Post-Colonial Agriculture Policy and Agrarian Change in Malawi, 1964–1979

Tamani Nkhono-Mvula | ORCID: 0000-0003-2912-9134
School of Law, Economics and Government, University of Malawi, Zomba, Malawi
tamaninkhono@gmail.com

Happy M. Kayuni | ORCID: 0000-0001-9602-7045
School of Law, Economics and Government, University of Malawi, Zomba, Malawi
hkayuni@unima.ac.mw

Wapulumuka O. Mulwafu
Mzuzu University, P / Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu, Malawi
mulwafu.w@mzuni.ac.mw

Abstract

Agriculture has always been the main occupation and a source of livelihood for the majority of people in Malawi since time immemorial. This implies that any institutional reform implemented on land, agricultural production and marketing of agricultural enterprises directly affects the farming communities. The interest of the article covers institutional reforms from the years 1964 to 1979. The article briefly analyses the colonial era policies and further explores how the post-colonial government took up a very populist approach to change most of the colonial era ordinances not only as a means of consolidating power but also transferring ownership of the means of production like land to the African farmers. However, though these changes were well intentioned, both the colonial and post-colonial institutional frameworks turned out to be the means through which the peasant farmers were oppressed. This state of affairs of systematic oppression of the peasantry experienced through these policies and laws thwarted the attempts for the transformation of peasantry into capitalist or semi-capitalist farmers. The argument of this article, therefore, is that the current state of the peasantry and underdevelopment of the smallholder sector in Malawi draws its origin from the institutions and structures created in the colonial and immediate
post-colonial period. It concludes that a positive change in the state of agrarian communities could be hampered more by the very institutional framework set up for agricultural development. Using a qualitative approach in data collection and analysis, the article explores how the post-colonial policies and practices assisted in bringing about agrarian change in Malawi.

Keywords

institutions – agrarian change – peasantry – colonialism – development

1 Introduction

Agriculture has been the main source of people’s livelihood in Malawi during both the colonial and post-colonial eras. This entails that any policy of government to influence a change in the farming practices has a direct impact on people’s livelihoods. The present article argues that the process of agrarian change in Malawi has over the years been determined by changes in policies and laws governing the sector of agriculture. This argument corresponds well with the work of other scholars like Mkandawire (1992), Chimimba (1991), Vail (1984) and Chipande (1983). The present article observes that some of the policies put in place by the government especially during the colonial era, actually frustrated the process of positive change and transformation of the peasantry. The change in government policies on land, marketing and production, on most occasions, altered the relationship between the state and the farming communities in a way that impinged a positive transformation of the peasantry. For instance, the imposition of the thangata system, hut taxes and restrictions on soil conservation during the colonial era greatly influenced farming and the general relationship between the state and farming communities. In particular, the inhumane nature of the thangata system, the kind of penalties for non-compliance to government ordinances and the brutality in

\[1\] The Thangata was a labour system where the local inhabitants on white-owned estates had to pay their rent through the provision of labour to the owners of the land. The Lands Ordinance (Native Location) of 1904 gave the white settlers the right to charge labour for rent to the inhabitants of the estates. The harsh treatment that the natives received and the attitude of the white settlers towards the natives fuelled discontent among the native Africans. Tensions were heightened and they culminated in the 1915 Chilembwe uprising (Pachai, 1973).

\[2\] A hut tax was payable by male adults on every hut in occupation, regardless of their income. Polygynous males paid tax on each of the wives’ hut.
which the soil conservation policies were being implemented, created a lot of resentment from the African farmers. This, in some cases, led to conflicts and African uprisings, like the Chilembwe revolt of 1915, which was mainly triggered by the resistance to the thangata system in the Shire highlands.

The post-colonial government in 1964, led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda took advantage of this growing resentment among African farmers towards colonial policies and brought about a swift change to these policies. This decision helped Dr. Banda to consolidate power and grassroots support as the oppressed Africans regarded him as a liberator. Additionally, the post-colonial government Africanised some of the concepts created by the colonial government it deemed to be helpful. For instance, the progressive farmers were given a local name called ‘Achikumbi’ to make them more acceptable in the changing political landscape. Though there were some similitude in the general attitude towards the smallholder farmers and the estates farmers both in the colonial and post-colonial eras but the modus operandi and the level of authoritarianism in the implementation of agrarian policies greatly changed after independence. The article covers some of the main issues from the period 1964 to 1979. However, reference of earlier relevant events has been made. The period beyond 1979, much of agriculture policy was guided by the structural adjustment, which is not the interest of this article.

The present article unpacks further the post-colonial motivation for change in agricultural policy, from the colonial policies that favoured white settlers to those that attempted to incorporate the African farmers into the capitalist farming orientation. As this article shall further note, these post-colonial changes in agricultural policy, though were regarded as being progressive, they did not bring any radical change in how the African farmer viewed agriculture in general as it was still centred at the heart of family relations and set up. As argued by Green (2011), in reference to the Chayanovian theory of peasant economy, the family farm generally is not dissolved by the expansion of

---

3 Malawi became independent on 6th July 1964.
4 Progressive farmers, were regarded as role model farmers, who apart from growing food crops, were also involved in the growing of cash crops like tobacco and cotton. They had relatively larger pieces of land and were supported with extension services, inputs and access to markets. They were developed so that they could be a reference point and had a relatively good relationship with the colonial authorities.
5 Literary means ‘farmers’.
6 The argument in the Chayanovian theory as regards the relationship between the farm and the farm family is that the higher the ratio of dependents to workers in a household, the harder the workers have to work in the farm. Chayanov proposed that peasants would work as hard as they needed in order to meet their subsistence needs. However, the worker has no incentive beyond those needs and therefore would slow and stop working once they were met.
capitalism. It continues to be reproduced as capitalism brings about a transformation of the commodity chains through the vertical concentration of capital. As such, the peasant farmers are partially integrated into the capitalist economy and hence able to survive its temporary downturns.

