

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

October 15, 1970
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Nairobi, Kenya

GJ-8
Ujamaa Villages

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

Almost daily here in East Africa I can pick up a newspaper or magazine and read diverging opinions concerning the true meaning of socialism. Many people feel that socialism in Africa is simply an ideology based on the theories of Marx and Engels. Others, more nationalistic in outlook, claim that socialism existed in Africa many centuries before Marx and Engels came on the scene. The one thing, however, on which there appears to be some agreement, is that the term African Socialism is relatively new. The term symbolizes the struggle of African peoples to rid themselves of the neo-colonial attitude and fosters commitment towards establishing an eventual state of economic and social stability.

Although the terminology debate continues, some of the East African communities are forging ahead in building an egalitarian society. Tanzania seems to be the country which has moved the fastest in practicing the tenets of African Socialism. President Nyerere of Tanzania states that his country has three broad objectives with regard to its practice of socialism: to establish a community where equal rights and equal opportunities are accorded to all its members; to create an atmosphere free of injustice, suffering and exploitation; and finally, to elevate the baseline of material welfare before any person is able to live in individual luxury. He contends that these ideals are simply extensions of traditional African custom based on the practices of the extended family.

Recently I had the opportunity to revisit Tanzania and to get a first-hand view of the Ujamaa village system which at present is most representative of African Socialism. These villages are schemes in which Tanzanians are encouraged to live communally in order to pool scarce resources and manpower so that they might establish and elevate their economic base. Surprisingly, although the Government feels strongly about the effectiveness of this program, membership in these villages is strictly voluntary. Another restraint which the Government has imposed upon itself is that no Government support can be given until the village has been started and has proven that it is indeed attempting to fulfill the objectives of a socialistic community.

At the present time there are over 1,000 Ujamaa villages in Tanzania. This number may be somewhat misleading, because they are not all functioning at the same level--some are much more advanced and sophisticated than others. Two years ago there were only 180 villages. The popularity of the Ujamaa villages has caused them to be a regular stopping-off place for the tourist visiting Tanzania. As one can imagine, the interruptions caused by the outsider snapping pictures, asking questions and in general wanting to be attended to caused much disruption in the many villages. Consequently, during my first visit to one of the villages, I was informed that only those visitors who have received official permission would be allowed to see the compound. Since I did not possess the necessary credentials I would have to leave. I was certainly disappointed at not being able to tour the premises, but my disappointment was somewhat lessened by the tact and politeness with which the refusal was extended. The two officials who represented the welcoming committee were indeed sympathetic and concerned, even more so since I was a "brother," but these were the rules as set up by their group and they would have to be adhered to.

I later found out that I was not only trespassing, but I had interrupted a meeting which was being held to decide whether one of its members should be expelled. These particular sessions are usually supercharged with emotion. When one first joins the village, he is given a six-month probation before he is accepted as a full member. During this time period, each party, the village and the individual and/or family, decides whether there is compatibility with the rest of the commune. In contrast, a person who has been found guilty of gross misconduct can be dismissed immediately.

People join the Ujamaa village for various reasons. Some come with the hope of acquiring free food, escaping the overcrowded conditions of the urban complex, or with the hope of securing a piece of land. For many it means an opportunity to get services which were heretofore unavailable--services such as schooling for their children or themselves, medical attention, and in some cases access to an approved water supply. Whatever the initial motivation, people eventually find an esprit de corps which tends to make them very much group-minded.

The meeting is one of the key elements in the functioning of the Ujamaa village. It gives the people the opportunity to communicate problems or issues on a formal level and to be informed on such things as new techniques or new equipment. Because of the importance it has, people are greatly encouraged to attend and participate. Very often, these meetings begin and end with some form of social activity. Activities take the form of eating, singing, and sometimes reading from documents prepared by their President, Mwalimu (Teacher) Nyerere.

