

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

SMALL-SCALE FREEHOLD AS A MODEL FOR COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE IN RHODESIA-ZIMBABWE*

ANGELA P. CHEATER

Department of Sociology, University of Rhodesia

IN FIRST DECIDING on the title of this paper, I had in mind a straightforward cost-benefit analysis of the African Purchase Lands, setting the costs of their establishment against their productivity, from their inception to the present, in an attempt to quantify impressions of their success. As soon as I started collecting data for this purpose, however, insuperable difficulties presented themselves. National production figures were available only from 1969. Costing direct Government financing of the physical infrastructure (roads, bridges, water supplies, fencing, diptanks, afforestation, soil conservation measures) proved impossible beyond 1950 (see Table I). Estimating the costs of extension work was likewise impossible. Although accurate figures for loans to A.P.L. farmers from the African Loan and Development Trust were obtained from 1969 (see Table II), the existence of other financing agencies (including the earlier African Loan and Development Company, the African Development Fund and its precursor the Native Development Fund, the Land and Agricultural Bank, the Agricultural Finance Corporation, and commercial banks and hire purchase companies) precluded the estimation of total loan-finance inputs. The attempt to weigh the costs of establishing marketing institutions against the use made of these by A.P.L. farmers, finally convinced me that the proposed exercise was simply not feasible.

At this point of maximum frustration, I was involved in a workshop organized by the Rhodesian Institute of Agricultural Extension to consider the greater effectiveness of extension work among peasant farmers in the Tribal Trust Lands. In the course of these discussions, it struck me that there was an urgent need to examine, on a national level, the inter-relationships among control over land, security of landholders, and productivity. I therefore abandoned my previous efforts to investigate the A.P.L. sector intensively, and switched my attention to a general but hopefully systematic examination of possible forms and variations of landholding in this country in the future.

* This is an edited version of a paper delivered to the Fourth Rhodesian Science Congress in September, 1977. I am grateful to R. Clark and R. S. Roberts for providing me with statistical information and advice on where to find it, respectively, as well as to C. Brand, G. Chavunduka, G. Cheater, P. Gradwell and G. Kahari for their comments and criticisms on the paper as a whole. Final responsibility for opinions and errors is, of course, mine.

Table I

DIRECT GOVERNMENT FINANCING OF PURCHASE LAND
INFRASTRUCTURE*

Year	Water Supplies	Soil Conservation	Fencing	Diptanks	Affor- estation	Roads and Bridges
1931	1 299	—	—	247	—	—
1932	3 291	—	64	357	—	—
1933	9 586	—	407	756	—	105
1934	10 305	—	423	?	—	200
1935	11 944	—	423	?	—	278
1936	13 946	—	560	?	—	395
1937	15 456	—	—	?	—	645
1938	17 131	—	606	?	—	920
1939	19 533	—	860	?	—	1 227
1940	22 678	—	929	?	—	1 392
1941	23 820	—	507	?	—	1 822
1942	33 237	—	599	?	—	2 499
1943	33 973	—	596	?	—	3 514
1944	58 498	—	596	?	—	4 708
1945	69 438	—	638	?	—	6 564
1946	80 806	194	649	?	—	12 640
1947	78 180	11 213	1 149	**	—	14 867
1948	120 000	14 670	883	—	—	17 480
1949	? ***	? ***	2 340	—	30	22 975
1950	?	?	2 331	—	26	39 274
TOTAL	623 121	26 077	14 560	1 360+	56	131 505
GRAND TOTAL : £796 679 = Rh\$1 593 358						

* Source: Southern Rhodesia, The annual estimates of revenue and of expenditure published as parliamentary papers (C.S.R. series); for a listing see, under year, F. M. G. Willson and G. C. Passmore, *Catalogue of Parliamentary Papers of Southern Rhodesia, 1899-1953* (Salisbury, Univ. Coll. of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1965).

