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THE EARLY YEARS: EXTENSION SERVICES IN PEASANT AGRICULTURE IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1925-1929

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Abstract

An extension programme using African demonstrators was launched in the reserves of colonial Zimbabwe in 1927. These demonstrators were given the task of teaching peasant farmers to farm intensively on small acreages using a four-course crop rotation system. This was to replace the traditional extensive system of 'shifting' cultivation on large acreages. The scheme was started in order to increase the carrying capacity of the reserves, and so enable them to cope with the increased numbers moving into them as a result of repressive government land policy and segregationist moves. An Agriculturalist for 'Natives', E. D. Alvord, was appointed and one of his principal tasks was to oversee the implementation of the demonstrator programme.

'And outside the city . . . all these people who were another colour lived; and beyond that the reserves, where an old order had died, and a new order presented a slammed door.'

Nadine Gordimer

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

AT THE TIME Whites entered Zimbabwe in the 1890s, African farmers were farming extensively using a system of rotational cultivation. As M. Yudelman put it:

The methods of cultivation used at the time the Europeans moved into the area were remote from those evolved by Jethro Tull, the father of the European agricultural revolution. Because there was no use for intensive land use, low yielding extensive methods of production were employed.¹

It does not necessarily follow that the methods employed by peasant farmers were inefficient; on the contrary, as Lord Hailey put it, 'Shifting cultivation is less a device of barbarism than a concession to the nature of the soil.'²

The view commonly held by settlers, however, was that Africans were poor agriculturalists and that later deterioration of land in the reserves

¹ M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land* (Cambridge, Massachusetts University Press, 1964), 12.

² W. Allan, 'Changing patterns in African land use', *Journal of Royal African Society of Arts*, (1960), CVIII, 612.

resulted from an inherent inability to adjust their agricultural techniques as the need arose.³ A brief look at pre-colonial and early colonial peasant techniques might go some way in dispelling this erroneous interpretation, as will a critical examination of colonial land policy. The latter, and not poor techniques, was the primary contributory factor to poor peasant performance in later decades. This article will show that lack of progress in the peasant agricultural sector was in fact largely due to the repressive land policy adopted by the colonial regime, and consequent distrust of motives behind White policy concerning peasant land and agriculture generally.

In pre-colonial years, when farmed extensively, land would be tilled continuously for up to four years, and then left idle for anything up to 15 years before being cultivated once again. In this manner land would regain its fertility naturally. Land was prepared by scratching the soil lightly with the hoe as this did not dislodge the valuable top soil; and then seed was broadcast onto the land. The viability of peasant techniques did not go unnoticed at the time of White settlement, when many settlers actually adopted African methods. In the 1960s W. Roder commented thus,

under conditions of thin soils and a tropical ecology, the Shona were in many ways, excellent agriculturalists. Their practises avoided the main problems that plague Southern Rhodesia: soil erosion and declining fertility of the soil. Soil erosion was reduced by thick, mixed plantings of low leafy crops which leave no bare ground between grain stems, while roots of the tree stumps and pollarded trees held the soil together. By shifting fields and letting land return to bush, they avoided prolonged periods of baring soil to erosion.⁴

Somewhat ironically, such a system of cultivation has in recent years, (and with modifications) regained popularity and is once again being used and adapted to an intensive system of cultivation. This is known as permaculture and is currently being used in Zimbabwe by some co-operatives; and is also used in some first world countries.⁵

Not only were peasants competent farmers but they were quick to respond to the new demands made on them for agricultural produce by the opening of the mines. Tax obligations were also met through sale of foodstuffs and cattle rather than by the sale of labour. One Native Commissioner remarked that 'acreage under cultivation is increasing considerably every year and mealies are more plentifully grown; this is

³ E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia with Particular Attention to the Interwar Years' (Durban, University of Natal, M.A. Thesis, 1979), 161.

⁴ W. Roder, *The Sabi Valley Irrigation Projects* (Chicago, University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper No. 99, 1965), 57.

⁵ The term permaculture was coined in 1974 by a Tasmanian, Bill Morrison; B. Morrison, *Introduction to Permaculture* (Zimbabwe, Tutorial Press, 1991).

due to trade'.⁶ In fact in 1903, sale of agricultural goods constituted 70% of all peasants cash earnings,⁷ and many were responding to market opportunities by moving to areas of high demand:

Natives sell a good deal of meal to those working on the mines, and a general tendency is observable to migrate nearer to the mines so as to be nearer those markets for the more advantageous sale of produce.⁸

Peasant farmers even changed the staple crop cultivated from rapoko to maize in response to demand from the mines:

Mealies formerly were not grown in any quantity, it is only since the occupation that they have gone in for it on a large scale with the purpose of trading it to the white man.⁹

In the early years of the 20th century, there was no competition from White farmers, no pressure on the land, and easy access to markets for peasant producers. Although reserves had been established, many Africans remained on unoccupied White farms. No efforts were made either to evict them or push them into reserves. This situation was to come to an abrupt halt in 1905, however, when the British South Africa Company (BSA Co.) started to make enquiries into land settlement schemes. The Gold Rush had not come to anything, and instead land became the new source of wealth. By 1908 when the White agricultural system began to expand, peasant opportunities were gradually reduced.¹⁰

At this time White farmers favoured maize and tobacco production, and cultivation of the former resulted in glutted markets.¹¹

The maize output, together with peasant production, quickly filled the country's tiny internal market causing the price of maize to fall by 30–50% between 1903 and 1912.¹²

Tobacco too, experienced a setback in 1911 and 1914 when markets were saturated.