The comradeship which is one of the aims of the many villages was very much in evidence in those areas which I finally received permission to visit. One of the villages, a 7,000 acre site, started in early 1965. It is located at Kerege, approximately 40 miles from Dar es Salaam. During its early existence, it accommodated 250 families. Owing to all the developments and new techniques introduced to the village, the officials now envision a maximum of 700 families to be located there in the near future. The village is made up of families from all regions of Tanzania. It was surprising to see that the bulk of the population was not from the immediate area and that most of its participants had been formerly a part of another cooperative. The Government through lucrative crop offers had persuaded them to come to Kerege.

While on tour of the acreage I was shown the basic cash crops, consisting of 400 acres of cashew nuts and 300 acres of coconuts. Other food crops include rice, cassava, maize, bananas, tomatoes, and potatoes. The guides also informed us that they have over 100 head of cattle, including 34 milking cows from which they get 25-30 gallons of milk each day. The milk is processed in a nearby town and is then distributed among the local residents--the remainder being sold to the Makonde Tribe who live just outside the area. In addition to retailing milk, they are attempting to raise chickens with the hope that they will soon market 300 eggs a day.

In answer to a question concerning their political structure, the chairman indicated that they have a series of committees to which people are elected or chosen. The executive committee, with a total membership of 15, represents the top decision-making group. It is also to this body that appeals are made when disagreements arise over some issue. It appears that the organization has become quite adept at conflict resolution. Other committees include finance, social, agriculture, and building. Every villager must work under a committee (of his choice); and to ensure that everyone takes advantage of this system, attendance is taken regularly. Salaries paid are based on compilations from attendance records.

Each Ujamaa village seems to have one area of specialty which contributes most heavily towards raising their economic base. At Kerege, the people were constructing a cashew processing factory. They are projecting an income of well over 17,000 shillings (\$2,429) per month. The project will begin with a skeletal work force of about 240 people and increase periodically until they reach a maximum of 2,000 workers.



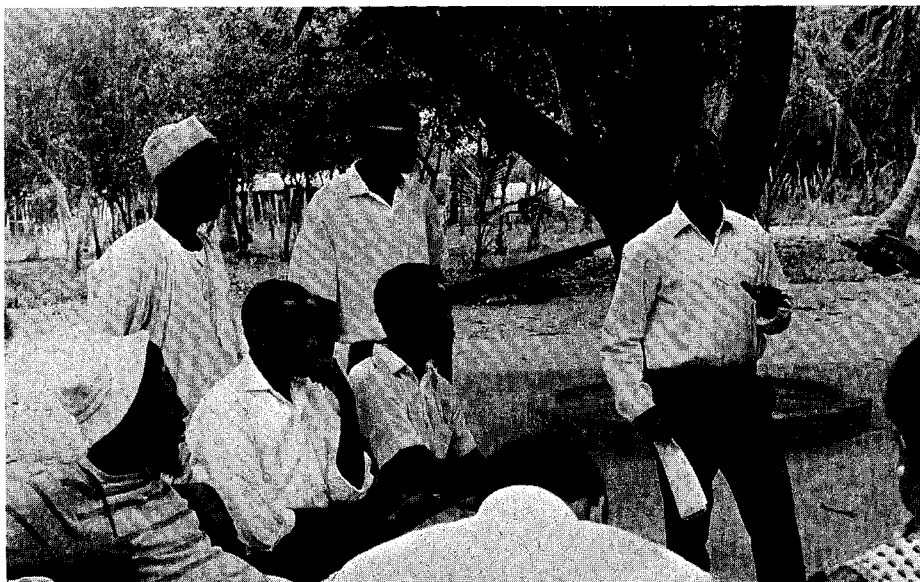
Village Chairman



Residence



Cashew factory



Pre-visit
Orientation

Our hosts very proudly showed us the different buildings and equipment which will be used to process the cashews. We were also introduced to a consultant from India who has been contracted by the Government of Tanzania to assist in the development of the factory. The consultant, after a brief introduction, related that they will start processing around 500 tons of raw nuts each year, which after processing should yield around 125 tons of marketable produce. During those months when there is a slack in work because of the lack of rain, the people are engaged in soapmaking, weaving, log cutting, carpentry and extensive building. After touring the factory, we were shown other social service areas, including the dispensary and school.