** 83 diptanks transferred to Trust Administration.

*** No longer separate votes, became part of consolidated revenue vote.

One may argue, of course, that such an examination of landholding possibilities is irrelevant and time-wasting, because tenure patterns are quite likely to be defined as a political issue and determined from an ideological perspective rather than with productivity prominently in mind. This possibility certainly exists: one would be foolish to ignore it. But other factors also require consideration. From the perspective of peasant motivation and reaction, historical precedent and possible profit are, if anything, more important than ideology. Both D. Feldman (1969) and R. Feldman (1974)

Table II

TOTAL SHORT-TERM LOANS EXTENDED TO A.P.L. FARMERS BY THE AFRICAN LOAN AND DEVELOPMENT TRUST, 1969-77 (Rh\$)

<i>Season</i>	<i>Total Amount</i>
1969-70	197 000
1970-1	214 000
1971-2	254 000
1972-3	273 000
1973-4	300 000
1974-5	507 000
1975-6	432 000
1976-7	725 000
1977-8	900 000*
TOTAL	3 802 000

* Anticipated.

have shown that, in Tanzania, ideologies imposed from above may be subverted by peasants with an individualized concern for their own well-being. Such a concern arises at least partly from past experience in the colonial system. It is therefore legitimate and indeed necessary to examine possibilities that have their main roots in the experience of the past eighty years in this country.

I therefore begin from the premise that individualized landholding for the purposes of commercial agriculture has long been accepted in this country; and that if it is to fulfil its agricultural potential within the region of south-central Africa, as a major exporter of both food and cash crops, Rhodesia-Zimbabwe should consider as a matter of urgency land reform based on individual tenure.

Land reform may be considered from at least two angles. Firstly, in developing agricultural economies, there is the concern to ensure that all who need it have access to land for subsistence without incurring rent charges: this I shall refer to as the redistribution perspective. Secondly, with explicit emphasis on productivity, there is the concern to prevent a decline, if not actually stimulate an increase, in the production of both food staples and export crops. In practice it appears difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile these differing objectives, particularly when land reform is undertaken in densely-populated territories, where ensuring survival for the majority of the (voting) population is a prime political consideration. One African exception to this general rule is, of course, Kenya; and given the historical similarities between Kenya and this country, the Kenyan model of landholding merits attention.

Divided during the colonial period into the 'scheduled' (European-owned) and African areas, independent Kenya has opted for the individualization of holdings throughout the country, thus extending the model of the

'scheduled' area into previously tribal land. Many of the previously European-owned farms in the highlands have been retained intact as large-scale farms under individual or sometimes collective ownership, to retain the advantages of economies of scale in production. Others have been sub-divided into smaller units based on varying population densities: the three smaller types average approximately 100-250 acres, 30 acres, and 5-10 acres respectively. This last figure is similar to the majority of holdings in the previously 'tribal' areas, in which the Swynnerton Plan, initiated in the 1950s, is still being implemented. Irrespective of their varying sizes, all land parcels in Kenya are registered as individual, freehold farms once their boundaries have finally been determined by survey.

In Rhodesia at present, landholdings of the approximate sizes of the Kenyan model already exist, complicated by racial distribution notwithstanding the Land Tenure Amendment Act No. 22 of 1977. Plots of 5-10 acres are characteristic of the Tribal Trust Lands and are held generally on a communal basis, except for those individualized holdings allocated between 1951 and 1962 in terms of the Land Husbandry Act of 1951. European-owned smallholdings averaging roughly 30 acres exist in the near vicinity of large towns and cities, in relatively small numbers. Medium-sized farms of 100-250 acres in the A.P.L.s are owned by Blacks, while large-scale farms of over 750 acres are currently the preserve, almost exclusively, of Whites. With the exception of communally-held land in the tribal areas and irrigation plots held on short-term lease only, all other landholdings may be held in freehold deed (of grant or transfer) — which, of course, implies the possibility of lease as well.

Indeed, one of the main problems associated with freehold, namely absentee landlordism, already exists as a result of the leasehold possibility, and affects particularly the large-scale, White-owned farms. By 1974, this problem had become so acute that the Rhodesian Front Government obtained parliamentary approval, in the Agricultural Land Settlement Amendment Act (No. 29 of 1974) for the right of the State to appropriate and re-lease unworked farmland that had already passed into individual ownership. One precedent thus already exists for re-allocation of land which, in the future, will be necessary on a much larger scale. The question thus arises: how may such re-allocation, involving sub-division, be achieved without causing ecological degradation and in the interests of increased productivity?