Consequent on changes in the White sector, the existing attitude to peasant producers underwent a metamorphosis. First and foremost was the need to eliminate peasant competition; and secondly, was the need for White farmers to compete with the mines for scarce labour. Initially agriculture and 'Native policy' were relegated second place and mining

⁶ National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), N9/1/4, *Native Commissioner Annual Reports, Native Commissioner, Chitmanzi, 1898*.

⁷ R. H. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (London, Heinemann, 1977), 72.

⁸ NAZ, N9/1/9–11, *Native Commissioner Annual Reports, Native Commissioner, Lomagundi, 1906*.

⁹ NAZ N9/1/5–6, *Native Commissioner Annual Reports, Native Commissioner, The Range, 1899*.

¹⁰ Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*, Ch. 4.

¹¹ I. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890–1948* (Longman, London and New York, 1988), 60.

¹² *Ibid.*

needs were given priority, but by 1912 the BSA Co. directors were telling their shareholders that as a result of rising land prices it was now more concerned with issues relating to land than those relating to mining.¹³ So it was not purely coincidental that African rights to land came into question at the same time that White agriculture was attempting to establish itself.

Among the first moves made in this direction was in 1907 when the BSA Co. started to charge rents of £1 per annum to Africans on unalienated land.¹⁴ 'NC's were told that they (i.e. peasants) must either move into reserves after their crops had been reaped or be prepared to pay the rent.'¹⁵ This sword proved to be double edged, for those who chose to enter the reserves would lose their markets for agricultural surpluses due to the remoteness of the reserves; and those who stayed on occupied White land would aid settler farmers by providing rents or labour services.¹⁶ This move was successful and African migration from White areas accelerated, the proportion living in reserves increasing from 54%–64% between 1909 and 1922.¹⁷

Reserve policy came into question as more land was required near the railway lines for White settlers. In the years following 1908, debates ensued as to the desirability of making adjustments to the existing reserves, and in 1914 a Reserves Commission was set up which ultimately declared that reserves should be reduced by 1 06 460 acres.¹⁸ These findings were not finalised, however, until the 1920 Order in Council. Africans were given a maximum of four years to move into another reserve or start paying rent.

Many reserves were now remote from markets and the railway, and as a result crop production declined due to costs involved in attempting to market produce. Furthermore, the post-war slump of the early 1920s accelerated the move into reserves. Peasant producers had

no incentive to remain near markets in areas in which they were obliged to pay rent when sale of produce was becoming uneconomic. Having made this decision to migrate to reserve areas, future possibilities of gaining financial requirements through sale of crops was negligible.¹⁹

Crop productivity declined further as congestion in reserves increased, and the practice of extensive cultivation added to this problem.

¹³ V. E. M. Machingaidze, 'Company Rule and Agricultural Development: The Case of the B.S.A. Co. in Southern Rhodesia, 1908–1923' (Salisbury, University of Rhodesia, Department of History, Henderson Seminar Paper No. 43, 1978), 2.

¹⁴ Land which had been appropriated but not yet sold or granted to individuals or companies by the BSA Co.

¹⁵ NAZ, N9/1/11, *Native Commissioner Annual Reports: Chief Native Commissioner, Mashonaland, 1908*.

¹⁶ These tenants often had to pay grazing and dipping fees too.

¹⁷ M. Loney, *Rhodesia: White Racism and Imperial Response* (London, Penguin, 1975), 53.

¹⁸ Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*, 104.

¹⁹ E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia', 40.

In 1923 the settlers gained control of the economy and, under the new Coghlan ministry, they launched a further attack on the reserves which was to culminate in the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. In terms of the Land Apportionment Act, 81 areas were created adjoining existing reserves in which Africans could purchase land. They thus relinquished their previous right to purchase land anywhere. A further outcome of this Act was that the next premier, Moffat, decided to take the advice of the Native Affairs Department and bring to an end the system of rent or labour agreements on alienated White land. This phasing out period was to last a total of six years, and by 1937 all Africans on this land were to have moved into reserves and purchase areas.²⁰

Coghlan also initiated the policy of developing rather than augmenting the reserves. An apparent paradox exists in these twin goals: simultaneously moving towards fuller segregation and attempting to develop the reserves. In keeping with this, African policy entered a new phase: 'the complete dislocation and breakdown of the tribal system was to be reversed after nearly twenty years of attempts to foster its disintegration'. And further, 'it was decided that reserves must be developed at all costs, particularly those in remote areas, and Africans persuaded to settle on this land.'²¹ Reserves were no longer viewed as a temporary expedient ceasing to be necessary once Africans were absorbed into the exchange economy.

In 1930 there were approximately 919 000 Africans in Zimbabwe: 587 000 lived in reserves; 300 000 lived on crown land; and 220 000 lived in urban areas.²² This meant that nearly one third of the African population would have to move into areas which were already congested and overcrowded. The purchase areas themselves did not offer a solution, as large portions of these were still communally occupied and these people too, would require resettlement. The Land Apportionment Act ensured that settler farmers achieved their goals: the creation of Native Purchase Areas meant the cessation of competition from commercial African farmers. Furthermore, as Africans moved into already congested areas, sale of surplus would no longer be possible and many would be forced to seek wage labour as an alternative source of income.

THE MOVE TOWARDS FORMAL EXTENSION SERVICES

Despite increased pressure on the land as a result of colonial land policy, the government was not prepared to allocate more land to Africans. In 1927 C. L. Carbutt had stated:

²⁰ E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia', 54-55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²² E. Tawse-Jollie, 'Native land tenure in Africa', *American Geographical Society, Pioneer Settlement Co-operative Studies*, 14, 1932), 185/6.

