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## MALAWI'S SEARCH FOR FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY

### Part I: Resource Endowment and Developmental Constraints

by J. Gus Liebenow

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It is difficult to be optimistic about the prospects of Africa providing sufficient food to feed its growing population. The Sahelian drought of the 1970s, which left a quarter of a million dead in its wake, captured the sympathies of the entire world, as has the current problem of feeding the several million East African refugees who are the victims of civil war and international conflict. Less dramatic, but in the long run more significant, is the steady toll of undernourishment and an unbalanced diet taken in the form of high infant mortality rates, loss of economic productivity, and susceptibility to the many tropical and temperate zone diseases that afflict the residents of the continent. In the aftermath of exuberance about African independence, gnawing doubts exist on the part of economists and others about the ability of African states to achieve their ambitious development goals without massive infusions of external aid.

The proverbial Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, of course, are not strangers to the African continent. What makes the current era different is not merely the magnitude of the problem and the wider world's greater awareness of the African condition. It is the realization on the part of Africans themselves that they need no longer accept poverty, starvation, and disease in a fatalistic fashion. While others may doubt the "inevitability of progress," many Africans remain convinced that a better way of life is both possible and imminent.

Despite this optimism, there are no simple diagnoses of African ills, nor easy routes to their cure. Many of the political, social, economic, and environmental problems of Africa relate directly or indirectly to the problems of food. High prices for staples, the mishandling of famine relief, and basic food shortages have been the root causes of great political instability in Ethiopia, Niger, Uganda, and Liberia—to name just a few recent cases. With population growth rates in excess of 3 percent per annum, with urbanization proceeding at twice the global average, and with a staggering increase in population density relative to arable land, the leaders of many African states find themselves coping with mounting crises that almost defy solution.

Few of the African states possess the mineral resources either for significant industrialization or even for the creation of export economies which would permit them to purchase abroad the food, clothing, and shelter required by their people. In basing development plans on an expansion of both domestic and export agriculture, moreover, one begins with the hard facts that 44 percent of Africa's land surface is subject to recurrent drought, 11 percent is in danger of desertification, and vast portions of the remaining arable land have become the lair of the mosquitoes, flies, and other organisms responsible for a range of diseases that affect human life and productivity.

Population pressure, moreover, means that even the land which has a reasonable guarantee of adequate rainfall is being overworked and threatened with erosion and loss of fertility.

As Uma Lele of the World Bank has pointed out, the rate of growth of African food production has lagged behind that of other world regions—less than 2 percent per annum during the period 1960-1975, compared with 3 percent for Asia and over 3.5 percent for Latin America for the same period.<sup>1</sup> During the latter part of the 1970s, food production actually declined by 1.4 percent in most African states, forcing them to import basic food staples. The 2 million ton food deficit for Africa registered for 1975 is projected to increase to 24 million by 1990. Officials of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predict that by the year 2000, Africa will have to import 39 percent of its cereal requirements unless drastic steps are taken to alter techniques of production, carry out rigorous population control programs, and reverse the flow of rural to urban migration.

Exactly how African states would pay for the imported food is another difficult problem, given the rising level of expectations. For these expectations must be measured against the escalating costs of oil, fertilizer, capital equipment, and other ingredients of agricultural modernization—compounded by the decreasing global prices for the agricultural and other commodities Africa exports. Indeed the situation is so bleak that Mr. Eduardo Saouma, Director-general of the FAO, analyzed the world food crisis in 1981 to be the worst since the start of the Sahelian drought of 1973 and predicted that by the year 2000 the long-range implications of the crisis would be that four-fifths of the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa would be living in absolute poverty.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to natural forces, human factors also play a substantial role in the African food crisis. It remains politically popular to attribute most of the failures in agricultural and other forms of economic development to the heritage of the colonial era, to the exploitative policies of the developed capitalist states, and even to the economists in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Unquestionably, some of the problems of African food production are the consequence, *inter alia*, of the alienation of the best land to European settlers; the over-emphasis upon the export sector to the neglect of domestic food production and local processing industries; and the failure of colonial entrepre-

neurs and administrators to train Africans to perform critical developmental roles. Manifestations of neocolonialism, involving not only the former colonial powers but also socialist as well as other capitalist states outside Africa, have further complicated the dependency of Africa upon external forces. The members of OPEC, moreover, while generally sympathetic to the plight of developing states in Africa, have nevertheless contributed to a dramatic rise in cost not only for petroleum products but also fertilizers, capital equipment, and indeed everything else that has to be imported. Thus, whether by accident or design, the gap between the standard of living of people in the developed states and those in Africa appears to continue to widen rather than diminish.