My own opinion is that it would be a grave error for this country to adopt what I have called the redistribution perspective on land reform, and to sub-divide existing large-scale farms into high-density plots in a partial attempt to relieve existing pressure on certain land areas. Such a solution, because it does not take into account the development process, is at best temporary and palliative, and may be expected to extend existing problems into the future. Instead, I would suggest that some large holdings be broken down into medium-sized farms and smallholdings, initially converting one quarter of all large farms into these intermediate categories in the ratio of

sixteen smallholdings for every medium-sized farm created, to produce a pattern of land distribution over the various types of holding similar to that

Table III

DISTRIBUTION OF LANDHOLDINGS OF VARIOUS SIZES*

<i>Existing</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
6 000	large-scale farms above 750 acres	4 500
8 500 (14 000 potential)	medium-sized farms 100-350 acres	28 000
?	smallholdings 25-30 acres	230 000
660 000 (estimated)	high-density plots up to 10 acres	450 000
674 500	TOTAL	712 500

* Figures are the national average and include regional and ecological variations. Each high-density plot is assumed to support a household averaging at least six persons.

reflected in Table III. I must emphasize that this suggestion is merely a first step, an immediate re-allocation. Over time, it will be necessary to convert additional large-scale farms into smallholdings in order to meet demands from that part of the population now under age, since my initial estimates concerning re-allocation are based on existing households and take no account of future projections.

It goes almost without saying, of course, that re-allocation of land and a switch to nation-wide freehold cannot, of themselves, be expected to produce miracles in the way of increased productivity. Indeed, *before* rural land is touched, residential urban land must be converted to freehold; if the urban end of the development continuum is not given this precedence, agricultural land reform may be expected to encounter precisely the same difficulties of implementation as did the Land Husbandry Act, when thousands of urban workers who perceived themselves to be insecure in town streamed back to the country to ensure that they retained what rural security they had for their old age. Furthermore, infrastructural improvements in transport and communications, marketing and pricing policies, literacy programmes, increases in the quantity and quality of extension advice, and more credit for small producers, must all be undertaken concurrently with land reform, if development is to occur.

Given the costs, direct and indirect, of my suggestion for immediate re-allocation of some ten million acres of farmland and the conversion of all holdings to freehold, my justification for these suggestions revolves around a 'people's viewpoint'. The remainder of this paper will be concerned with various aspects of this view: farm size in relation to development and productivity; producer motivation; cultural values.

My major reason for recommending against re-allocation to high-density plots of up to ten acres, is that such holdings cannot guarantee more than a subsistence living to those working them. Subsistence cultivation, in turn, tends to reinforce existing sources of social and economic security, particularly large families, which are problematic in the development process. Such holdings should, therefore, be seen as a 'residual employer' in the national economy, rather than as the normal way of life for a majority of the population. If we assume for the moment that development will permit rising standards of living for the majority, such high-density plots *may*, eventually, be amalgamated into larger, more productive units through the operation of a land market. At our present level of development, therefore, *policy* should be oriented towards providing greater security for and increased productivity among a substantial proportion of current subsistence producers, in order to stimulate the process of development itself.

For this reason, the importance of indivisible smallholdings, oriented either to intensive crop or to intensive (small) livestock production and workable by family labour, cannot be over-emphasized. Lipton (1977) holds that such units constitute a preferred size for ensuring equity and productivity in primarily agricultural countries the world over. Clough (1968) and Steele (1972) note that the smallholdings in Kenya produce the greatest return per acre and are, therefore, the size of holding most likely to yield productivity increases in the short term. Indirect evidence from smallholdings half the proposed size (some 10-15 acres) in some of the A.P.L.s in this country confirm impressionistically that such holdings are both productive and easily manageable for the person with subsistence experience only. Smallholdings promise visible improvement in living standards, while remaining within peasant management experience: an appealing motivation to greater productivity in the transition to a commercial farming orientation.

