

Successes and Failures of Rural Social Development: the SADCC Region with Special Reference to Agriculture *

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ABSTRACT

The importance of agriculture for the overall socio-economic development of the countries of the SADCC region has been recognised and the problems in this area are now being addressed. This paper takes a general look at the relationship between social development and agricultural development in the region, focusing particularly on 1) the problems faced by the agricultural sector in Africa and 2) on agriculture and development in Tanzania. The paper argues that agricultural development is a basic pre-requisite for the raising of standards of living and quality of life in the region but has that it has not, up to the formation of SADCC, received sufficient attention in terms of individual, joint and collective action possibilities.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that in the countries of the third world, a large proportion of the population suffers from malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and general deprivation. Likewise, a people's standard of living and their material well-being in general depends largely on the goods and services that they have managed to produce at a given time. In other words, questions of standards of living must be viewed against the background of increased production of income, in the form of goods and services, together with its distribution within individual countries.

As far as the SADCC region is concerned, however, questions of socio-economic development have to be primarily considered within the framework of agriculture, which provides a living for more than 60 percent of the population and constitutes the basis of the economies of all member states. Yet, agricultural production, not only in the region but also elsewhere in Africa, faces a host of problems which render the region generally incapable of

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feeding itself. The objective of economic activity, at least in many developing countries, is that it should be accompanied by an equitable distribution of income with the poorer sections of the population, notably the rural population, being provided with relevant social services. With the dismal performance of the agricultural sector, however, it would mean that there is not much income to redistribute, nor an economic base strong enough to sustain, let alone expand the social infrastructure.

Nevertheless it has been stated, by politicians and development economists alike, that development planning in Africa should accord priority to rural development programmes. This is necessary because the majority of the population reside in the rural areas and that opportunities for formal education, health care, gainful employment and personal development should be available to them. No one could possibly dispute this view especially considering the importance of the agricultural production to farmers.

Good intentions by governments notwithstanding, the rural areas of the SADCC region have invariably not experienced any dramatic improvements in living standards over the past decade. With economic growth generally lagging behind population growth, and food production on the decline, any achievements already gained in the area of social development could well be in jeopardy.

Social development in perspective:

Social development could be conceptualised as that dimension of development which considers man as the ultimate purpose of all development, and thus provides for the realisation of his worthiness through the attainment of the highest possible standards of living. In discussing standards of living, cognisance is normally taken of the fact that increased output, and even increased monetary income, do not automatically mean a better standard of living in terms of material wellbeing, better nutrition, housing, education, physical and mental health, leisure and social integration.

A country could therefore be said to have registered progress in social development to the extent that a greater percentage of its population has access to essential services, such as health, education, housing, clean water, transport, etc. These services, of course, are over and above the satisfaction of such basic needs as food and clothing. The extent to which the majority of the population are gainfully employed and therefore have a source of income is another aspect of social development.

It is therefore apparent that social development can only be pursued and achieved within the framework of the political and economic set-up of individual countries. It is the economic policies of the state which determine

such things as the level of investment in the development of social infrastructure, priority in rural development, income redistribution, and so on. Of course, the resources available to the government, particularly the government of a developing country, are limited, and the opportunity cost of any proposed service must be kept in mind when choosing between social services and economic services.

It seems clear that it is within the realm of rural development that social development can best be visualised. Selassie (1982) correctly observed that "the health status of the rural population is low. Scarcity of safe water supply for drinking and for sanitary purposes, poor nutrition, lack of knowledge of preventive health measures, the frequently epidemic proportions assumed by such debilitating and killer diseases such as malaria, sleeping sickness, and infectious diseases undoubtedly reduce the productive capacity of the rural work force. Since lower productivity means lower income, rural communities do not have the means for improving social conditions." Rural developments has on the other hand been described as involving changes aimed at the enhancement of the quality of life of the people who live in a village. It is through rural development programmes that various African countries have been able to attain a sizeable socio-economic change in the countryside. Subscribing invariably to the ideals of agrarian reform, government efforts to provide various social services and to stimulate increased production have been augmented by people's own efforts, with relevant organisation and mobilisation at the local level.