An adjustment in the agricultural and pastoral systems hitherto practised by the Natives is essential if the land assigned for their use is to prove adequate to their needs . . . already there are signs of congestion and overstocking in certain areas where the Natives have been left to follow their own time honoured agricultural and pastoral methods.²³

Given the new role the reserves were now to play, this need could no longer go unnoticed. The government, as mentioned above, was not prepared to take cognisance of the repeated pleas that the reserves were overcrowded, and that more land should be allocated to them. They maintained that existing land should be used more intensively. Hence the idea began to take shape that schemes designed to improve peasant farming methods should be devised. These would then increase the carrying capacity of the reserves, and they would be able to cope with the increasing numbers migrating into them as the six-year period envisioned by the Land Apportionment Act drew to a close. These desires were not entirely altruistic, and in part arose from the growing need for a ceaseless supply of cheap labour. The Native Commissioner (NC), Charter, stated as early as 1903, 'It is the old and primitive and antiquated method which keeps the Native so much at home and his constant excuse for not going out to work.'²⁴ In 1907 the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) commented:

If the Native could be taught more practical things such as proper cultivation of the soil, adequate housing of themselves and their families, wants would gradually arise which would necessitate working to earn the necessary purchasing power, and so throw into the labour market a greater number of keen and intelligent workers than any taxation or amplified legislation could produce.²⁵

At this time, however, the pressure was not great enough to galvanise the government into action, and the settler farmers were not yet a force to be reckoned with.

By 1910 these demands had made some headway and a Committee of Enquiry into African Affairs was appointed under J. H. Graham. This report drew attention to the need for agricultural instruction.

We recommend the establishment by government of central institutions in reserves where teaching may be given by expert instructors, not only in regard to proper methods of tillage, but also to the treatment and rotation of crops and to all other branches of agriculture.²⁶

The suggestion was made that members of government staff should actually travel around the districts advising peasants in their own areas.

²³ C. L. Carbutt, 'The racial problem in Southern Rhodesia'. *NADA* (1934), XII, 7.

²⁴ NAZ, N9/1/8, *Native Commissioner Annual Reports, Native Commissioner, Charter, 1903*.

²⁵ NAZ, N9/1/10, *Report of Chief Native Commissioner for the Year Ending 31/12/07*.

²⁶ Southern Rhodesia, *Debates of the Legislative Assembly* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1923), 583.

This method was later adopted by E. D. Alvord when he began his scheme of demonstration work for peasant farmers.²⁷ The proposals of this Commission were then reaffirmed in 1911 by a conference of senior officials of the Native Affairs Department.

The BSA Company, however, was antagonistic to any such recommendations, possibly due to the threat that peasant farmers might pose. This in part explains the delay in the inauguration of development programmes until 1925. Besides, the reserves themselves had not been finalised at this time. The Native Affairs Department must also shoulder part of the blame at this point, because it had neither the capital nor the trained staff to undertake the technical educational training needed to this end.²⁸ Thus education remained entirely literary and in the hands of the missionaries.

As segregation became more probable, the BSA Company underwent a change in attitude. In 1920 a separate Native Development Department was established, and H. S. Keigwin was its Director. This Department was subordinate to the Native Affairs Department, and through it the development of African industries was to be promoted.

In 1921 Keigwin wrote a report on the 'Industrial Development of Natives' in which he drew attention to the following:

The present methods of agriculture cannot long continue. As the reserves get filled up the soil is being exhausted faster than is practicable, while the extensive destruction of timber should be checked. Better methods of tillage, improvement in seed selection, more constant cultivation, proper rotation of crops . . .²⁹

Keigwin supported the move to segregation and advocated the development of Africans in their own areas. He recommended that an instructor be appointed whose job it would be to go around the reserves and demonstrate to peasant farmers. He also advocated the establishment of industrial training schools whose primary task it would be to educate the Africans in order that they could then be self-sufficient in their own areas. These schemes were eventually adopted and, with modifications, became the backbone of future African policy.

Two industrial training schools were subsequently opened in the early 1920s: Domboshawa in the Chinamora reserve in Mashonaland, and Tjolotjo in Matabeleland. The aim of these schools was to compensate for the inadequacy of missionary education by providing a more practical training. The Government agreed to give financial assistance.

²⁷ NAZ, E. D. Alvord, 'The Gospel of the Plow' (Unpubl., 1950).

²⁸ This lack reflects the attitude of the BSA Co., at this time, towards improvements of peasant farming techniques, and agricultural education generally.

²⁹ H. S. Keigwin, 'Report on the Suggested Industrial Development of Natives, 1920', S. Rhodesia, *Miscellaneous Reports, 1917-1923* (Southern Rhodesia, Govt. Printer, 1924).

The money voted to Keigwin's scheme was for a different purpose. They started on the hypothesis that the Native wanted industrial rather than religious and literary education . . . the Missionaries trained a smaller number of pupils to a higher level.³⁰

Domboshawa and Tjolotjo were essentially industrial schools and initially agriculture was not accorded much attention. Nevertheless, it was decided that demonstrators were to be trained at these schools. Moyana is of the opinion that this was 'an attempt to resuscitate an already chaotic economy in the African areas'.³¹

The CNC stated in his annual report for 1924:

Several NCs report upon the continued refusal of the Natives to use kraal manure as a fertiliser, although by precept and by demonstration the advantages of these methods have been impressed upon them for some years. In time to come, as the reserves become more densely populated, a more economical system of agriculture will become a necessity, and in view of this a certain number of Native Agricultural Demonstrators are being trained at the Government schools at Domboshawa and Tjolotjo. It is intended that these Demonstrators will, on completion of their training, be drafted to the Native Reserves to instruct the local populations on modern methods of agriculture.³²