However, by virtue of their restricted size, smallholdings can never become purely commercial farms oriented entirely to production for the national market, nor can they support cattle without special arrangements (save, perhaps, one cow for household milk requirements). If such smallholdings are to become the focus for rural development effort in the medium term, then, it is important to consider what arrangements could be made to accommodate livestock, given that cattle are so important to peasants in this country, for social and ritual as well as economic purposes. One possibility lies in grazing commonages similar to those in high-density farming areas at present. The alternative of co-operative feedlots, presupposing as it does a primarily commercial orientation to cattle, might initially be less popular, despite its advantages of economies of scale for the market production of beef, because it overlooks the banking function that cattle currently perform. Hence some combination of commonage and feedlot is probably the most feasible solution in the short term. Some workable solution must be devised, however, preferably in consultation with peasant farmers, in advance of any land reform exercise.

Given the disadvantages of size of both high-density plots and small-holdings for commercial production, it is essential for the national economy, particularly in the short term, that export-oriented production continues on medium and large-scale farms. However, large farms currently tend to be under-used and the available data suggest that medium-sized farms produce, in value terms per unit area, a comparable output to large-scale farms (Cheater, 1974, pp.13, 88-9). Clark (1976) records that production per hectare among those A.P.L. farmers, to whom the African Loan and Development Trust has extended short-term credit, is valued at Rh\$14,30 on a credit base of Rh\$3,60. These figures compare with Rh\$21,60 on a credit base of Rh\$7,10 per hectare on large-scale, European-owned farms. Hence it seems both sensible and efficient to invest resources for commercial production in medium-sized holdings, since they are almost as efficient, at least among the better farmers, as large farms, while not incurring the same absolute costs in achieving similar economies of scale. The productivity of medium-sized farms, as well as their current scarcity, is reflected in free market prices of between Rh\$20 and Rh\$25 per acre for these farming units. An immediate doubling of the (potential) number of these farms can therefore be expected to have a positive effect on national agricultural output, although one would be foolhardy to attempt an estimate of the quantitative increase without considerably more data on current production than are readily available.

Perhaps more important than immediate production increases, however, would be the longer-term effects on producer motivation that these suggestions might have, by lifting (though not removing entirely) existing constraints on production that arise from pressure on the land in the peasant sector. Once the existing pressure is relieved, not only does an improved standard of living appear feasible to the peasant producer, but development *within* the high-density, subsistence base, starting with assured security of tenure through freehold, becomes a more realistic objective than it is under present circumstances.

In seeking to relieve this population pressure on the land, however, the creation of nearly a quarter of a million smallholdings and doubling the number of medium-sized farms may not in itself be sufficient. In particular, in re-allocating large farms, we must consider the position of those people currently living and working on such units. At present, approximately one-fifth of the total Black population of this country resides on European-owned farms. In addition, an unknown but significant number of families (some calculations put this figure as high as 20 per cent of all potentially independent households) in the Tribal Trust Lands *de jure* are landless, although *de facto* they may be working portions of kinsmen's fragmented land. Together, these landless categories may comprise 100 000 household units, possibly even more. Therefore, unless we are to re-allocate additional large farms to high-density plots to accommodate these people, we must assume that they will

need employment. Some may indeed find work on new medium-sized holdings, and some may drift to town. But I would suggest that the majority, having experience in agricultural production, might best be employed on State farming corporations. While not in favour of sub-dividing more large farms than is absolutely necessary, I see no reason why some agri-businesses should not be owned and managed by the State, perhaps initially on an experimental basis. Here I am emphatically not suggesting State *co-operative* farming, which failed in Zambia (Lombard, 1971), but a system of State management, with a statutory minimum wage for workers and conditions which would include satisfactory welfare benefits and provision for retirement, as well as profit-sharing incentives to increase productivity.