An appropriate political atmosphere has in many cases been instrumental in promoting initiative at the local level, and in harnessing the potential human and material resources at this level towards social development in terms of building schools, dispensaries, community centres, road construction, etc, in the spirit of self-reliance. Nyerere (1979) has correctly argued that "rural development is a matter of investment and technology. But it is also a matter of politics. . ." For if development is to be in the people's interests, they must possess both political and economic power within the village, in the region, and in the nation. The point is that at every stage of development people are aware of what their basic needs are, and if they have sufficient freedom they can be relied upon to determine their own priorities of development and work for them.

Social development must be seen as constituting general improvements in social awareness and wellbeing for the whole population. But increased output should lead, not only to improved standards of living, but also to more savings and more productive investment.

This would mean that social development policies should go alongside economic policies, and that collective rather than individual goals should be

accorded priority. Rural development should be seen as the vehicle for attaining the objectives of social development.

The state of agriculture in the SADCC region

Africa has been singled out as the only continent in the world with a decline in per capita food production during the past two decades. The continent has, therefore, had to resort to massive importation of food, supplemented by food aid. Meanwhile, the SADCC region, with its combined population of 60 million is struggling to develop a coherent, positive approach to the region's long term agricultural problems which include persistent food shortages. It has been pointed out that declining food production means that SADCC countries are progressively less able to feed themselves. With the regions population expected to reach 100 million in the year 2000, without a turnabout in the agricultural situation many people will suffer from hunger.

The kind of problems besetting agricultural development in the SADCC countries are similar to those being experienced elsewhere on the continent. Besides such factors as vagaries of weather, including drought, desertification, floods, cyclones etc, there is also the susceptibility to externally determined price fluctuations of primary commodities produced in these countries. Considering that agricultural exports are the prime source of foreign exchange earnings for most of the region (with the exception of Angola, Botswana and Zambia) it is no wonder that the economies of these countries are seriously affected by every sharp fluctuation in the international market prices for their agricultural commodities.

In any case, the recession experienced by the industrial countries in recent years has considerably reduced the demand for primary products. It is also a reality within individual countries in the region, that the collection, distribution, storage and marketing of agricultural output has, by and large, been made difficult by the fragile physical infrastructures obtaining in the countryside.

Furthermore, African governments have, over the years, been blamed for apparently pursuing domestic policies which were biased in favour of cash/export crops in terms of research, extension services, credit and input supplies and marketing services, thus perpetuating the regions food problems.

Urban bias has, according to Tony Killick (1985) been marked by net outflows of resources from the rural economy, by insufficient price incentives, by weak supporting services in the provision of inputs and training, and by inadequate research efforts.

Associated with urban development bias and food production is of course the question of rural-urban migration, whereby rural agricultural workers flock

into urban areas in search of wage labour. Since it is young men in particular who drift to towns, there is often a serious labour shortage at critical farming periods, with the ageing population left on the land failing to cope with land preparation, weeding, harvesting and so on. In fact labour shortages at critical crop periods have been cited, along with poor soils, lack of improved seeds and crop losses due to pests and diseases, as one of the technical stumbling blocks common to the SADCC region. The SADCC member states have also acknowledged the fact that many of the institutions created to develop agriculture are costly, ineffective and fail to address the real problems of the rural poor. More stress is therefore presently being put on agricultural research, rural extension which really reaches smallholder food producers in the countryside, incentives to farmers, changes in the internal marketing of agricultural produce and better administration of rural programmes. There is, in other words, an increased recognition of the considerable potential of small farmers' contribution towards increased production, and a corresponding increase in the assistance given to them in order to create conditions in which they can increase their productivity. Such impressive policies and programmes have, however, been weakened by other extraneous factors, including drought which has in recent years plagued most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It has been pointed out, for example, that Mozambique has experienced almost total losses of food cereals in some regions, with 100 000 cattle deaths and 238 000 tons of cereals lost in 1984, aside from the tremendous loss of human life.