In keeping with the above, Keigwin, in his capacity as Director of Native Development, stated in 1924:

An opportunity has at length been afforded of initiating the scheme for the training of Native Agricultural Demonstrators for work among the people in the reserves . . . It is certain that it is only by Native agents that the masses can be reached, equally so that such agents must first be specially trained at some central institution. Of the 21 authorised, Domboshawa is to take 12, Tjolotjo 9. Normally the course will begin in September, and will continue with one month holiday in the dry season for two full years. It will take the line of a thoroughly practical training in field operations, and care of stock, and will be reinforced by a comprehensive series of lectures in the elementary science of the subjects studied.³³

Keigwin stated further that practical field work was vital in order that the men gained actual teaching experience. In keeping with this they were to be allocated four acre plots on which they were to practise a rotation system using the same methods that they would later advise progressive

³⁰ *Southern Rhodesia, Legislative Assembly Debates, 1922-3, Vol. I, 1-25 May, 1921, 375.*

³¹ H. V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land in Zimbabwe* (Harare, Mambo Press, 1984), 92.

³² NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, 1924* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1925).

³³ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, 1924; with Report of Director of Native Development.*

farmers on. In their second year, Keigwin advocated, they were to go out into the field in the reserves adjoining the two schools, and actually instruct pupils on their own plots.

THE INCEPTION OF EXTENSION PROGRAMMES: EARLY DIFFICULTIES

In 1924, 21 men were selected by various NCs and, at Domboshawa and Tjolutjo, they embarked on the demonstrator training programme. And yet this was only a very small percentage of the total number of students at these two schools. In 1925, Domboshawa had 187 pupils, and Tjolutjo 76; of these only 13 and 6 respectively, were demonstrators in training.³⁴ Progress was slow and although agriculture was part of the syllabus, industrial training received greater emphasis.

Administrative conflicts were largely to blame for the delay in implementing these projects: there was antagonism between the Native Affairs Department (NAD), and the missions who saw African education as being their responsibility. They did not approve of the fact that Keigwin was awarded £7 500 for his schemes, a sum they saw as extravagant.³⁵ They also disapproved of Domboshawa School being isolated from the rest of the education system and themselves.

The missionaries advocated the creation of a sub-department that would take over the supervisory functions which were in the hands of inspectors of the Education Department who were more concerned with White education. The Hadfield Commission, appointed in 1924 to enquire into the matter of African education, was divided as to which department the sub-department should fall under. Jackson, the CNC, felt that this sub-department should come under the Native Affairs Department and not the Education Department. Under the Moffat government in 1927, the Native Education Department was created with H. Jowitt as its head, and Domboshawa under his control.³⁶ The 1924 Hadfield Commission did not believe Keigwin to be suitable for the implementation and execution of the scheme, hence he resigned in 1926 and the Native Development Department collapsed soon thereafter, having only been established in 1920. However, the Native Education Department too, was only to survive for the short period of two years. The CNC believed that it was not a good thing to broaden the already wide gap between African administration and education, by removing the industrial schools from the control of the Native Affairs Department. In 1929, as a result of the Hadfield Commission, the passage of the Native Development Act substituted the Native Education

³⁴ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner*, 1925.

³⁵ *Southern Rhodesia, Debates of the Legislative Assembly 1922-3*, Vol. 1, 1-25, May, 1922, 370.

³⁶ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Chief Native Commissioner Annual Report*, 1927.

Department with a new Native Development Department that had Jowitt as its director.

From 1929 to 1930, the rivalry between the Native Affairs Department and the chiefs on the one hand, and the missionaries on the other continued, but not openly. As long as Jackson was CNC, the split was perpetuated because he shared many ideals of the Native Development Department and the missionaries although he was in the employ of the Native Affairs Department. In 1930, a new CNC, Carbutt, was appointed and at this time the NAD came to dominate Black development once again, as Carbutt represented the more conservative traditions of the NAD.³⁷ The primary consequence of this continuing conflict and antagonism was that it had the effect of hindering the implementation, and later expansion, of extension schemes.

Despite the inner conflict in the Native Affairs Department, an Agriculturalist for the Instruction of Natives was appointed in 1926, but under the Department of Agriculture. Then when the Department of Native Education was created in 1927, he was transferred to this branch of the Native Affairs Department. The Agriculturalist, E. D. Alvord, had this to say about the difficult situation:

I consider that April 1 marks the real beginning of my work as Agriculturalist for instruction of Natives. On this date I was transferred to the Department of Native Affairs. This was a wise move for it was quite evident to me that an Agriculturalist for Natives was out of place in a department which was organised and conducted chiefly for the agricultural information of Europeans.³⁸

The 1925 Land Commission was partly responsible for the appointment of Alvord, as it envisaged the migration of Blacks to the reserves on a more permanent basis. It was realised that if these areas were to be capable of carrying a much larger population, then deterioration must be arrested, and development encouraged. Deforestation and soil erosion were becoming rife, and continued practise of rotational cultivation was now unviable.

ALVORD AND HIS BACKGROUND

Alvord was an American missionary, initially stationed at Mount Silinda. He had been selected to instruct the pupils there on so-called 'improved agricultural methods'. Alvord was disheartened by what he found upon arrival at the mission in 1920. He found that the maize crop had almost failed, the soil was in a poor state: barren and arid, and other crops grown

³⁷ E. Punt, *The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia*, 68.