In the suggestions made so far, there has been a fundamental assumption that increased production, in the early days of development, is best promoted by encouraging production differentials through the land tenure system itself. This premise stands in direct contradiction to the view that land allocation should be strictly controlled by the State, in a rationing system that will prevent the emergence of gross inequalities in the society as a whole. My own view is governed, not by political ideals, but by the recognition that, ultimately, it is the producers who are responsible for, who cause, development. In turn, this premise can be broken down, to include:

- (1) the recognition that people should be given the freedom to choose what role they wish to play in national production: indeed, if this basic freedom is not recognized, peasant producers will assume it anyway, thereby sabotaging planned production targets;
- (2) the importance of secure tenure to the small-scale producer, in some form of individual control over land and other instruments of production;
- (3) the necessity to provide positive incentives, in the form of increased economic rewards, to the more capable producers in order to stimulate further productivity increments.

However, in incorporating the producer's viewpoint into my assumptions, I have not accepted that inequalities should be allowed to develop unchecked. Explicitly in the case of the suggestions I have outlined in this paper, I believe that a graduated land tax is essential, both to stimulate production (in order to pay the tax) and to remove enormous disparities in productive wealth. Such a land tax is more likely to achieve a measure of egalitarian growth than is, for example, a levy system on production, partly because it does not penalize the successful *producers* and partly because it can be absorbed, as a status indicator, into indigenous social organization. It is, of course, well beyond the scope of this exercise to consider the mechanics of implementing such taxation proposals, or even the refinement of the taxation system itself: all I am concerned with here is basic policy.

The importance of the views and wishes of producers in the development process cannot, I believe, be overstressed. If the producers are ignored and their views deemed irrelevant, no amount of ideological commitment at

the top will be sufficient to ensure reasonably equitable modernization of the economy. One must allow the people, especially the peasants who constitute the majority of our population, latitude to make decisions based on their personal interests and related to their adaptation to specific local environments, both ecological and social. They will make such decisions anyway, irrespective of policies and ideologies formulated at the centre; if one is genuinely concerned to prevent the growth of glaring inequalities, one must recognize this fundamental fact and, if necessary, abandon ideology in favour of pragmatic response to expressed opinions among the people. I emphasize this point because, as a research anthropologist among farmers, I was struck by the gap between what Government believes (or purports to believe) about A.P.L. farmers and what the farmers themselves say.

Among farmers in Msengezi A.P.L., for example, the single most important reason given for buying a freehold farm was a desire for security: a secure home for retirement; a secure home for children; security of freehold; security against resettlement; security for ageing parents. The importance of this security factor in its various forms reflects, firstly, the fundamental insecurity of work and residence in colonial towns; secondly, a rejection of tribal systems, with their own particular modes of ensuring security which are enshrined in social relationships; and, thirdly, the problems which have arisen over the last forty years from the national distribution of land, especially under the Land Apportionment and Land Tenure Acts. This desire for freehold security is reflected in the escalating free-market prices paid for A.P.L. farms to which title has already been granted, now more than ten times the original alienation price paid to the state. The attraction of these farms is also confirmed by other researchers (Hughes, 1974; Kay, 1971; Weinrich, 1975).

Nor is the concept of individualized freehold, found in the A.P.L.s, as remote from customary land tenure as is generally believed. Particularly in areas of high population density, in which agriculture had become effectively sedentary rather than shifting, Shona-speaking people recognized the right of the eldest son *de facto* to inherit his father's land (although land did not figure in the inheritance ceremony), which represents a departure from the more usual practice of allowing a deceased 'estate of usufruct' to revert to the common village pool for re-allocation by the headman. The inheritance of land in this manner, which is fairly common in Africa, represents the first step in the individualization process. Perhaps this incipient individualization of tenure in the customary system goes some way towards explaining why the majority of Africans, including chiefs, who presented verbal evidence to the Land Commission in 1924-25, were in favour of the freehold system embodied in the proposed Native Purchase Areas. Some, indeed, were quite prepared to buy their own tribal land! Certainly such attitudes must be the main explanation for the indemnity payments made by new holders to those relinquishing tribal plots, recorded in the Buhera district in the late 1940s by Holleman (1968). The sale of individualized arable and grazing rights

acquired under the Land Husbandry Act (Holleman, 1968), also suggests a ready acceptance of freehold and its implication of market transactions in land.

