar beans) for the market, and later cash-crops especially cotton to support Britain's Lancashire textile industries. On the other hand, the need to create additional internal markets to expand the economic opportunities of the rural areas was paramount in allaying rural-urban drift.

The general argument on the part of Government was that colonial Zimbabwe was facing a "socio-political-human problem" largely wrought by what the settler government feared was a massive rural-urban drift.¹⁷ The drift was believed to offset the peace and security of the country as an increasing army of the unemployed and frustrated Africans was seen as potentially troublesome. In the colonial government's view, for the maintenance of domestic peace and stability, it was essential to create some form of employment for the thousands of unemployed Africans flocking to the towns.¹⁸ The Secretary for Internal Affairs, W. H. H. Nicolle, felt that, whilst industry was making a valiant effort to absorb them, it was not growing fast enough to absorb all the African job-seekers. Thus, it was incumbent on his Ministry to place or keep as many Africans as possible on the land, with the assurance that they would annually reap an abundance of food with a surplus, depending on their own industry, for sale.¹⁹ This could only be achieved through the development of efficiently run irrigation schemes wherever both water and land (the two most contentious issues in the history of Zimbabwe) suitable for this purpose were available, and through their settlement on a subsistence and cash farming basis. This was

17. NAZ (RC), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Box 100817, Location 3.13.8F, File: AGR/16 Irrigation Schemes Individual 351-420 (January 1967 - February 1968), Noel Robertson (Deputy Secretary - Ministry of Internal Affairs) to W. H. H. Nicolle, 6th March, 1967, p. 1.

18. NAZ (RC), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Box 100817, Location 3.13.8F, File: AGR/16 Irrigation Schemes Individual 351-420 (January 1967 - February 1968), Noel Robertson (Deputy Secretary - Ministry of Internal Affairs) to W. H. H. Nicolle, 6th March, 1967, p. 1.

19. NAZ (RC), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Box 100817, Location 3.13.8F, File: AGR/16/GEN/387 Tribal Trust Land Act, "Tribal Trust Land (Control of Irrigation Schemes) Regulations 1967 (May 1967 - June 1967)," W. H. H. Nicolle's Circular No.178 to all PCs, DCs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Water Development and Treasury, 13th June, 1967, p. 1.

why the concept of decentralisation alongside a State Corporation (TILCOR) to oversee the planned rural-growth with irrigation as an important element in a drought-stricken area was adopted. Decentralisation as a solution was thus proposed to bring economic development to the rural areas (far-flung regions) of colonial Zimbabwe. The adoption of the policy in the country dates back to the mid-1950s, but its active implementation began in the 1960s. The period from the 1950s to the 1960s, therefore, marks the beginning of serious debate about decentralisation.

TILCOR-Sanyati: Decentralisation Policy in Perspective

The decentralisation strategy in Zimbabwe which was suggested in response to the problems besetting the country can be put in a historical and internationalist development perspective. The inspiration for community development, decentralisation projects and the fight against poverty is not simply the product of domestic initiatives, but it is shaped by the nature and outcomes of programmes in several developing nations in the world beyond Zimbabwe and the Sanyati micro-study. Decentralisation predated the two TILCOR-Sanyati irrigation projects (Gowe and the Main Estate). In May 1962 a policy of active decentralisation, known as Community Development, was adopted in Rhodesia. This was a carbon copy of the 1960 policy of decentralisation initiated by the Permanent Committee for the Decentralisation of Industry (later named the Board for the Decentralisation of Industries) in South Africa. The Government of the Republic argued that, whereas decentralisation first centred on the borders of then 'Bantu Homelands/Bantustans' (black settlement areas); consideration was also given to industrial development within these areas.

In Rhodesia, Community Development, which has often been equated to economic development, was adopted as a major instrument for rural development. As in South Africa, it aimed to bring development within African areas and reduce concentrating development-effort outside them. An increasing need was seen to shift emphasis from central government control of development in the communal areas to 'development from below', which entailed involvement of the local communities in their own development. Although the term 'Community Development' was first formally defined at the 1948 Cambridge Conference on African Administration, attempts at decentralisation in Southern Rhodesia can be traced back to the 1950s. In 1956, for instance, the settler government made initial attempts to address the issue of spatial polarisation of economic development which was increasingly creating political pressures and unrest from both settler communities living away from the major centres as well as urban-based African nationalists and their African clientele in the rural areas (Tapela, 1985: 8).