³⁸ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Report of Agriculturalist for Instruction of Natives*, 1927.

were also in poor condition. He noticed too, that despite the abundance of cattle manure, none was used to offset such problems. Consequently, Alvord gave himself the task of attempting to reverse these trends before the onset of the next rains.³⁹ Alvord then selected six acres of overworked school land and formed demonstration and experimental plots. He fertilised these with cattle manure, two were planted to maize and the remaining four were planted to a systematic crop rotation. He drew up a system of 'Agricultural Work for Adult Natives'.⁴⁰

Alvord came under fire from the Industrial Missionary at the mission who did not see the need for agricultural instruction. As was to be the case at Domboshawa and Tjolutjo later, agriculture was neglected. Despite this, Alvord's five year agricultural course at Mt Silinda School was approved by the mission and introduced.

In March 1921, Keigwin, then Director, Native Development Department, having heard of Alvord's method, went to the mission to observe progress there. Keigwin found that the six experimental plots were thriving and he was very keen that Alvord go to Harare (then Salisbury) 'and advise him on the scheme for agricultural instruction at a new training school for Natives to be established at Domboshawa'.⁴¹ Alvord's scheme did not pass unnoticed by other authorities either, and news of the success he was experiencing at Mt Silinda spread. In 1922/3 he was visited by H. G. Mundy, the Chief Agriculturalist, accompanied by the CNC and Acting CNC, Taylor and Jackson respectively. In part, it was as a result of this visit that the government decided to take up Alvord's methods, and in 1924 the first demonstrator trainees enrolled at the two schools. At this juncture Alvord was not to know that it would not be long before he was to become permanently involved with these schemes.

In 1921, Alvord experienced what he considered to be a somewhat fortuitous setback, which was to provide the key to all his future development tactics. Many people had come to the Before Harvest Meeting⁴² to observe the results of improved tillage methods. Alvord found that the people were suspicious and loath to believe that such results could be achieved by themselves. He maintained that they saw it as 'White man's magic . . . witchcraft made them grow'.⁴³ Alvord then went on to say:

³⁹ NAZ, E. D. Alvord, *The Gospel of the Plow*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² These were meetings held alongside one of the demonstration plots prior to harvesting. At these meetings, the results of extension methods could be examined by all present.

⁴³ NAZ, E. D. Alvord, 'The Development of Native Agriculture and Land Tenure' (Unpubl. 1958), 6.

It was then I made my prodigious discovery. A discovery which was to influence millions and affect the economic development of a whole nation. I discovered that in spite of high qualifications and experience, a white man could not teach agriculture to the superstition steeped African . . . I made the discovery that the African must see things demonstrated on his own level, within his reach by Demonstrators of his own black colour . . .⁴⁴

To a degree this may have been the case, but what he actually missed was that the peasants were suspicious because they had no reason to trust the Whites. The initial creation of reserves, and then the Native Reserves Commission, were testimony to the fact that the White man was not to be trusted. The Africans naturally felt that if they demonstrated that they could successfully farm smaller acreages, then they would be allocated even smaller areas to live on.⁴⁵

Perhaps not coincidentally, a few years later in 1926, the CNC came to the same conclusion that Alvord had earlier. He was commenting on the demonstrators who were about to go out into the reserves to

open a campaign on the lines which have proved so successful in the Transkei, where Native conservatism had for generations been proof against knowledge acquired by Natives in the service of Europeans. A similar irreceptivity has been observed among the Natives of this colony. The projected method is analogous to the 'extension' system successfully practised among the Negroes in the Southern States.⁴⁶

The CNC went on to quote the NC, Chibi, as saying,

I consider that the sending of one or two demonstrators from the government school at Domboshawa will effect more immediate and lasting results than any amount of working on European farms.⁴⁷

The NC, Victoria, was more sceptical, and somewhat ironically came to the conclusion, 'Demonstration of better methods will be of no use without compulsion.'⁴⁸ He cited as his backup 'Natives who work on European farms without supervision but this has no effect on Native agriculture.'⁴⁹ The NC, Makoni, was nearer the mark when he said, 'So long as European farmers continue to fail to produce good crops while the Natives regularly reap ample harvests, the Native can hardly be expected to change much.'⁵⁰ It is apparent, then, that the NCs were divided both on their attitudes to Africans themselves, and on the use of implementing extension services.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Vide Infra*, 23.

⁴⁶ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the CNC*, 1926.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the CNC*, 1926.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

ALVORD'S EARLY YEARS AS AGRICULTURALIST

In 1926, Mundy, upon hearing of the imminent closure of Alvord's Mission Society, offered him the job of Agriculturalist for the Agricultural Instruction of Natives. His duties were enumerated:

to organise better the agricultural training of Natives at the Mission and Government schools — also to organise agricultural instruction and development in the reserves by means of Native Demonstrators and demonstration plots.⁵¹

Alvord accepted, and took up the post in 1926. He was enthusiastic and out of step with the general colonial attitude. To a degree he was sympathetic with African problems and often at odds with the colonial government. He undertook extension services in a genuine effort to relieve the lot of the peasant farmer, and not with attitudes such as those of the government as his foremost priority. This notwithstanding, Alvord was not politically motivated, and he always operated within the limits set by the settler regime and the official policy of the day. He was concerned with the economic well-being of the Africans, and this primarily in so far as it was a vital factor in their spiritual vitality. It must be remembered that Alvord was a missionary by vocation.

From the first, Alvord faced government antagonism. The government wanted to increase the carrying capacity of the reserves and reduce the financial outlay to those areas, but they did not want to create a competent and competitive farmer out of the peasants. It was feared that one result of these schemes would be to create a surplus crop produced by peasant farmers which would enter the market, flooding it with a low quality, low priced crop and lowering standards that the settlers had set, and underselling their crop.