Generally, the classical debates on agrarian change and transformation dwelt mainly on three basic issues, which are accumulation, production and politics (Bernstein (2009) as quoted in Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010). For a long time, the debate about the trajectory of agrarian transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa has been dominated by the question of whether and how the peasantry is going to disappear (Chiningo, 2015). Some of the questions that have been asked in these debates are: a) Could the paths taken by capitalist societies in the north be replicated in poor and agrarian societies of the south? b) Could the pre-capitalist conditions (e.g., feudalism) and social formations of today’s capitalist societies be compared to what is prevailing in the predominantly agrarian societies of the south? c) Did anti-imperialism movements and a turn to socialism in some African, Latin America and much of the developing world in the 1960’s facilitate the development or underdevelopment of agrarian societies? However, the present article slightly departs from the three questions raised above to look at how institutional frameworks should be regarded as the central issue in explaining agrarian change. The three questions above all have underlining institutional arrangements that underpins them. The pre-capitalist conditions of the current developed countries like feudalism were based on the structure that was created by the institutional formations prevailing at the time. The Malawi situation slightly differs from these conditions yet this article argues that both conditions (the feudal system of the medieval Europe and prevailing conditions in Malawi) came about due to institutions in place that drives them.

The process of developing this article mainly employed a qualitative methodology. This involved a review of both literature and archival documentation. Additionally, data was collected through experts’ consultations to triangulate

---

7 These debates inspired by dependency theories dwelt on the notion that agriculture has the potential to produce food and non-food output and financial resources above its reproductive requirements. In the process, this agricultural surplus could be used to support the substantial resource costs of industrialisation, structural transformation, accumulation, and the emergence of capital, both within agriculture and beyond.

8 This has its origins from the works of Lenin on imperialism and Marx on historical materialism. The debates on production explore the extent to which capitalism has developed in the countryside, the forms that it takes and the barriers which may impede it.
with the data collected from literature and the archives. The data was then analysed through framework analysis\(^9\) process.

This article is sub-divided into five parts. The first part briefly discusses the changes in the agriculture policies and how the processes and practices of the colonial period influenced the change and the orientation of the agriculture policies in the post-colonial period. The second part gives an overview of how Dr Kamuzu Banda, the first post-colonial leader of Malawi, came up with a populist approach to change the colonial policies affecting agriculture as a way of consolidating power in the early years of the post-colonial period. These policies were gradually changed to counteract the institutional arrangements made by the colonial government in agriculture, which oppressed the peasant farmers thereby thwarting any attempt for a smallholder sector transformation. The third part presents an introduction to the post-colonial agriculture narrative. It explains the several development initiatives and strategies of the post-colonial government and agriculture’s position in these developments. It has to be noted that the postcolonial government recognised the importance of agriculture and gave it a central role in the development process of the country. The fourth part gives an overview of some of the major development initiatives that post-colonial government came up with in an attempt to develop the smallholder sector. The article highlights two of them, namely, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP). The fifth part gives an outline of how the post-colonial institutions like ADMARC were used to develop the estates’ sector at the expense of the smallholder sector through surplus extraction and also through unfair pricing and taxation.

2 Changes in Colonial Agricultural Policy

Malawi (then known as Nyasaland) became a British Protectorate in 1891 and the colonial period extended up to 1964. However, the present article acknowledges that this colonial period was not a homogenous period as regards agricultural policy and institutional structure. This is because several landmark events during the period, like the First and Second World War led to a number

\(^9\) This system was preferred as it provides systematic and visible stages to the analysis process and is much more applicable in qualitative analysis studies like the one being undertaken. The technique follows the basic stages of qualitative analysis like familiarization of data, identification of the themes, indexing (coding) of the data, charting, mapping and interpretation.
institutional changes especially on how agricultural extension and soil conservation, land governance, agricultural marketing structure and institutions were being carried out (Chimimba, 1991; Kalinga, 1993). For instance, after the second world war, the colonial government started investing more in peasant farmers to intensify food production than during the inter-war period and at the same time allowing more peasant farmers participation in the growing of cash crops like cotton and tobacco but also from 1951 started to extend agriculture subsidies mainly on tobacco to African farmers on native trust land (Mandala, 1990).

However, other scholars like Green (2009) adds to the debate with a slightly different argument. He argues that during the entire colonial period, though there were marked changes regarding agriculture extension, what changed mainly were the strategies while the colonial policy of conservation remained the same. The Second World War also in itself did not bring about much change on issues of governance and the structural arrangement that governed the general relationship between the African peasant farmers and the administration as most of the inter-wars ordinances were still intact. Additionally, Chimimba (1991) argues that though there were indeed a number of changes after the war, some of these changes cannot be attributed to the war as a critical juncture. The processes leading to these changes started in the inter-wars period, for instance, the financial reforms towards the colonies and the idea that colonies could not develop much without the support of the colonial office, had been on the agenda since the late 1930. However, this idea was accelerated and implemented after the war with an increased investment in rural development projects and also promotion of institutional reforms and technology change for African farming systems (Cowen and Shenton, 1998).