All the teachers in the village are provided by the National Service Unit. They are all certified. In addition to a basic education, the children are schooled in the philosophy and practical aspects of Ujamaa, such as farming techniques. At any point where schooling is no longer desirable or possible, the student because of this functional aspect of his education is qualified to take a position in almost any area of work in the village. The curriculum is also geared to meet the needs of those students seeking college level education. Reading comprehension programs are also offered during the evening hours for those persons who must work during the regular school hours.

It is not unusual for a person to put in 10-15 hours on the shamba (farm), and a couple of hours of schooling, followed by a committee meeting. It was reported that the women, especially, found it very difficult to stay awake during the meetings. Not only do they work in the fields and other places with as much effort as the men, but they also have the responsibility of the children. Recently, however, the women have started cooperatives where they exchange babysitting. This arrangement allows each woman to participate in most of the activities of the village.

Whereas the school teachers are products of the outside community, the medical staff is made up of people from the village who have been trained in the medical centers of Dar es Salaam. The basic staff consists of a midwife, several medical aides and a registered nurse. Severe medical cases are referred to the District Medical Officer in Dar es Salaam. At the end of this year, the village will decide after a thorough evaluation whether it might be feasible to have a more sophisticated medical setup. Heretofore, it has not been practical or economical owing to the small population.

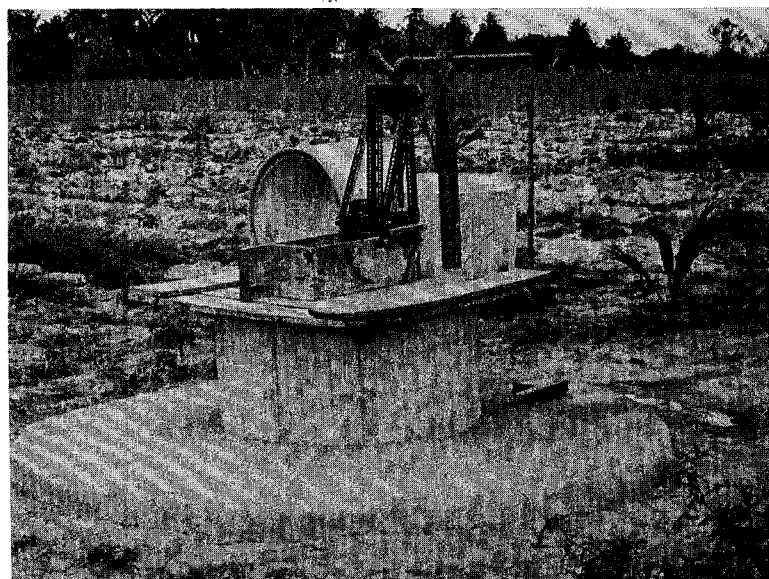
The final part of our tour of the village consisted of seeing the residential areas. In addition to being responsible for the communal land, each villager is given two to three acres of land for his own personal use. Most of the inhabitants are engaged in the raising of animals and crops which they sell in the open market. As long as one remains a part of the Ujamaa village he is free to carry on such transactions, but as soon as he decides to leave, or is dismissed by the group, the land reverts back to communal land. It is rare, however, that people willingly give up their land after spending time and energy cultivating it.

While the village at Kerege is representative of most of the Ujamaa locations, I also had the privilege of visiting an atypical village established for the mentally ill and destitute. The village is located across the harbor from Dar es Salaam approximately 17 miles inland. This particular village at Mwera developed from a reaction that the mentally ill have the same rights as any other citizens of Tanzania seeking to better themselves in the true spirit of Ujamaa. It was further felt that they too could become productive if they were placed in the right setting and were presented with the type of tasks which they could handle without too much stress. Instead of being the product of the planning of its prospective inhabitants, Mwera Ujamaa village was established by one of the general hospitals in Dar es Salaam--Muhimbili. Muhimbili is one of the largest teaching hospitals in East Africa. It is an eight hundred bed unit with over 1,000 employees. The mental unit at Muhimbili, under the guidance of a psychiatrist, Dr. Charles R. Swift, has undertaken responsibility for Mwera village. Although the village follows the Ujamaa doctrine and carries the title, it has not reached the level of functioning that makes it eligible for Governmental support. It operates on what the general hospital can share and from donations and contributions from outside sources. Although very Spartan in appearance, it is truly a therapeutic community.