In the year 1956, a Select Committee to report on decentralisation was appointed but its recommendations were largely ignored. Two years later, a second committee was nominated which recommended that a wider distribution of industry and urban-growth was not only desirable but essential to the future welfare of Rhodesia as a whole. These recommendations were largely frustrated by the political and administrative complexities of the federal structure to which Southern Rhodesia belonged. Thus, little progress was achieved with regard to implementation.

A third Select Committee was then set up to inquire into, and report on ways and means of implementing decentralisation in Rhodesia. It submitted its findings in 1972 but, for the third time, no action was taken. Although this protracted inaction on the part of the settler governments since the 1950s regarding the decentralisation policy was part of a more general problem characteristic of the policy formulation-implementation discourse, two specific practical causes of this quiescence are evident. Firstly, in 1974 the UDI government's ideas on decentralisation were elaborated in the *White Paper* titled *Policy on Decentralisation* (1974). This paper defined decentralisation as "the economic development of growth-points outside the major cities with particular reference to commercial and industrial activities" (Ibid). TILCOR growth-points were, thus, equated to 'development nodes' in the vast rural areas of the country. The development nodes were to form the catalyst for development as self-sustaining centres of economic activity, creating both jobs and wealth in the rural areas. Most of these nodes were agricultural in nature, the exception being "Seki" (Seke) in Chitungwiza (a satellite town of Harare) which was an industrial node located near the capital city, then known as Salisbury (*Rhodesia Calls*, 1976).

The internal inconsistencies within the policy paper and its disregard for the recommendations of the previous select committees were the major causes of the delay in implementing decentralisation. Secondly, there were no positive measures and clear guidelines for implementing such a policy. This was exacerbated by a slow-down in real-growth in the economy in the 1970s due to the escalation, during UDI, of the national liberation war (Second Chimurenga, 1966-1979). Furthermore, internationally-imposed sanctions also led to the drying up of all external funding. As with all infrastructure development, TILCOR was funded by the Government from a very modest taxpayer-base built on individual as well as company and mining taxes. The liberation struggle intensified markedly between 1972 and 1979. For Robbie Mupawose, the first black TILCOR General Manager after independence, "The whole [agricultural] setup got caught up in the war situation" (Mupawose interview, 2006).²⁰

20. Interview with Robbie Mupawose, Former TILCOR General Manager and Former Secretary, Lands, Agriculture and Resettlement, Harare, 19 October 2006.

The wartime hardships experienced by smallholder irrigation in Sanyati were reflected through the operational performance of Gowe between 1970 and 1979 amid efforts by the Government to implement decentralised growth. Despite the hardships, the 1970s were officially viewed as successful years. In 1970, members of parliament, after “noticing the success” of many smallholder-schemes, started to urge the government to pursue “with vigour and on a wider front” (*Rhodesia Parliamentary Debates*, 1970: 932), the establishment of irrigation schemes for the inhabitants of the poor rainfall areas. Gowe, in particular, was regarded as having huge potential and had to be given high priority for 1970 because the scheme was perceived to be producing excellent results.²¹ Its net-profits varied among plot-holders from ZW\$119.00 to ZW\$493.00 depending on labour-input.²²

The commonest form of labour was household-based. A small group of relatively well-to-do (‘resource-rich’) plot-holders used the traditional voluntary work-group (*humwe*) if they could not do all the work with the labour of their family. This group often preferred to work the land of richer plot-holding irrigation entrepreneurs because they provided ample food and drink to the workers. Agricultural success was measured on the basis of income derived and yields realised from the three major crops grown at the irrigation scheme, namely maize, wheat and cotton. The income from green maize, for example, was ZW\$10.00 per bag. Maize yields varied between 16,5 and 45,5 bags per acre, wheat between 15 and 21,5 and cotton between 1, 094 and 3, 167 lbs (*Ibid*). These results encouraged the settler-government to hold Gowe up as a “self-provisioning asset” in drought-stricken Sanyati (*Ibid*). However, the State was possibly employing new rhetoric to pre-empt the escalating war.