Access to land is another important aspect as regards agrarian change. The work of Ng’ong’ola (1983) and McCraken (2012) share more insight as regards changes on land laws during the colonial period. Both put emphasis on the recommendations of the Abrahams Commission10 report of 1946 and how this report influenced the development of land ordinances during period after

---

10 Sir Sidney Abraham, appointed as an independent Land Commissioner with a brief to examine new ways of controlling Thangata and to advise generally on land policy wrote, ‘I have reached the conclusion that the only solution is the clear-cut one of getting rid of the status of resident native and leaving him free to quit the estate or to stay there on terms satisfactory both to himself and the landlord, substituting contractual for statutory rights’ (As quoted in Ng’ong’ola, 1983: 191). This led in 1948 to the government setting up a Land Planning Committee made up of senior civil servants to look into the question of acquisition of land for African re-settlement, and in the same year enabling legislation was passed to make this possible.
the war. The Commission was set up to address the grievances over land by most African farmers that at one point led to the Chilembwe uprising of 1915. The report by the commission pointed out the need for land redistribution to African farmers and this led to the review of the land ordinance of 1928 (MacCraken, 2012). This brought about a change in the attitude toward peasant agriculture where they were now being allowed to grow more cash crops like cotton and tobacco. The Commission also recommended that the long-term aim of land policies should be a transformation of Native Trust Land to private property, while at the same time discouraging chiefs from exercising their powers in preventing the rise of individual enterprises.

The other factors that assisted in bringing about the observed changes after the Second World war included the coming in of a pro-African agriculture Governor of Nyasaland, Geoffrey Colby in 1948. Sir Colby who among others championed the redistribution of estate land to the smallholder farmers, his initiative among others helped in increasing the output especially of cotton and tobacco from the peasant farmers (Kettlewell, 1965; Pachai, 1973). Sir Colby was the first ever Governor of Nyasaland to publicly acknowledge that the idea of commonly held land was one of the curses of African agriculture. Additionally, the 1948/49 famine was also a crucial issue that brought about a rethink on how agriculture production was to be done (Kettlewell, 1965: 239). The major cause of the famine was drought, however some white estate owners, among others, claimed that the famine could be explained as an outcome of increased tobacco growing among the African farmers. They argued that smallholder farmers had divided too much land for tobacco growing at the expense of maize and that the organization of production was such that the two crops were in direct competition in terms of the need for land (Vaughan, 1987).

The issues outlined above were some of the determining factors for the change in agriculture policy in the colonial period. These changes set up the rhythm of agriculture policy in the post-colonial period.

3 Colonial Land Institutions and the Creation of an Agrarian Structure

The colonial land policy in Malawi established and consolidated a dual agrarian system comprising of distinct white settlers dominated estates sector and a peasant African smallholder sector, which generated selective pressures towards the peasantisation of rural society. Thus, the structure of land ownership was divided into European and African zones. This was also more vivid
especially in other settler economies like Southern Rhodesia and South Africa.\textsuperscript{11} The European zones often consisted of the most fertile soils, while the quality of African land was generally poor and marginal. In some cases, Africans became tenants on the land they previously owned if they chose to remain on the land after it has been titled. Newbury (2014) indicates that though most of these white settlers had signed to the “non-disturbance”\textsuperscript{12} clauses in their title deeds or certificate of claims issued to the European landowners by the colonial Government, most of them still subjected Africans to payment of the labour rent known as \textit{thangata}.\textsuperscript{13} The other indirect way in which the Africans were forced to become tenants on white settler farms was through the imposition of hut tax.\textsuperscript{14} This made most of them to move from African Trust Land\textsuperscript{15} to settle on private estates in order to generate the cash income needed to pay hut taxes (Mulwafu, 2002; Mkandawire, Jaffee and Bertoli, 1990; MacCraken, 2012).

After the establishment of the Protectorate in 1891, the promotion of export-oriented, large-scale agriculture was a central feature of the British project for economic development in Nyasaland, given the lack of commercially exploitable mineral resources (Chiningo, 2015). The issues of land ownership and property rights over land were therefore to be central to the achievement of this policy. However, the promotion of estates farming came with its own challenges especially for the smallholder peasant farmers. This was the case as there was a shrinking access to arable land as a result of transfers of land from the smallholder sector to the estates. The settlers gained land in the form of private property rights (freehold) or rentals (leasehold). Further down the line, the colonial Land Ordinance of 1928 gave settlers concentration of land and

\textsuperscript{11} Other scholars, influenced by dependency theories have pointed out that these colonies which had a large number of European settlers are on average well off than those who have fewer settlers. This is mainly because European settlers encouraged established institutions that protected property rights and encouraged investments. (cf. Acemoglu et al., 2001).

\textsuperscript{12} The non-disturbance clause gave the Africans living on the land, before the claim was made, the usufruct right on land. However, it allowed the land owners to demand rent from those who came on the land later (as in the case of the Anguru people who came from Mozambique) but due to lack of effective policing by the government and also ignorance of this right by Africans, everyone on the farm was subjected to rent, sometimes in form of thangata.

\textsuperscript{13} This was an arrangement where tenants had to work for the landlord for one month to pay off their tax and another to pay their rent – both during the crucial rainy season. However, the plantation owner’s main concern was not to extract land rent, but to assure sufficient supplies of labour. The agreements mainly were made verbally.