Mention must however be made of the effects of South Africa's campaign of military and economic destabilisation on Angola, Botswana, Mozambique and Lesotho. In these countries, South African raids have often prevented the cultivation of crops in the countryside. Bandits and reactionary groups have done enormous damage to the transport system through the destruction of railway lines, bridges etc. Consequently the SADCC states have had to divert more and more of their meagre resources towards additional military expenditure in order to contain these acts of aggression. This state of affairs has undermined efforts towards increased agricultural productivity and therefore worsened the economic situation prevailing in the region.

SADCC is, however, presently concerned with the development of a coherent, positive approach to the regions long term agricultural problems, with the following objectives:

- (a) To satisfy the whole populations basic need for food, and then progressively improve the food supply;
- (b) To achieve national self sufficiency in food, freeing the region from the constraints of dependence and
- (c) To eliminate the periodic food crises which cause suffering and reinforce dependence and underdevelopment.

Furthermore, it is now a policy among SADCC member states that any new agricultural infrastructure has to be linked to the other stages of production and marketing which form the food chain.

Implications for social development

Poverty has been identified as the basic socio-economic problem in Africa, and especially in rural Africa. Income per capita is generally very low, primarily because productivity is low. As already mentioned earlier, social development entails the expansion and maintenance of the social infrastructure, apart from increased incomes. As far as the rural scene is concerned, increased incomes, and therefore increased productivity which form the basis for improving living standards, depends solely on agricultural development.

Yet the state of agriculture as outlined above portrays a somewhat bleak picture. It has been observed for instance that living standards have during the past decade generally been on the decline in the rural areas, in countries such as Zambia, Lesotho, Tanzania and Mozambique. This is understandable, considering that food and cash crop production has been on the decline and this means that, coupled with the usual drudgeries of rural life, individual families have not been able to look beyond the concern for day to day survival.

In the same way falling productivity has meant that individual governments have been unable to maintain a certain level of service expenditure in the face of increased population. In other words public spending has not increased in congruence with the increasing demand for social services. At best, countries like Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia have hardly been able to sustain the existing social infrastructure. The existence of dispensaries without bandages and essential tablets such as aspirin, schools without notebooks and desks (pupils have to sit on the floor or on bricks) are cases in point, demonstrating a government's good intentions but lack of resources.

The net result of limited public spending has been a general deterioration in the delivery of social services, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Governments have occasionally called on voluntary agencies to assist them by undertaking to build schools, hospital, etc, and for the public to be organised and mobilised to engage in such self-help activities.

The decline in productivity has not been confined to agriculture. The local consumer industries have been experiencing problems of shortages of raw materials, spare parts, etc, forcing them to operate at far less than 50 percent capacity in some cases. This has in turn meant a severe shortage, particularly in the rural areas, of such basic consumer items as sugar, kerosine, soap, matchboxes, and blankets. In Tanzania, for example, peasants who have been

saving for years with the intention of constructing modest brick houses have been unable to realise their lifelong ambition because essential materials such as cement and iron roofing sheets are hard to come by, except perhaps on the black market where the prices are exorbitant. When these facts are viewed together with spiralling inflation it becomes quite apparent that real incomes for everyone, but perhaps more so for the rural population, have fallen substantially, thus pushing down the standard of living in general terms.

It is therefore quite convenient for one to conclude that social development is really, in the final analysis, an offshoot of economic development. Social development is about people and their social and material wellbeing. Without any sound economic basis, social development would remain an obscure ideal. The development of agriculture at least in the Sub-Saharan region is definitely a *sine qua non* for social development in the rural areas.