It is not enough to blame external forces. After almost a quarter of a century of independence, some of the burden of responsibility must be shared by African leaders as well as by the African masses. Of necessity, the balance sheet on continuing underdevelopment must include fratricidal conflict; widespread official corruption; misplaced priorities in economic development; reluctance to alter traditional agricultural and herding practices; massive imports of consumer goods; and uneven regional development. The record must also include the propensity to pursue politically popular rather than intellectually brave courses on urban growth, family planning, income distribution, and skill-orientation education.

We have reached a point where it should be apparent to most observers that political rhetoric and good intentions are not sufficient to resolve Africa's food problems. The crisis is compounded in the 1980s as Mozambique is faced with food rationing; Zambia must engage in massive importations of food; Tanzania lacks adequate grain storage facilities even when the harvests are reasonable; and the problems of malnutrition are evident not only in true disaster areas, such as Uganda and Somalia, but even in states of more general abundance, such as South Africa. Indeed, of the 28 states the Director General of FAO suggested face severe food problems in 1981, Africa accounts for 22. It is for this reason that attention is directed in this paper to one of the few states in sub-Saharan Africa which appears to have a more favorable record in its efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. Indeed, some analysts have even boldly referred to this exception as the "Malawi miracle."

### The Malawi Case

The surprising aspect of the Malawi accomplishment in food production is that the United Nations in 1980 counted it among the 36 members of the "Fourth World," that is, those lowest income countries at or below the subsistence level of survival. Of the 46 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi ranked tenth from the bottom in terms of GNP. This Central African country has neither the resources for industrial development nor the hopes for the prosperity which could come from the export of minerals needed by the developed world. Thus, as Julian Burgess, a writer for *African Business*, states:

*The success story of the Malawi economy is the success story of farming. It enabled Malawi to grow at an average in real terms of 6.7 percent per annum in the 1970s. This must be some sort of record for non-oil producers in Africa, if not the world as a whole.*<sup>3</sup>

The preponderance of agriculture in the Malawian economy is revealed in the 1977 census: it shows over 83 percent of the adults in a population of 5.6 million to be engaged in agriculture and related occupations (hunting, forestry, or fishing). Agriculture also accounts for over 94 percent of export earnings. Favorable growth rates in both export and domestic agriculture contributed substantially to the rise in the GNP between 1970 and 1976; going from 300 to 700 at market prices.<sup>4</sup> Even an otherwise critical analyst of the Malawian political system was obliged recently to note, relative to the Malawian economy, that

*Sizable foreign exchange earnings from commodity exports have made Malawi an exception to the Third World rule of massive government indebtedness. . . . Western nations [are] attracted by . . . a relative lack of corruption in the implementation of aid schemes. . . . The nation is self-sufficient in food production and exports rice and maize to Zimbabwe and Zambia.*<sup>5</sup>

That anonymous critic also commented that, despite the inflation generated by rising oil costs, "Malawi has far to go before it reaches the stage of acute economic crisis faced by its neighbors."

Further words of praise for Malawi's agricultural program have come from Uma Lele of the World Bank. In a tough-minded critique of African agricultural development, she argued that, despite the rhetoric, "most African countries are not giving priority to the development of peasant agriculture. There is not even much understanding of what is required to develop it."

By way of contrast, Uma Lele singles out Malawi and two other sub-Saharan African states (Ivory Coast and Kenya) as exceptions to her generalization that the high and worsening rural-urban income disparities are the consequence of the fact that "agricultural sectors have been stagnant or slow growing even relative to the poorly performing industry and service sectors."<sup>6</sup> Some evidence of the success of Malawi's agricultural program—including its facilities for storing and preserving maize and other foodstuffs—was dramatically revealed in 1980 when Malawi's ability to withstand the full impact of the East African drought stood in sharp contrast to the performance in most of the neighboring countries.<sup>7</sup>