According to some of the hospital officials, many of the patients are products of rapid urbanization. They are unable to cope with the social changes involved in the rural-urban movement. A large number also come from secondary schools. It is felt that the strain of the many school examinations has taken its toll of a great portion of the younger population. As is true with almost any new program, once the word gets around that something new is being offered, people just seem to gather from all parts of the territory.



Chicken Coop

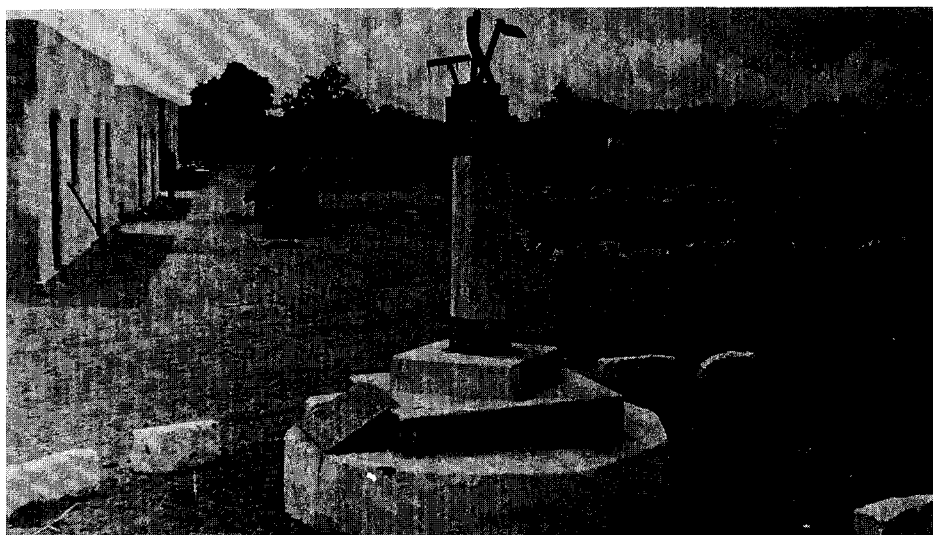


Above: Self-styled
irrigation system



Attendant at
Mwera

Right: Entrance
to Mwera



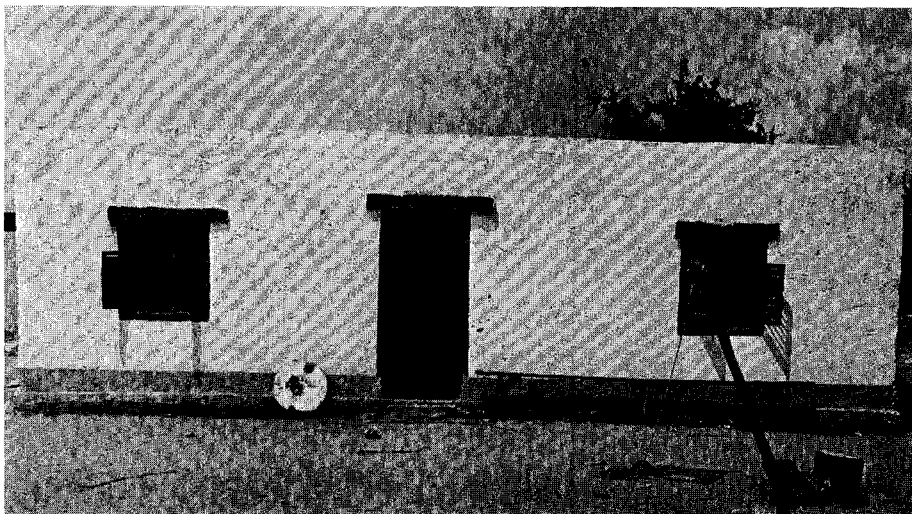
The village at Mwera has a capacity for 75 patients. It caters to both sexes, although the males seem to dominate the caseload. The living quarters, which accommodate 3-6 to a dorm, are spread around a courtyard affair; thus every patient has a view of all the other quarters. In the true spirit of the Ujamaa code, everyone in the village is required to work. Accordingly, every patient is given a routine to follow. Besides being responsible for the cleanliness of their personal possessions as well as living area, the patients are engaged in work, such as clearing forest--to make way for further expansion of the village--farming, and construction work. They also have a small number of animals which they hope will increase in the near future. They now have 50 chickens and 13 goats.