Mention should, however, be made of the fact that some considerable strides have been made towards improving the quality of life in the rural areas. With the dawn of independence from colonialism, most African countries embarked on deliberate policies aimed at tackling the problem of rural poverty and moving away from conditions of underdevelopment. Both individually and collectively member states of SADCC have registered significant progress in such aspects of social development as community development, rural consumer cooperatives, self-help schemes, land reform and resettlement schemes, adult education, public sanitation, nutrition projects, primary health care and immunisation projects, etc. It would obviously be difficult to catalogue all these broad achievements for individual countries, but suffice it to say that political independence did provide the basis for individuals, groups and communities to realise some "personal" growth within the existing social organisation at the local level.

In bringing about these achievements government efforts have often been augmented by those of the people themselves, organised and mobilised at the local level through self-help schemes. Voluntary agencies initiated various rural development projects, while religious organisations in particular have made a tremendous contribution in the fields of education and health. Likewise UN agencies and other international development organisations have also continued to finance selected rural development projects in the countryside. It is encouraging, however, to note that practically all the countries in the SADCC region have expressed the commitment to raise the standards of living of their people, and to pursue broad egalitarian policies designed to achieve that objective. This further underlines the significance of rural development, for as Nyerere (1977) has put it, "rural development must be a description of the whole strategy of growth—the approach to development, and the prism through which all policies are seen judged and given priority."

Agriculture and social development in Tanzania

Any serious discussions on Tanzania's post independence development policies in general and rural transformation in particular has to centre around the Arusha Declaration of 1967, and the subsequent policy of socialism and self-reliance (Ujamaa). The declaration provided a new blueprint for the country's socio-economic and political development along socialist lines, pledging among other things, to put a decided emphasis on agriculture.

Since then, the government has launched various campaigns geared towards increasing agricultural production. To date, one could say that whatever we call success in Tanzania is largely a success created by the peasants of Tanzania. They have been doing the producing which underlines the advances in education, health, the building of factories and the establishment of a viable transport system. And yet, as Nyerere (1977) observes, "although it is agriculture which is basically responsible for all the successes on which we pride ourselves we have not been developing agriculture itself, and now it cannot bear the load we have put on to it".

Tanzania boasts of tremendous potential in agriculture but unscientific agricultural methods, coupled with the vagaries of weather and attendant problems, has militated against an increased agricultural production. Peasants still use hand-hoes and possess little knowledge and skills of modern farming techniques. Furthermore procurement of enough fertilizer, seeds and godowns to store harvests are questions that have proved difficult to solve. These have seriously impeded agricultural production and left the nation struggling for more dependable foreign exchange reserves. In particular the poor performance of the agricultural sector in the 1970s was attributed to low producer prices, poor credit facilities, an inefficient marketing system, an unfavourable land tenure system, poor soil and water conservation, lack of skilled manpower, low investment, inadequate research and extension services and poor marketing infrastructure.

It was perhaps the realisation on the part of the party and the government that traditional agricultural methods could not, without change, provide the kind of increased output needed to sustain the present level of development, that prompted the formulation of a New Agricultural Policy in 1983. The policy aims at "raising the welfare of the peasant through the elimination of factors militating against the growth of the country's agricultural sector." This had to be so necessarily, because experience has shown that the objective of developing the peasants collectively has not been achieved so far. It was noted, however, that while good leadership at village level is called for, it is people's participation in decision making from project installation to project implementation that determines the failure or success of village agricultural projects.

Experience shows that villagers do not play a significant role in formulating and preparing village plans. With the agricultural policy, therefore, a guarantee has been made for the participation of the majority of villagers in agricultural development so as to enhance the capacity of the rural sector increasingly to absorb the incremental labour force resulting from population growth, and make the villagers themselves accountable and responsible for their economic and social welfare.