It should be noted at this point that neither the settlers nor the government deemed it important that the peasants respond favourably to the agricultural changes that were now considered necessary. In fact development policies were not viewed with regard to their benefit to the peasant himself. Instead they were inaugurated in order to increase the carrying capacity of the reserves and to prevent further soil erosion. This would allow more Africans to subsist in the reserves and hopefully reduce the necessity for government support in the form of famine relief in times of drought and crop failure. In 1930 the following was written on the purpose of demonstrators,

The aim of farming Demonstrators on Native Reserves is not to stimulate the production of cash crops, but to teach the Native farmer how to get

⁵¹ E. D. Alvord, 'The Gospel of the Plow'.

good returns from his labour, and at the same time build up and maintain the soil fertility for himself and his children. It must be remembered that land in Native Reserves is communal and it is limited. No individual can be permitted to go extensively into the production of money crops, wear out the land and crowd out other individuals who have an equal right to a share of the land.⁵²

Hence Alvord was offered little government assistance for his extension schemes. In part this may be attributed to his sympathy with the people, and in part this may be ascribed to the fact that he was a missionary and, as mentioned, 'missionaries and the Native Department were not in agreement over the question of Native policy'.⁵³ Furthermore, Alvord was an American; he was seen as tactless and opinionated and this was not well received by a civil service consisting primarily of men of British origin.⁵⁴ Alvord, in his enthusiastic and often tactless way, created a resistance in the minds of NCs who felt that he was encroaching on their domains and their fields of expertise. It took many years to overcome this antagonism.⁵⁵

When Alvord took up his post at Domboshawa, he found that agriculture was not on the syllabus, and none of the 130 pupils studied agriculture, only industrial courses. This was in keeping with current government attitudes towards Black agriculture. The six demonstrators in training and some paid labourers simply ran the school farm. Even the demonstrators' training was vague and superficial. The greatest emphasis, then, was given to industrial training particularly those skills which offered no competition with Whites. Skills like carpentry and building were taught at the highest levels, and agriculture was only taught at the lowest level. This, of course, reflected with the fear that adoption of improved techniques might create a class of independent African commercial farmers who would pose a threat to White farmers who were themselves not fully established at this time.

Alvord's system was based on organic farming and crop rotation, but the demonstrators in training had no knowledge of these principles. In view of this, Alvord recommended an additional year's tuition. He then set

⁵² NAZ, *Official Yearbook of the Colony of Southern Rhodesia, Vol.2, 1930* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1931), 745.

⁵³ E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia', 72, quoting R. Dinns, retired Native Commissioner.

⁵⁴ On at least one occasion in later years, Alvord appealed to his superiors in the NAD requesting a salary increase. Their response was that as he was an American and hence a foreigner, he did not qualify for this. Alvord's first instinct was to resign, but his passion to preach 'the gospel of the plow' prompted him to continue in spite of such an obvious lack of support. NAZ, E. D. Alvord, 'The Gospel of the Plow'.

⁵⁵ E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia', quoting D. Hampton, ex-Principal, Domboshawa School, 72.

about restructuring the school syllabus which had not kept to the original scheme drawn up in 1921 by Keigwin and himself. Alvord took over the agricultural side of the curriculum at both schools, but only after the CNC compelled the Principal at Domboshawa to follow Alvord's recommendations pertaining to agriculture.

Thus the demonstrators in training were to have an additional year's training, and during this year they were to carry out practical work on the reserves adjoining the two industrial schools. It was also decided to increase the entrance qualification from standard 3 to standard 5, as the early demonstrators did not have the literary qualifications necessary to carry out their duties. Following this in July 1927, a five-year course in practical agriculture (following Alvord's methods employed at Mt Silinda) was introduced and placed on the school curriculum. Students were to study soil conservation methods, gardening, animal husbandry, fish farming, water conservation, crop cultivation, general farm practice and farm mechanics. Alvord also inaugurated similar courses at several mission schools.⁵⁶

It had generally been believed that Africans would not be attracted by agricultural schooling: that they considered they knew all there was to know about farming as they were farmers themselves.⁵⁷ Ironically, and despite all such expectations, numbers swelled at the two schools with the majority of students seeking to enter the agricultural course. Ultimately, emphasis came to be placed in this area.

It must be stressed at the outset, that agricultural instruction was intended to raise the level of land use sufficiently in order that reserve farmers could eke out a subsistence livelihood from the land; the demonstration schemes devised in the 1920s did not attempt to alter the existing structure of the traditional system. Communal holdings were to be maintained. Capital intensive, large-scale holdings were not encouraged at this stage, as this would defeat the main purpose of extension services: to increase the carrying capacity of the reserves.

Our purpose is to teach these reserve Natives to make the most of their arable and grazing lands. It is our aim to teach them how to grow on one acre the quantity of crops they now grow on ten acres. Thus we shall be able to set free more lands for grazing purposes and greatly add to the resources of the Native reserves.⁵⁸

Thus the carrying capacity and productivity of the reserves would be enhanced without a notable increase in expenditure, or any alteration in the existing communal system.

⁵⁶ E. D. Alvord, 'The Gospel of the Plow'.

⁵⁷ NAZ, SRG/INT4, A. M. G. Jackson, Acting Chief Native Commissioner, *Annual Report on the Two Industrial Schools at Domboshawa and Tjolotjo, 1926*.

⁵⁸ NAZ, SRG/INT4, *Annual Report of Agriculturalist for Instruction of Natives, 1929*.

During the first year, demonstration plowholders were taught modern tillage methods suitable to intensive farming methods and the value of manuring the land. They were to be instructed in the proper use of the plough, land preparation and planting methods which would be suited to the new intensive system of farming that they were expected to adopt.