\textsuperscript{14} A hut tax was payable by male adults on every hut in occupation, regardless of their income. Polygynous males paid tax on each of the wives’ hut.

\textsuperscript{15} Land held by the chiefs under customary tenure.
the means to control labour without applying coercive means (Khaila, 1992; Mandala, 1990). These ordinances were by and large aimed at ensuring the survival of the European producers, often at the expense of the productive capacities of the African farmers. Therefore, the most direct way in which European settler farmers were favored by the state was through land policies and other institutional formations like the Land Ordinances. The legacy of these land demarcations is still evident today in much of the shire highlands especially Thyolo and Mulanje districts.

4 Dr. Kamuzu Banda’s ‘Shrewd’ Populist Agrarian Philosophy

Dr. Banda and the post-colonial leadership noted the shortcomings of the colonial policies as regards agriculture development and were eager to make changes to correct the imbalances and the distortions in the social, political and economic lives in the independent Malawi. To achieve this, Dr. Banda initially took a very populist approach to develop the agriculture sector and as a means to consolidate power. This was evident when Dr. Banda introduced the Natives on the Private Estates Ordinance (12/1962), which fast tracked the transfer of land from estates to Trust Land. He also abolished the Native Tenants Agreement Ordinance. This was a legislative document that enabled the white settlers to demand labour in exchange for rent in the estates and this was mostly done in the shire highlands. The removal of this ordinance therefore meant the end of the detestable system of *thangata*.

Furthermore, in 1962 he abolished the Land Use and Protection Ordinance thereby doing away with “*malimidwe*” (proper farming) whose coercive clause like permission to use force for soil conservation allowed Government Officers to assault, apprehend and jail smallholder farmers for not following soil conservation regulation. During the post war and the later days of the colonial period (1945 to 1964) most of the agricultural policies were re-entrenched in the hope that the same policies that were resisted because a ‘white man’ formulated them would be acceptable when the ‘black man’ commandeered them (Kettlewell, 1965). True to this, Dr. Banda changed some of these policies to suit the changing environment. For instance, initiatives like the Master Farmer Schemes were given a local name as “*Achikumbi*” programme. This mantle was given to the farmers who had followed good practices and had maintained a high yield level for at least five years, they were awarded with certificates by the President, who called himself as *Mchikumbi* Number 1. These farmers were also visited by the President every year in his annual crop inspection tours. This was all an attempt to Africanise a European programme
and make it more acceptable after most of the colonial era progressive farmers were embroiled in politics and were referred to as “Akapilikoni” (traitors) by the locals. Additionally, the soil conservation regulations were re-introduced, but this time persuasion, rather than force, was used (Chimimba, 1991; Khaila, 1992; Masangano, 1997).

However, after noting the disappointing production results, and also after Dr. Banda had consolidated power, the government again shifted focus and transferred land to the estate sector, this was also further elaborated by some scholars who noted this sharp shift in agricultural development policy (Green, 2011; Chiningo, 2015; Nkhoma, 2019). The poor performance of the smallholder sector was further noted by World Bank data that from the 1960s onwards, the smallholder sub-sector had been characterised by a low and stagnant levels of production per capita. This was mainly as a result of low productive capacity (World Bank, 2011).

On another note, Dr. Banda in an effort to encourage the youth’s participation in agriculture value chains, he established the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP). The resolution to establish the MYP was passed at the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) Convention of 1968, held at the Lilongwe Town Hall. The Malawi Young Pioneers came to play an increasingly developmental role by raising the consciousness of the youth toward national development and patriotism. The MYP was also seen as a useful channel for encouraging economic progress through youth participation in agriculture development. The concept of MYP was based upon the Ghana Young Pioneers. However, the Malawi scheme involved a ten-month training programme covering a wide range of agricultural practices, rudimentary literacy skills for those who needed them, basic constructional techniques, and physical fitness. In the early days the MYP was used extensively in spreading out modern and good agricultural technologies into the villages from which the trainees had been selected to persuade their relations and neighbours to use these more sophisticated agricultural methods. However, over time the MYP transformed into a paramilitary wing of the MCP and was used as an instrument of terror until it was abolished in 1993.

In general, the present article observes that the Malawi case reveals an agrarian dogma that was not fixed, but was reviewed and altered to meet professed changes on the ground and much of the interpositions in this era were mostly

---

16 “The Convention approves His Excellency’s policy of establishing Young Pioneers agricultural settlement in the country and the setting up of Young Pioneer Training Bases as the best means of making the youth of this country grow up with a sense of responsibility to the country and the nation and ensure accelerated development” (MCP Convention Resolution, 1968: 6).
state-led. It has further been noted that the institutional changes that were
done in the immediate aftermath of the post-colonial period were measures to
strengthen the pre-capitalist family farms rather than transform rural relations
of production and that there was therefore a remarkable degree of continuity
in the colonial agrarian doctrine. However, over time there was a progressive
shift from this stand. The decline in peasant farms output made Government
to become skeptical about the capacity of the small-scale farmers. This was
one of the main reasons for a shift in policy. However, this shift necessitated
also a shift in land tenure structure to meet the goals of Government. It was felt
that customary land communalism was a contributing factor to underdevelop-
ment since “every body’s baby is nobody’s baby”.

At the onset of this period, it was realised that agriculture offered a greater
possibility for development of the economy than any other sector and on the
overall, the post-colonial period saw a shift in the intensity of investments in
the agriculture sector.