In spite of these official pronouncements, Gowe-Sanyati irrigation plot-holders received a raw deal. In discussions leading to the promulgation of the *ADA Act* (1971), the government saw ADA as an agency that carried out its functions in the national interest. However, it was clear that by 1972 the plot-holders hardly afforded their own agricultural machinery. They continued to hire Agricultural Development Fund or African Development Fund (ADF) ploughs and sometimes they got these on loan from Modern Farm Equipment, Gatooma²³. The plot-holders paid the usual land-preparation fee of ZW\$15.00. Although a few better off small-scale irrigators did not struggle to meet their own production costs, such charges reduced

21. NAZ (RC), 153673, C36.18.2F, AGR/16/A/15 Vol. 1, Gowe Irrigation Scheme, August 1965-December 1969.

22. NAZ (RC), 153673, C36.18.2F, AGR/16/A/15 Vol. II, Gowe Irrigation Scheme, “Preliminary Project Report”, 1976, p. 7.

23. NAZ (RC), 153673, C36.18.2F, AGR/16/A/15 Vol. II, Gowe Irrigation Scheme, 5 December 1972/73, p. 2.

their potential net-income. Table 1 illustrates how high the cost of wheat production per plot was in 1973.

Table 1: Cost of Production — Wheat (1973)

Cost of Production (Wheat)	
Expenditure	Zw\$
Soil Preparation	15.00
Fertilisers "D" and "AN"	22.60
Tokwe Seed	13.25
Combining	11.25
Transport of fertilisers	4.30
Transport of wheat at 50c per bag	16.50
33 sacks at 31c each	10.23
Water Rates	21.00
Total Cost of Production	114.13
RECEIPTS: Average yield 33 bags at \$6.40 each	211.20
Less cost of production	114.13
Estimated profit per plot	97.07

Source: NAZ (RC), 153673, C36.18.2F, AGR/16/A/15 Vol. II, Gowe Irrigation Scheme, 1973, p. 2.

The Agricultural Officer, A. R. Harvey, stated that in 1973 the Gowe plot-holders produced a total of 1, 198 bags of wheat from 63 acres. The average yield per acre of 19 bags was regarded by Harvey as "the best ever achieved at Gowe" (Ibid). However, the so-called wonderful yields were not matched by the net-profits that accrued to the farmers, which were estimated at ZW\$97.07 per plot. The relatively huge cost of production siphoned off and limited the plot-holders' potential profit-margin. Some of the plot-holders' accumulation prospects were seriously hampered by circumstances beyond their control. For instance, small plots and the lack of agricultural finance for inputs and other services. Therefore, Gowe was hardly a 'self-provisioning' scheme as the cost of production on each irrigation plot was quite heavy especially for the less-to-do ('resource-poor') plot-holders.

The plight of the farmers was worsened since 1972 when the policy of giving loans for seed and fertiliser to "all and sundry" was drastically curtailed.²⁴ In response to what the Secretary for Internal Affairs felt (without giving figures) were unsatisfactory yields for the 1971/72 season as a result

²⁴ NAZ, Rhodesia: Departmental Reports: "Report of Secretary for Internal Affairs for 1972", 1973, p. 15.

of the alleged poor standard of some farmers occupying the irrigation plots, it was declared that each Gowe farmer was "now expected to pay for his requirements" (Ibid). Very strong sentiments were expressed that the Department of Internal Affairs needed to be more selective in future and to thoroughly assess the farmers' ability before they were given full-sized plots to cultivate. The Secretary of the Department went further to justify his decision against giving loans to farmers who were not delivering when he asserted: "It is apparent that the farmer who has invested his own money in a crop achieves a much higher standard than one who has obtained a loan to purchase his seed and fertiliser requirements" (Ibid).

Whilst there was a measure of truth in this assertion, the Secretary seemed to have overlooked the debilitating effects of the severe drought experienced in the 1972/73 season on the farmers' performance. Equally ignored was the fact that the setting up of an irrigation holding called for a high level of capital investment by the 'settlers' which, without irrigation subsidies, was beyond the capacity of many. This, coupled with the curtailment of loans for seed and fertiliser, led many farmers to leave the Gowe Irrigation Scheme for dry-land holdings or out rightly opted to purchase land in the renowned cotton growing small-scale commercial farming areas, formerly Native Purchase Areas (NPAs) or African Purchase Lands (APLs), of Chenjiri and Copper Queen²⁵ in the Gatooma and Gokwe Districts (Gokwe Agricultural Officer's Report (1973).