In the first two years, maize was usually planted

for the purpose of teaching manuring, winter ploughing, cross ploughing, proper seed bed preparation and cultivation. At the end of two years demonstration, the owner is either dropped or undertakes to have the Demonstrator teach him proper rotation.⁵⁹

Farmers were shown how to stump and clear lands in readiness for the plough. It was hoped that Alvord's schemes would bring an end to what he saw as the misuse of the plough, and in 1929 the CNC said in this regard, that

It is hoped that sound agricultural guidance will, through demonstration, surmount the difficulties that confront the husbandman in his transition from the hoe to the plough. Such guidance is badly wanted, as ploughs at present are a doubtful advantage.⁶⁰

It was vital that ploughing be properly done in order to aerate the soil. Winter ploughing was encouraged as this helped retain moisture during the dry season. They were shown how to select seed and plant carefully in rows instead of using the original method of broadcasting.

Those peasant farmers who had tried to modernise by adopting the plough had actually experienced lower yields. Even White settlers had quickly seen the advantage of African methods of hoe cultivation: a light scratching of the ground so as not to dislodge the top soil. Deep ploughing unaccompanied by cultivation, manuring and irrigating, simply added to the problem of soil erosion. The CNC stated in 1925 that although the

more general use of ploughs must be regarded as a step forward, it brings in its train problems unfamiliar to the Native agriculturalist, and involves abandonment to some extent of the method of which he was the master.⁶¹

In 1929 the CNC compared lands prepared by hoe and plough respectively:

In the one done with the hoe the contour of the ground has been studied, and the ridges made with a view to draining the lands from the heavy floods, but still more to prevent erosion, the crop stands high and dry in the heaviest rains, and gets all the benefit of the humus turned under between the sods which form the ridge. The other is a sacrificed piece of ground, the half turned drills running in circles or straight lines, no

⁵⁹ E. D. Alvord, *Agricultural Demonstration Work on Native Reserves* (Salisbury, Occasional Paper 3, 1930), 26-27.

⁶⁰ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the CNC, 1929*.

⁶¹ NAZ, SRG/3INT4, *Annual Report of CNC, 1925*.

thought being given to flooding, wash or anything else, patches of grass left where they could not get the plough to work, the crop existing where it can.⁶²

The plough had become increasingly popular because it was a labour-saving device. This was an important consideration in the rural economy when so many members of the households were absent, having gone to urban areas in search of employment in order to get money to meet their financial obligations. The plough allowed for more extensive cultivation, and could be used by women. As early as 1924 the NC Inyanga had appreciated this difficulty.

The Natives in the reserves are very slow to adopt European methods of agriculture. Indeed, as nearly all the able bodied men go away to work and leave the agriculture to the women, it would not be much good their learning unless the women were taught at the same time and could be induced to change their methods.⁶³

Other NAD officials were also becoming aware of this factor, and indeed the Assistant Agriculturalist commented that women and girls were to be encouraged to attend 'Before Harvest' meetings in order to accelerate the extension movement.⁶⁴

Thus plough cultivation led to decreased yields per acre, but the increased acreages planted compensated for this. The same yields were therefore realised with the same, or less, amount of labour. As a result of the above, lands tended to be abandoned earlier. The necessity to increase the carrying capacity of the reserves meant that such problems could no longer go unnoticed. It was one of Alvord's primary tasks to tackle this problem of plough cultivation and so bring an end to one of the problems besetting the reserves.

Initially then farmers were advised in the use of the plough and land preparation. During the second and following years, ploughholders were to be taught crop rotation, the aim here being to build up and maintain soil fertility. Alvord drew up a crop rotation system which was intended to build up the soil to a high degree of fertility in a very short time. It would also permit intensive and continuous cropping of the soil. One acre was divided into four plots. (This was later increased to two acres.⁶⁵) These plots were to be rotated for a period of four years. Maize was planted in the first year with a liberal application of manure: up to 15 tons per acre.⁶⁶

⁶² NAZ, SRG3/INT4. *Annual Report of the CNC, 1929.*

⁶³ NAZ, S138/206 1924-1927. Native Commissioner Inyanga to Superintendent of Natives, Umtali 26/3/24.

⁶⁴ NAZ, S1542/A4, Vol. 1. Report on Before Harvest Meetings in Demonstration Centres, 28/4/34.

⁶⁵ NAZ, S235/474. A. Pendered, 'Marketing of Native Produce Report', March 24, 1945. 31.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

This was followed in the second year by maize or 'kaffir-corn' or any other intertilled farniceous crop. In the third year a legume was planted, these would be ploughed in at the end of the season and had the vital task of replacing nitrates in the soil. Alvord advocated the planting of legumes which were already familiar to peasant farmers, like groundnuts or 'kaffir beans'. In the fourth year rapoko or another close growing millet crop was planted.⁶⁷ Such rotation principles would allow a much more intensive cultivation of the soil, and hence increase carrying capacity per acre. Each reserve would then be able to sustain the increased numbers soon to flood into them.

SPREADING THE GOSPEL

In May 1927, the final examinations for the demonstrators were held, and all but one of the 12 passed. In August, preliminary meetings were held on 11 different reserves and then the first demonstrators assumed duty.⁶⁸ At this juncture it was envisioned that demonstrators would be located in their own areas. It was hoped that this would prevent hostility to the demonstrators.⁶⁹ Demonstrators were instructed to:

Question a likely man in his area as to the acreage he has under cultivation, what his returns have been . . . then he will tell him that he should be able to get better results with better methods. He will then offer to take over one or two acres of this man's land, attend to the cultivation and generally handle the crop until it is reaped.⁷⁰

It was not intended that the demonstrator take over the plotters' plots entirely, but rather encourage the man to work under his guidance. No-one was to be forced to take up the schemes; all farmers who followed the advice of the demonstrators were called co-operators. Each demonstrator was to have between 16 and 18 plotters and as many co-operators as were willing to follow him.⁷¹ 'Before Harvest' meetings were to be held alongside plotters' demonstration plots, they were to be supervised by the NC and the demonstrator. Villagers were invited to attend the meetings and observe the results of adopting the new methods of cultivation.