5 The Post-Colonial Agricultural Policy Narrative
and Agrarian Change

Nyasaland became an independent country of Malawi on 6 July 1964. The
end of colonialism brought about several changes in how the institutions as
regards agriculture development were being managed. At the same time,
Dr. Banda, took total control of the economy and he desired to orient it towards
capitalism. (Cammack and Kelsall, 2011; Banda, 1964; Kayuni, 2011). This chap-
ter enquires on the changes made on the agricultural and related sectors like
land and marketing in the post-colonial era. It analyses the background and
whether the institutional changes in the post-colonial era achieved their
intended purposes. Much of the discussion on this chapter centres on the poli-
cies and the philosophy of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda.

As indicated earlier on, Dr Banda started his reign with a populist approach
to change policies and laws on land, marketing and the general agricultural
production towards smallholder development. However, scholars like Jonathan
Kydd (1984) and Davide Chiningo (2015) have shown that land distribution in
favour of the estates’ owners was reinforced almost a decade after indepen-
dence because the new administration did not have confidence in the small-
holder farmers. Kydd further argues that this policy of emphasising on estates
agriculture had a further negative impact on smallholders’ access to productive

resources and therefore on their capacity to increase production. Between 1973 and 1983, customary land under cultivation decreased by 40 per cent, while private land (including state-owned estates) increased by 30 per cent. The period from 1964 to 1979 estate sector production grew by 17 per cent annually, while smallholder farmers’ production grew by only 3 per cent. At the same time, smallholder production of cotton decreased annually by 4.8 per cent between 1970 and 1980, while tobacco grew by 3.4 per cent (Christiansen and Kydd, 1982; Sindima, 2002). The growth in the privately owned estates’ sector was mainly the result of the investments made by the new political elite, who at the insistence of Dr. Banda, opened up tobacco estates in all the three regions of the country.

The colonial doctrine, which focused on pre-capitalist agriculture remained in its form (Green, 2011; Mkandawire, 1999). Independent Malawi inherited a system where some crops like tea and flue-cured tobacco were grown exclusively by white settler farmers while crops like groundnuts, maize, cotton and others were grown by the smallholders. Few changes to this status quo occurred in the immediate post-independence period. Furthermore, much of the foundation for what constituted agricultural policy in the early years of the independence was a legacy of mostly post-war colonial policies.

As regards agriculture and national development, Dr Banda had a slogan of “Chuma chili mu nthaka,” through which he emphasised the importance of agriculture for development. He repeatedly said in most of his speeches that the state of the country, especially the smallholder agriculture sector in the post-colonial era, was the result of neglect by the colonial administration. He argued that with intensified agricultural production, the economy of Malawi and the livelihood of its people could improve. When closing the 1962 Nyasaland Economic Symposium held in Blantyre, he emphasised the need to develop and modernise the agriculture first to boost national (including

---

18 Land held under the jurisdiction of the traditional leaders.
19 These were estates established by state owned enterprises like the Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) and the Malawi Young Pioneer (MYP), an institution that was created to promote youth participation in agriculture development. The estates were created alongside the privately owned estates to accelerate the growth of the agriculture outputs.
20 Literary translated as “wealth lies in the soil/land”.
22 CRP/100/67, Hansard, 12 December 1963, Malawi National Archives.
industrial) development. The period from 1964 to 1979 was characterised by heavy investments in agricultural infrastructure, with Dr Banda himself as the Minister Responsible for Agriculture. These investments included irrigation, resettlement schemes – which spread throughout the country – the opening of agricultural research centres and other institutions of higher learning for agriculture. Much of these were done through the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) discussed further below. After the first general elections in 1961, which was done towards end of the colonial period, Dr. Banda led Malawi Congress Party won and he became the first African Prime Minister of Nyasaland. Additionally, a number of African legislators were elected into the Legislative Council of Nyasaland. This helped Dr. Banda to easily change most of the institutional frameworks he felt were not in the interest of developing agriculture, especially among the Africans of Nyasaland. As such, once he became Prime Minister after the General Elections, he felt the need of coming up with his own national development framework, that guided all investments in the strategic sectors of the economy including agriculture.

The first concise national development plan through which the development philosophy of Dr Banda was to be operationalised was the Nyasaland Development Plan (1962–1965). This plan focused on building the country’s economic infrastructure that was hitherto neglected as the attention of the colonial government was building settlers’ estates sector for exports of raw materials to England-based industries. Under this plan, estates were to be developed to increase the domestic market through the commercialisation of agriculture. However, the focus of the plan was on the smallholder section. The agriculture sector in general was projected to grow at least by 11.4 per cent annually. The plan also put in place measures for the development of the road network aimed at facilitating the marketing of the agricultural produce. It also put in place land reform mechanisms for agriculture development (Nyasaland Government, 1962). Additionally, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), which

---

23 Closing address of the Nyasaland Economic Symposium, held in Blantyre on 18th to 20th July 1962.
24 He indicated that he chose to be the minister himself because agriculture was the most important topic at the time. He took the responsibility in order that if there is any mess to be made, he shall be in charge of it himself (Dr. Banda’s speech at the Nyasaland Economic Symposium, 1962).
25 The emphasis on the importance of agriculture was put in the Plan as follows: “Production in agriculture must increase at a phenomenal rate so that reliance on it as a source of income has meaningful content not only for the few but also for the masses. It will do so only if there is a sustained and effective campaign to encourage and assist the masses to take up crop farming. This is what the Government sets out to do in the present plan” (p. 46).
Dr. Banda led at that particular time, emphasised the importance of agriculture in its election campaign manifesto of 1961.  