The farmers found themselves in an invidious position as they were hardly allowed to partake in the national cake. A lot of emphasis was placed on smallholder-irrigation as a means of promoting socio-economic development in arid areas. Although output increased in certain cases, this was achieved at the expense of economic efficiency and organisational sustainability. The main reason for Gowe's partial success can be attributed to deliberate over-emphasis on centralised bureaucratic planning and management of schemes, with insufficient attention being paid to the participation of farmers and other stakeholders in enterprise development.²⁶

^{25.} Chenjiri and Copper Queen were renowned cotton growing regions in Northwestern Zimbabwe.

^{26.} Whilst community participation is crucial for achieving sustainable development, it does not occur unless a conscious effort is made to ensure that the intended beneficiaries are empowered to make their own decisions and are allowed to take risks. The intended beneficiaries are not always willing to make independent decisions and take risks unless there are benefits and opportunities to be had. Potential net benefits and opportunities must be demonstrated, where possible, by the development agents concerned or the government. On the merits and demerits of community participation in development and irrigation as an instrument of sustainable development in developing areas, see J. A., Thomas and W. J. Stilwell (1993) *Proceedings of the International Workshop on Smallholder Irrigation: Community Participation and Sustainable Development*, pp. 1-89.

What then were termed 'national interests' by the Government were, in fact, white-settler interests.

Instead of bringing considerable benefit to the inhabitants of Gowe, settler agricultural-policies, therefore, impacted negatively on the economy of this area as a whole (*ADA Annual Report*, 1973: 8). The situation was not ameliorated by the tense security position as a result of the war and the 1972/73 drought (*ADA Annual Report*, 1974: 7). During the war the former Prime Minister of Rhodesia, Ian Douglas Smith, tried to appease Africans who had been disgruntled by being forcibly moved to infertile pieces of land by both the *NLHA* of 1950-1951 and the *Land Tenure Act* (1969) by setting up more irrigation projects in their areas (Pazvakavambwa, 1997; 2004).²⁷ This is why the TILCOR-Sanyati Estate was established by the government. The Sanyati scheme was followed by the creation of several other rural ventures including a few urban ones such as the Seke Industrial Projects. These developments did not, however, either stop the war or completely halt the process of rural differentiation but they definitely slowed it down. The Sanyati Scheme continued to operate in an economy that was clearly under siege from two standpoints of national magnitude, namely sanctions and the war. Thus, a number of factors forced the government to decide to create the Main Estate (1974) and implement the growth-point concept to advance decentralisation.

The vagaries of the war-economy watered down or neutralised necessary political pressures coming from white representatives from the smaller and distant centres who formed the core of the most vocal and powerful advocacy for decentralisation. From 1974 to 1978, little had been accomplished regarding the implementation of decentralisation. It remained a mere debate. This state was not surprising because the legal and administrative foundations, as well as the promotional aspects of urban-decentralisation, were still inadequate at that time. It is doubtful whether there was enough political pressure or will from the white settlers to facilitate the location of economic activities at less-favoured points or, worse still, in the communal areas.

In the end, the overall effect of the *White Paper*, the Select Committees that preceded it and subsequent legislation meant that the implementation of decentralised urban-development between the 1950s and the mid-1970s remained effectively limited to European areas. The policy was only spread to the communal areas when TILCOR started promoting irrigation-based growth-points in such areas. Thus, for the greater part of the colonial period, decentralisation was confined to mere debates and there was very little formal implementation, especially in frontier localities such as Sanyati.

²⁷ NAZ (RC), 158098, C19.10.7R, DC's File: Gowe Irrigation Scheme; Financial Plans, Water Reports, 1970, p.176; Interview with Pazvakavambwa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by documenting and analysing colonial agrarian history and the innuendoes of TILCOR decentralised development, this article contributes new insights towards resolving current economic development problems and understanding of familiar issues/material in the field of agro-economic studies. The article demonstrates that the Gowe-Sanyati case study gives important insights regarding how marginalised rural folk can be included into mainstream economy (inclusive growth). The colonial agrarian history of Sanyati before 1979 was characterised by allusions to decentralisation which were only firmly, but not consistently pursued until the advent of TILCOR as a government-sponsored urban and rural development agency in 1968. Whatever discussion on decentralisation existed in this period, therefore, was relegated to mere innuendoes about the process. Nevertheless, the old challenges of yesteryear (the colonial era) concerning secure land tenure for rural farmers still haunts us today, illustrating that those who forget their past are doomed to repeat their mistakes. How far the decentralisation debate and policy was pursued after 1979, going into independence in 1980, is a subject of further research.

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