The policy is also meant to assist peasants in reducing some of the risks they face, natural and artificial. Some of these risks are:

- (i) Exposure to a money economy and its associated problems of supply and demand.
- (ii) Insecurity due to floods and droughts.
- (iii) Inability and unreliability of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to realise the expected yields.
- (iv) Poor peasants finding it difficult to adopt modern farming methods, or being forced into indebtedness in trying to meet the demands of new technology.
- (v) Too many peasants sharing a small piece of fertile land for cultivation with the result that some become marginalised and are faced with hunger and misery.

It is also expected that the new policy will review the system of pricing of agricultural products and inputs, since this has an important impact on farm productivity and incomes. Like-wise the recently re-instated cooperative societies, the Co-operative Rural Development Bank (CRDB) and other financial institutions should strive to serve the peasants by directing their resources to them. Loans and expertise in the sector should be made readily available to the peasants.

Meanwhile it is worthwhile pointing out that, in spite of a visible decline in agricultural production during the past decade, Tanzania has registered some success in various aspects of social development. As far back as 1974 for instance it was decided that all children of school going age must be in school by 1977. Since then the number of children in primary schools has been increasing steadily, so that by the end of 1984 there were 3 600 000 children in 10 100 primary schools in the country. Secondary education has undergone both qualitative and quantitative expansion, together with the inception of technical, vocational and agricultural secondary schools in order to provide relevant knowledge and skills at post primary school levels. The government has also instituted Folk Development Colleges, where basic skills in agriculture, including animal husbandry, poultry, farming, simple bookkeeping and domestic science are taught in order to elevate the villagers' levels of production and quality of living. The most successful educational service has,

however, been in the area of adult education, with three million adults having attained adult literacy by 1984. Adult literacy rate stands at about 80 per cent present, and efforts are being made to achieve full literacy by the year 2000.

Health services have also been accorded high priority by the government. Following the proclamation of the policy of free health for all after 1967 the delivery systems, including hospitals, dispensaries and medical centres, have been expanded and strengthened in both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Mass mobilisation campaigns aimed at elevating the nutritional and health standards of the population have been instituted, with a view to raising the awareness of the people of the importance of dietary and environmental factors for good health. A major project has been the primary health care programme, a concept incorporated into the health delivery system in 1980, which has as its primary objective the prevention of communicable diseases. The supply of safe water is a basic requisite in the campaign for good health. There have been wells and taps built in the rural areas. Experiments with bamboo pipes have proved successful in central Tanzania, and a campaign is being carried out to spread them throughout the country. Bamboo pipes are cost efficient and require little technical expertise. Tanzania is trying hard, in any case, to meet the 1991 target year of supplying safe water to all its people.

Nevertheless, bringing about rural transformation has proved to be a challenging task, not only in Tanzania but in most developing countries as well. Efforts to bring about change have been on a trial and error basis, and mistakes have been made both in planning and in implementing policies. Obstacles towards genuine social development are many and diverse, some having to do with national policies and economy, but many of them being related to the conditions of under-development in general.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to assess social development against the background of agricultural development in the SADCC region, with a particular focus on Tanzania. It has been pointed out that it is through agricultural development, which in most of the sub-Saharan Africa is concomitant with economic development, that the countries in the region can in the final analysis raise the living standards of their people. The point of emphasis has been that the rural areas need to receive top priority in terms of social services, increased incomes and infrastructural development in general, not only because they have hitherto been relatively deprived of these things but more so because the majority of the population reside there and need to maintain the present levels of agricultural production. The present state of

agriculture has been outlined and it clearly leaves a lot to be desired just as the prevailing general level of social development.

The countries of SADCC have undoubtedly recognised the need to strengthen their economies, both individually and collectively, through joint programmes. It is encouraging to note that SADCC has among other things addressed itself to the question of tackling the long-term agricultural problems facing the region. It is the contention of this paper that as the subregion progressively frees itself from the shackles of economic stagnation the basis for sustained social development in the countryside will have been formed, so that the rural population in particular can look forward to better standards of living in the foreseeable future.

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