As it has been noted earlier, Dr Banda had total control of the economy and in charge of the country’s general development philosophy. Most of the Government policies were coming as directives from him. As such documents like the MCP manifesto were very important in defining what the Government policy would be. The directions of Government policies were also derived from the numerous speeches he made during party conventions, in parliament and during other events. One of the manifesto’s objectives was to reduce inequalities by distributing wealth, income and power. This would be achieved through the commercialization of agriculture. However, considering the prevailing status quo of marginalisation of the African farmers, there was a need for the government to take drastic measures to reform the institutions and rearrange the structures that were unfavourable to peasant agriculture transformation. This, therefore, led to the development of the second national development plan, which supported changes on institutions related to land, marketing and human resources for agricultural development.

The second national development plan after the 1962–1965 one was the Malawi Development Plan (1965–1969). This policy document did not explain in detail what the Government was to do in agriculture. Although agriculture was not emphasised, the plan mentioned agriculture, under its Guiding Principle 7 (i), as an important sector which at the time accounted for more than half of the country’s GDP. Under this development plan, capacity building for agriculture development, especially for the smallholder sector, was one of the key priorities. It was during this period that institutions like Bunda College of Agriculture were established to produce skilled manpower in agricultural research, extension and other fields. Additionally, as this article will further show, it was during this period that programmes like the Integrated Rural Development Programmes, that brought a tremendous shift in land ownership policies established. Additionally, access to market facilitating institutions like the Farmers Marketing Board, were established.

The third national development plan was the Statement of Development Policies (1971–1980). In its opening chapter, the statement put forward an emphatic message on agriculture development and its importance as “... A

26 “Elsewhere we have said that one of the things to be accorded priority is agriculture. We say so because Nyasaland is a primary agriculture country and also because any underdeveloped country at Nyasaland’s stage of economic development must first modernise its agriculture if a break with stagnation and a move towards self-sustained economic growth is to be made” (MCP Manifesto, p. 14).
statement of more detailed objectives must therefore be concerned primarily with increasing agricultural productivity ..." (p. 1). The Plan further presented a statement of intent on what is to be done on agriculture that Malawi was not only aiming at mere self-sufficiency in food supplies, but also production for exports. This statement meant that the Government planned to extend a dualist approach\textsuperscript{27} to agriculture development by prioritising mainly the estates sector with the hope that the benefits will trickle down to the smallholder sector. The arguments for a dualistic strategy assumed that the relationship between the two sectors would be mutually beneficial. As argued by Mkandawire (1999), there were a number of expected gains from dualism of the agriculture sector accruing to the smallholder sector including: 1) Technological spillover motivated by the demonstration effect as knowledge available on the estates could spill over to the smallholder sector. In addition, the knowledge acquired through “learning-by-doing” during wage employment on the estates could be used by the employees on their own farms. 2) Incomes of small households would be increased by remittances by workers in the estates. 3) Estate agriculture would provide relief to pressures on land by providing wage employment. However, over the course of implementation of this policy document, not much of these were realised as there was no clear framework of engagement between the estates and the smallholder subsector. The smallholder subsector continued being a pool for labour force for the estates sector and, with a marketing system greatly favouring the estates sector, very limited incentives were available for the growth of the smallholder subsector. Thus, the 1971 plan presents a progressive ideological shift and a drift away from the initial narrative of concentrating the energies on the smallholder sector. This was after it was noted that the smallholder subsector was not yielding much in terms of agricultural and national economic development.

6 Post-Colonial Smallholder Farmers Development Initiatives

The post-colonial period experienced a number of restructuring of the sector, which had a direct effect and assisted in shaping much of the contemporary agrarian situation. However, on the overall, as noted by this article, the twentieth-century agriculture in Malawi was characterised by a conflict between the smallholder and estate sectors over productive resources and markets. In all these conflicts of interest, the state has mostly intervened in favor of the estate, resulting in the shrinkage of the productive base for smallholder

\textsuperscript{27} An agricultural system that has distinct estate and smallholder sectors.
farmers. Additionally, the expansion of the estates sector was in need of more arable land and cheap labour and all this resulted in smallholder farmers being disadvantaged.28

However, one of the insights that the study has from literature and also interaction with key informants highlights effort taken to address some of the challenges affecting the smallholder sector. For instance, the Government introduced a number of programmes, and one such programme in the early post-colonial era was the Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) with support from the World Bank. These were smallholder farmers development programmes established in 1968. The general focus on agriculture for these programmes was based on the fact that increasing agriculture production and productivity has a direct positive effect on the rural poor whose main activity is agriculture production. Furthermore, these programmes, were called ‘integrated’ because they contained several components. The programmes had objectives that included crop production improvement through credit, extension, land resettlement, agricultural marketing, encouragement of livestock production and they also included distribution of work oxen, investment in rural infrastructure (feeder roads, buildings and boreholes) and improvement of health services. However, the programmes were essentially geared at improving agricultural productivity, especially for maize, groundnuts and tobacco on large scale with an aim of impacting the national economy.29