There are no formal therapeutic programs for the patients--their activities are strictly reality oriented. That is, if one doesn't work, he doesn't eat; if he doesn't help build, he doesn't have a place to sleep. The same holds true for recreational activity; the patients create their own. While we were there, we watched some of the patients playing checkers using old bottle caps and another game--African in origin--baa, using round stones as the movable pieces.

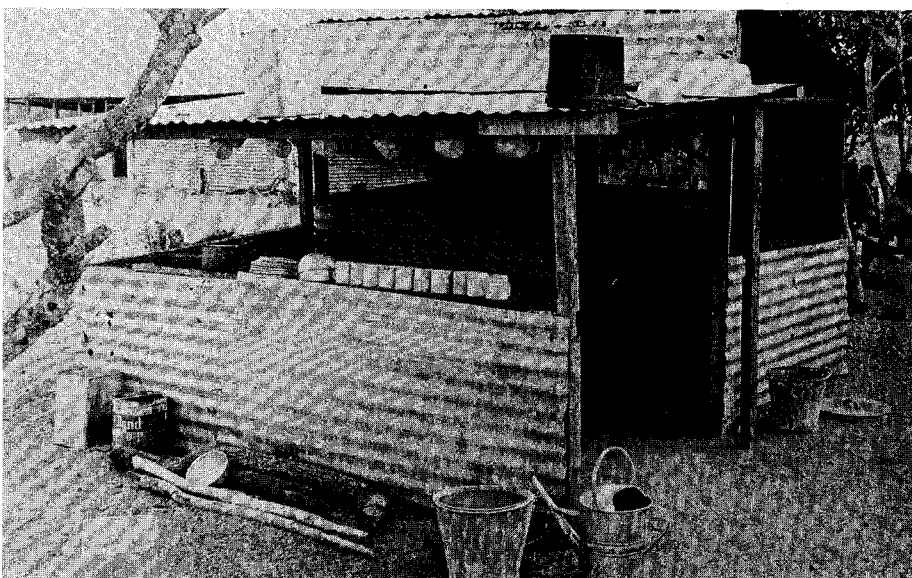
When asked if these basic principles were carried out, the officials gave an emphatic yes. In defense of this hard core system, one of the attendants quickly noted that it has to be this way because of the limited staff of three people-- one trained medical assistant and two on-the-job aides. Because the "reality therapy" is effective, it will continue. However, as technical staff and equipment are added, program alterations will be considered.

The rate of success of the village, measured in terms of release and readmission, has been excellent. The present program seems to offer the respite that is needed by the people who come. When the patient feels he is ready, he may transfer to another Ujamaa village. The transition thus far has been an easy one for many patients.

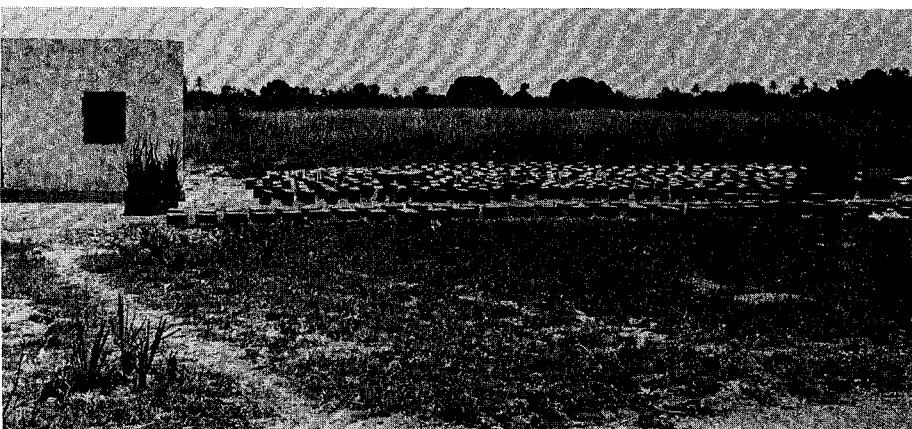
In view of what I had experienced at the two villages visited, my impressions were certainly biased towards feeling that the Ujamaa organization was without major problems. After expressing this observation, I was quickly informed by one of the organizational officials that this certainly is not the case. Each day seems to bring a whole set of new problems. The similarities of the different villages, however, does allow for a great deal of sharing and problem avoidance. It was decided during the early stages of development that not only individuals would pass on acquired information and skills but this practice would also take place at the organizational level. It has paid off well.