All farmers who consistently followed the correct methods on all their lands would then qualify for a 'Master Farmer' certificate. Once he attained

⁶⁷ E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia', 75, quoting D. Hampton, ex-principal, Domboshawa school.

⁶⁸ NAZ, SRG/INT4, *Annual Report of The Agriculturalist For Instruction of Natives, 1927*.

⁶⁹ NAZ, S138/206 1924/1927, Correspondence between Chief Native Commissioner and Principal, Domboshawa School, 26/1/27-29/1/27.

⁷⁰ NAZ, S138/10 24/2/1927, Native Affairs Department Correspondence.

⁷¹ NAZ, S235/474, A. Pendered, Marketing of Native Produce, 31.

this he was expected to help the demonstrators and give advice to others in his neighbourhood. The first Master Farmer certificate was given out in 1935.⁷²

Among the first reserves to be allocated a demonstrator was the Selukwe Reserve in 1927. In part this may be attributable to the fact that respective NCs in this reserve were persistent in their complaints as to the condition of the reserve. As early as 1921 the NC remarked,

A considerable amount of crown land has recently been taken over by European farmers and it is estimated that about 50% of the Natives residing thereon removed to the reserves, the balance remaining on the farms.⁷³

In 1926, the NC, Selukwe, observed that Africans were still moving into the reserves. He maintained that this was attributable to 'high rentals, dipping fees . . . and stringent labour clauses'.⁷⁴ He went on to say that 'In this district the only reserve is, even today, very thickly populated and the present occupants complain of having insufficient ground for cultivation and grazing.'⁷⁵ It was at this time that he first requested a demonstrator.

The time has now arrived as far as this district is concerned at any rate, for the trained Native Agricultural Demonstrators. The Native Reserve here is small for the population it has to carry and, unless improved methods of agriculture are introduced and the Natives taught to make better use of the areas at their disposal, it will become more badly overcrowded.⁷⁶

It was partly owing to such insistence that a demonstrator was allocated to the Selukwe reserve in 1927; and in his Annual Report for that year the NC pronounced,

The Natives appreciate the beifits (sic) which they will receive from the demonstrator, particularly as it is becoming more apparent, even to them, that with the removal of Natives from farms each year, the reserve is gradually becoming too congested to permit of the wasteful methods of cultivation adopted by them in the past.⁷⁷

The work of the new demonstrator, Mapolisa, was a resounding success, and many peasant farmers were soon enthusiastic to become plottolders. Others became co-operators, and adopted improved methods on their own.

In the successful first year of demonstration, Alvord was unwittingly aided by the fact that 1927/8 was a drought year; crops were failing nationwide.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ NAZ, N9/1/24, Native Commissioner, Selukwe, 1921.

⁷⁴ NAZ, S235-504, *District Annual Reports, 1926.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ NAZ, S235/505, *Native Commissioner Annual Reports, 1927.*

The season, though a bad one in all other respects, was most suitable for purposes of demonstrating the effects of proper cultivation . . . several plots were surrounded by Native lands in which maize had almost entirely failed to withstand the drought conditions. The tall healthy plants in the demonstration plots formed a very marked contrast to the immature and stunted ones in the adjacent lands.⁷⁸

The NC, Selukwe, stated further that all suspicions on the part of peasant farmers abated in the face of such a resounding success. Indeed countrywide, average yields on demonstration plots were 13.5 bags compared to 1.5 bags on 'ordinary Native Lands'.⁷⁹

In 1928, Alvord observed that there were now 17 demonstrators on 11 reserves, demonstrating for 88 different village leaders, on a total of 92 acres. These yielded four times more per acre than similar crops on adjoining lands farmed by traditional methods.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

Extension services were initiated by the Native Affairs Department in the mid-1920s. They were a result of changing settler opinion as to the role of the Africans in the colony, the creation of permanent areas for them to reside in, and the segregationist policies that were crystallising during this period.

The colonial authorities realised that they would have to increase the carrying capacity of the reserves if separate development were to be a reality. It was at this time that E. D. Alvord, a missionary at Mt Silinda, was experimenting with intensive cultivation methods for mission farmers. As a result of successes he encountered he was offered the post as Agriculturalist for Natives, and joined the Native Affairs Department in 1926.

Due to his efforts at the two technical schools, Domboshawa and Tjolotjo, the first demonstrators completed their training in 1927 and began work in the reserves. This year marked the official start of demonstrator effort in the reserves. The initial years of extension witnessed a success in that crop yields increased and many peasant farmers were eager to follow demonstrators.

Clearly, early demonstrator efforts did meet with a degree of success. But despite the success of extension policy in its early years, improvements were not sufficient to overcome problems consequent upon overcrowding and congestion. The government was not going to give in and allocate more land to the reserves.

⁷⁸ NAZ, S235/506, *Native Commissioner Annual Report, 1928*.

⁷⁹ NAZ, E. D. Alvord, 'Gospel of the Plow'.

⁸⁰ NAZ, SRG3/INT4, *Annual Report of the Agriculturalist for Instruction of Natives, 1928*.

These early successes were also short-lived because there were many problems inherent in the programme that were not foreseen at the inception of the schemes. Consequently, before the decade of the 1920s was over, early extension policy was already being revised.