This IRDP, however, had not gone without critics, who observed that although the intentions on article could have been good, rural development projects in general did not intend to develop the rural poor, but to enforce their status as producers of agricultural raw materials for the industrialised countries (Chipande, 1983). Additionally, much of the support through these programmes did not go to the poor but a few relatively well-off farmers, thereby reinforcing the concept of progressive farmers, which further created the gap between the poorest and the well-off. Under the IRDP, there were at least four major programmes which were the Karonga Rural Development Programme (KRDP), Lilongwe Land Development Programme (LLDP), the Lakeshore Rural Development Project (LRDP) in Salima and the Shire Valley Agricultural Development Programme (SVADP). These programmes were small-scale and labor-intensive and they targeted about 10 per cent of all smallholder farmers in the country, which translated to 30 per cent in the areas they were being implemented. However, the experience of the LLDP is that these programmes did not work out as intended. For instance, among the intentions of

28 For further information on these processes, see also Thandika Mkandawire (1999) and Erik Green (2007).
29 The case of Lilongwe Land Development Programme.
the programme was to increase productivity through increased use of fertiliser and hybrid over local varieties. This could then increase output on a reduced portion of land. However, an analysis of the LLDP done by Chipande, 1983 and Traugh, 2020, showed that this was not the case, the proportion of maize hectare did not decline as anticipated mainly due to low uptake of hybrids but also the rapid growth of Lilongwe city, which demanded more maize for food. This necessitated an increase in land for food production. It was therefore realised that the programme could not produce significant impact on productivity for the majority of the Malawian smallholder farmers. The IRDP lasted for about a decade and were incorporated into a new programme, called the National Rural Development Programme.

Another programme of significance was the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) which was launched in 1978. This programme brought about a new thinking in the rural development philosophy of Malawi, with an idea of stimulating rural development by bridging a gap between the rural and urban areas while generating growth in all the geographical areas of the country. The programme initiated, among others, the establishment of rural growth centres and an intensification of extension services. The rural growth centres brought to the rural areas amenities in resemblance to an urban centre. Additionally, the farmers were encouraged to form clubs through which they could get credit and access extension services. This was intended at promoting a spirit of togetherness among the farming community.

On the overall, the aim of NRDP was to improve productivity towards self-sufficiency in food for the majority of the smallholder farmers as opposed to the IRDP which had a limited geographical focus and programme scope. The programme had 8 Agriculture Development Divisions (ADDs), 28 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and 180 Extension Planning Areas (EPAs). This set up was mainly designed to develop the smallholder sector and was well structured to provide extension and other services to the farmers. However, the NRDP concept, as was then the case with the IRDP, did not yield the much expected results. This was mainly because it failed to properly align to other government policies on development like the export promotion policy and the farm output pricing policies. These had a wider implication on the rural welfare.

7 Post-Colonial Land Reforms and Status of Peasant Farmers

As noted earlier, access to and ownership of land is one of the greatest determinants in the formation of an agrarian structure in rural communities. This is the case as secured land tenure provides the means, the incentive and the
orientation of production and investments in the agriculture sector. In the early years of the post-colonial era, Dr. Banda insisted that Malawi agriculture could not develop if land resources were not properly utilised and proper utilization could not take place where there was no individual responsibility over land resources.\(^{30}\) Following such a declaration by the President at the start of the Malawi Congress Party Convention in 1966,\(^{31}\) the Convention made a resolution at the closing session, where the delegates “… Wholeheartedly accepted Government policy as regards land tenure and undertook to do everything in their power to see to it that the policy succeeds…” (p. 3 of Convention Resolution). Furthermore, the 1969 Convention condemned the practice of shifting cultivation and encouraged people to own land; it encouraged the Government to do all it can for this to happen.\(^{32}\)

In an effort to operationalise these aspirations and improve the African farmers’ access to land and raise their agricultural productivity, the Government passed three new statutes in 1967. These laws were also aimed at encouraging the extensive production of crops like maize, groundnuts and tobacco and at the same time to ensure that land is effectively used. These laws included the Customary Land Development Act, the Registered Land Act and the Local Land Board Act. These provided the African farmers with a legal basis to have ownership of land as an enabling factor to transitioning from subsistence to a cash economy. This was a crucial departure from the Colonial Land Ordinances which generally favoured the European settler farmers. The Registered Land Act allowed African farmers to register their land to leasehold for the first time. To enable the operationalization of this Act, land registration districts were set up, the first being the Lilongwe Land Registry. Each land registration district had a Land Control Division whose function was vested in a Local Land Board. It is this Board which recommended the allocation of titles and controls of all matters concerned with the development of the district or scheme in which it operates. Ng’ong’ola (1982) highlighted that the Local Land Board Act indicated that a Land Board comprising of chiefs, agricultural officers, and local politicians, would replace the chief as the executive power when it came to land transfers on Native Trust Land.

On the one hand, these laws were seen as being progressive in enabling the access and ownership of land by the Africans, but on the other hand, they greatly reduced the power and authority of the chiefs in the control of land. As

\(^{30}\) Speech of Ngwazi Dr. H Kamuzu Banda at the opening of the 1966 Malawi Congress Party Convention.


such the Government knew that these laws would face a lot of resistance from the chiefs. It was therefore resolved that they be implemented as a pilot over a limited area in Lilongwe. This initiative formed part of the Lilongwe Land Development Programme (LLDP), which covered 500,000 acres of land. The Act had a huge bearing in directing the course of agrarian change in Malawi especially in Lilongwe by among other things altering the labour relations and dynamics. Legal ownership of land made a lot of would-be casual and permanent labourers to engage in commercial farming themselves. At the same time, the Acts provided for a systematic tenure-based alienation of the smallholder sector from producing certain cash crops. Those engaged in estate farming could cultivate a variety of crops without limit, while those within the smallholder sector were legally prohibited from producing cash crops such as burley tobacco, sugar and tea to avoid oversupply of the market and poor-quality produce. In the case of tobacco, this was regulated through the issuance of quotas to farmers. This change in dynamics of institutional arrangement helped to provide for a genesis for a new agrarian structure. A dualist demarcation of the market oriented capitalist estate sector and the subsistent smallholder sector.