Nor, indeed, is this acceptance of individualized tenure surprising, for it was precisely the individual control over land which underlay the ethic of 'primitive capitalism' in precolonial society. Wealth was accumulated, in many African societies, by investing production surpluses in labour units in the form of additional wives, who then generated increased surpluses. This strategy explicitly associates control over increasingly large landholdings with increasing capital (in the form of wives and children). The importance of land as the basic means of production and of generating capital, is also reflected in traditional Shona songs and proverbs. Thus in the precolonial economy, production differentials were accepted and reflected in the special term, *hurudza*, for the outstandingly successful farmer. Only when production differentials grew to unacceptable proportions did certain levelling mechanisms come into play to distribute wealth more evenly. One reason for this acceptance of differentials was the Shona emphasis, in folklore, proverbs and stories, on hard work as the route to success, coupled with the recognition that not everyone worked equally hard.

CONCLUSION

The suggestions in this paper are made with a view to provoking thought on the very important issue of land allocation and use in the short term in this country. The assumptions underlying these suggestions are broadly compatible both with precolonial practice and with the contemporary views of Black agriculturalists themselves, while taking into account the historical background to existing tenure patterns and the precedents that this history has established. It is vital to the country's future economic stability that it realizes its potential productive role as major food supplier in the regional economy of south-central Africa. In this respect, the Kenyan example is instructive, for Kenya has become one of the most successful agricultural producers on the African continent since attaining its independence (Sinclair, 1968), using similar landholding patterns on a similar historical base to the suggestions made here.

Obviously, if landholding is defined as a political issue of fundamental importance to the creation of a socialist Zimbabwe, at one level these suggestions become redundant. Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions — indigenous values and historical precedent — will exist irrespective of central ideologies and policies and, as a pragmatist concerned with development, I would recommend that peasant perspectives be incorporated into planning, whoever does it. Otherwise plans will fail.

References

- BROKENSHA, D. AND GLAZIER, J. 1973 'Land reform among the Mbeere of Central Kenya', *Africa*, XLIII, 182-206.
- CHEATER, A. P. 1974 *Agricultural Production in Msengezi African Purchase Land, Rhodesia: Sociological Aspects* (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Faculty of Social Studies, mimeo).
- CLARK, R. 1976 'Finance hampers African agriculture', *The Rhodesia Herald*, 30 July.
- CLOUGH, R. 1968 'An Appraisal of African Settlement Schemes in the Kenya Highlands' (Cornell Univ., unpubl. Ph.D. thesis).
- FELDMAN, D. 1969 'The economics of ideology: Some problems of achieving rural socialism in Tanzania', in LEYS, C. (ed.), *Politics and Change in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press).
- FELDMAN, R. 1974 'Custom and capitalism: Changes in the basis of land tenure in Ismani, Tanzania', *Journal of Development Studies*, X, 305-20.
- HIGGINS, B. 1967 *Economic Development: Principles, Problems and Policies* (London, Constable, 2nd edit.).
- HOLLEMAN, J. F. 1968 *Chief, Council and Commissioner* (Assen, Royal van Gorcum).
- HUGHES, A. J. B. 1974 *Development in Rhodesian Tribal Areas: An Overview* (Salisbury, Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation).
- KAY, G. 1971 *Rhodesia: A Human Geography* (London, Univ. of London Press).
- LIPTON, M. 1977 *Why Poor People Stay Poor* (London, Temple Smith).
- LOMBARD, C. S. 1971 *The Growth of Co-operatives in Zambia, 1914-1971* (Lusaka, Univ. of Zambia, Inst. for Social Research).
- SINCLAIR, S. 1968 'Agricultural development in Kenya: Planning and implementation', *Economic Planning*, IV, vi, 3-6.
- SOUTHERN RHODESIA 1931-50 Annual Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Salisbury, Government Printer).
- STEELE, D. 1972 'Hindrances to the programme to encourage the rise of African entrepreneurship in Kenya resulting from the theory of the dual economy' in *Proceedings of Seminar on Development Trends in Kenya* (Edinburgh, Univ. of Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies).
- WEINRICH, A. K. H. 1975 *African Farmers in Rhodesia* (London, Oxford Univ. Press).