Typical dormitory



Kitchen facilities



Home-made bricks for building

The inability of certain areas to attract personnel is one of the major problems which the Government is attempting to help solve. The voluntary membership makes it difficult for the more remote areas to compete with districts which offer proximity to central service centers, such as Dar es Salaam. Along this same line, however, the Government in its quest to see that every area meets with as much success as possible has sometimes been premature in its assistance programs. In some areas it has made the villagers dependent in problem solving. Whenever work projects become a little complex, the operation remains at a standstill until help is sent by the Government. This willingness to intercede on the part of the Government has also caused some areas to be a little less careful than they would be ordinarily. One prime example cited is the giving of rations. In response, crops in many areas have not been given the attention needed for a successful harvest. Other times, the Government has gone to the expense of tractor cultivation where it has proven to be economically infeasible. It has meant not only the expense involved in such an operation, but it has also served to cut down employment possibilities. This situation has occurred in areas where unemployment has been a problem.

Another problem cited entails poor planning on the part of the villagers prior to initiating a particular project. Very few conduct feasibility studies regarding such things as types of crops, crop markets, or protection of crops from wild animals. Other examples of poor planning or incomplete planning include poor logistics of crops in relation to secondary processing sources, and the inability to compensate for time delay involved in producing and experiencing gain. One village which planted coconuts failed to realize that it would be necessary to have some form of temporary subsistence for the five to seven years needed for the coconut crop to develop. These and other experiences have convinced most of the people involved with the Ujamaa villages that thorough planning is one of the vital needs for the true success of the communal project.

In answer to many of the problems that have cropped up during the past few years, one of the officials presented a paper at an East African Agricultural Economics Society Conference, held in Dar es Salaam. He listed the following requirements in order to ensure a fairly successful venture regarding Ujamaa villages:

- a. Economic planning of Ujamaa activities, to ensure that the potential of development through cooperation is realized, and that the policy does not lead to more equity at the cost of a lower rate of growth.

b. Integration of Ujamaa planning with district, regional and national plans.

c. Availability of necessary Government resources (both staff and finance), while ensuring that they are allocated to areas where they will be productively used, and that they are designed to create self-reliance rather than dependence.

d. Political education and mobilization of both farmers and leaders.

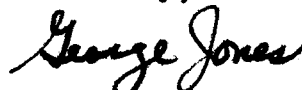
e. Training at all levels for the skills required in socialist development.

f. Research into all practical, social and economic aspects of Ujamaa development.

When I asked this same official about the future of Ujamaa villages, he would not venture a guess. "One thing for sure," he commented, "we don't expect the growth patterns to be as rapid as they have been in the past." He felt, however, that the experience gained during the past years would certainly facilitate a more sound and viable program for future growth.

Throughout this whole experience, I could not help but draw parallels between the Ujamaa Village programs and the Mississippi project at Mound Bayou (GJ-1). Although the Ujamaa village scheme has less access to planning and development resources than the Tufts Delta Project, the fervor and emotional spirit is comparable. It would be most enjoyable to witness a session where the people of both groups convened to discuss and relate hopes, fears and delights in becoming independent. To me, this would be the height of true cultural exchange.

Sincerely,



George Jones

Received in New York on November 9, 1970.