8 Post-Colonial Agriculture Markets and the Exploitation of Smallholder Farmers

The exploitation of peasant farmers started in the colonial period and continued in the post-colonial period. In the colonial period the marketing boards were created, inter alia, with an aim of easily controlling the marketing of most strategic crops like tobacco, cotton and maize (Pachai, 1973). These tendencies alienated the peasant farmers and they played a huge role in determining the

33 In the Lilongwe Land Development Project there are clearly definable units upon which land reforms could be based. The first of these is the Chiefs’ areas, each between 10,000 and 20,000 acres and headed by the Chief; the second are the village units of about 400 acres each; the third are the small number of extended family (or consanguine families, the mbumba) units of 80–8120 acres each (Pachai, 1973: 696). Other land reform programmes under the IRDP included Karonga Rural Development Programme, the Lakeshore Development Project in Salima and the Shire Valley Agricultural Development Programme.

34 This was further elaborated in literature by Green (2010).

35 These were statutory institutions that were created to provide order and structure in the marketing of several strategic crops like tobacco, cotton and maize. Examples of these marketing boards included the Native tobacco Board established in 1928 and the Maize Control Board created in 1946.
state of peasantry among the African farmers in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Thus, the control of smallholder farmers produce markets and pricing started in the colonial period through, *inter alia*, the use of these marketing boards and continued to the post-colonial era, however in a different format. In the colonial era, as Khaila (1992) notes, the peasant farmers that had access to land and relatively higher output still did not progress into the status of capitalist or semi-capitalist farmers over time. One of the ways in which the colonial and post-colonial administrations hindered the process of de-agrarianisation\(^\text{36}\) among African farmers was to have them restricted from entering the market through the unfair practices of the marketing boards.

This article argues that as was the case with land laws, which unfairly alienated the peasant smallholder farmers, so were the marketing policies. They were characterised by keeping purchase prices for smallholder agricultural produce low, enriched the colonial and postcolonial state institutions. At the same time, they made it difficult for smallholder farmers to move into and expand commercial farming and they remained peasants. This situation presented a scenario of nominal smallholder growth with a reduced smallholder per capita productivity. Additionally, the smallholder farmers had to find other sources of income such as public work, migration work, or part-time work in urban areas, and they had to concentrate their production on food crops for subsistent consumption. Additionally, both the colonial and post-colonial governments used the marketing boards to extract surplus, which impoverished the peasant farmers and without these constraints, smallholder commercial production would have increased steadily and thereby reducing poverty, increasing food security and enhanced economic development.

9 Conclusion

This article has presented some of the key issues surrounding the institutional changes in as far as land, marketing and the general approach to agriculture development was done in the immediate post-colonial era covering the period between 1964 and 1979. Most of these changes were done with a direct aim of correcting the injustices of the colonial era where institutional arrangements systematically exploited the peasant farmers through land, marketing

\(^{36}\) Deborah Bryceson (2002) defined it as a long-term process of occupational adjustment, income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly agricultural-based modes of livelihood.
and production policies. This hampered a positive process of agrarian change. Furthermore, the article traced the institutional changes and how those changes affected or influenced the modernisation of the smallholder sector and how the smallholder sector has generally related to the estate sector. This kind of situation, where there are institutionalised controls and access to land and markets, has a great bearing on the pace and direction on the process of agrarian change. The article has shown that although the smallholder sector played a crucial role in the agricultural sector and the economy generally, the agricultural policy was not in their favour as it supported the estate sector more both in the colonial and post-colonial eras. At the same time, the smallholder farmers were being barred from growing certain crops like flue cured tobacco through quotas and other means like the demand that such kind of crops be grown on registered land of which most smallholder farming was being done on customary land. The estates sector apart from the fact that they had access to resources through other means, also extracted a lot more surplus from the smallholder subsector. The estates sector also had access to cheap labour, which was made available through market manipulations that made smallholder farming less profitable.

The article has also noted of the deliberate policy of segregating the smallholder sector, through the Achikumbi programme. These so called progressive farmers, were given a lot of incentives as compared to the rest of the smallholder farmers and this arrangement contributed to the stratification of the smallholder subsector. The programme was initially supposed to be a model of providing encouragement for the rest of the farmers to follow suit but the subsequent politicisation of the programme made it difficult for the other farmers to breakthrough into this category. The Achikumbi farmers although already well-off, they were given all the incentives like preferential extension support and credits.

The post-colonial era started with populist tendencies of Dr. Banda who abolished several of the colonial era ordinances that he felt were oppressive to the African farmers. Most of the processes in the aftermath of independence indicated a political will to develop the smallholder subsector and that it would be given all the attention and support it needed to develop. Reforms on land tenure systems and markets seemed to be going towards the development of the subsector. However, after Dr. Banda had consolidated power and seeing the slow progress in the development of the smallholder sector, attention shifted again towards the estates. Further research on this topic could cover the period from 1980 on how structural adjustment changed this policy landscape and the trajectory of agrarian change.
References