The presence in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe, of an increasing number of overseas investors, donor agency representatives, and United Nations officials attests to the broad interest in the Malawian achievement. Interest stems not only from the agricultural base of Malawian modernization; it arises as well from a fascination with the ability of President H. Kamuzu Banda to "swim against the socialist tide" in African ideological terms. Banda, moreover, boldly elected to establish both economic and diplomatic ties with South Africa as a calculated strategy for growth and self-sufficiency. Finally, Banda is one of the few African leaders who has been able to slow the pace of rural to urban migration, which elsewhere in the continent has produced massive urban unemployment and the removal of laborers from the rural sector, where they could have contributed to food and other agricultural production.<sup>8</sup>

### Constraints on Malawian Development

The accomplishments of postindependence agricultural planning in Malawi are all the more remarkable when one considers the various geographic, historical, cultural, and other constraints on development. Indeed, efforts to isolate unifactoral causes for the success of Malawi's agricultural programs invariably suffer on more detailed analysis. Given the prominence of drought in explaining the failures of agriculture in the Sahel in the 1970s, for example, and in Tanzania and other East African countries recently, Malawi's more favorable water resource base is cited as a factor in its success. It is true that the country generally has enjoyed close to 52 inches of rainfall annually in recent years, and furthermore, that one-sixth of the country's domain consists of one of Africa's largest freshwater lakes. On closer analysis, however, one

realizes that 98 percent of Malawi's rainfall occurs within a 7-month period (October to April), leaving almost drought-like conditions for the rest of the year. Figures on the national average, moreover, conceal extremes ranging from a high of 95 inches per year at Nkhata Bay on the lake to a low of 27 in Kasungu district. Some of the heaviest rain occurs in the high mountain areas where relatively little crop cultivation occurs. While it is recognized that historically the shores of Lake Malawi served as a refuge during times of severe drought in Eastern and Central Africa, its contemporary relevance is limited. The fact is most Malawians live in the higher upland plateau and at too great a distance for the water to be carried or piped from the lake at an economic cost.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, water for agricultural purposes poses roughly the same constraints in Malawi as it does in neighboring countries.

The arbitrary fashion in which colonial boundaries were drawn in the nineteenth century division of Africa also poses constraints. Like several of its neighbors, Malawi is a landlocked country, with its closest accesses to the sea being the Indian Ocean ports of Beira and Nacala in Mozambique, which lie at distances of 322 and 564 kilometers respectively from the Malawian borders. Given the rising cost of petroleum required for land transport, as well as the costs of constructing and maintaining roads and rail links, this is a considerable developmental disadvantage. Malawi's elongated shape, moreover, has complicated the task of administrative and political control as well as the achievement of balanced regional development. The country is only 198 kilometers wide at its broadest point but 920 kilometers from north to south.

Economic and political constraints also emerge from what some observers have called Malawi's "pear-shaped" development. That is, the historic expansion of European missionary, trading, and administrative interests from Southern Africa in most of the colonial era produced a concentration of economic activity around the commercial capital of Blantyre and the administrative capital at Zomba. The central region was relatively neglected. Other than mission education at Livingstonia, the north—or "dead North," as colonial administrators called it—was viewed as a source of mine labor, but little else. It was to correct this regional imbalance that Banda—while serving a prison sentence for his opposition to colonial authority—

planned to establish Lilongwe as the capital of independent Malawi. Its location at the approximate center of the country has dramatically shifted development in a northward direction.

The arbitrary demarcation of colonial boundaries also left Malawi with one of the highest densities of population in Africa. With its population of 5.6 million located on 94,276 square kilometers of land, Malawi has a crude density of 59 persons per square kilometer. This gross figure, of course, understates the case since it masks the fact that much of Malawi's land is not arable. Nor does it take into account that the regional densities range up to 148 persons per square kilometer in the central region and 214 in the southern region. In two of the districts in the south—Chiradzulu and Thyolo—the densities are 566 and 462 persons per square kilometer, respectively. The situation has been aggravated dramatically within the period since the 1966 and 1977 censuses. Experiencing an annual growth rate of 2.7 percent per annum between 1966 and 1977, the national population density figure rose from 53 to 59 persons per square kilometer in that brief period.<sup>10</sup>

Given the absence of resources needed for industrial growth (oil, coal, or iron), or even exportable mineral resources beyond limestone and other building stones, Malawi's development is closely tied to agriculture.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the availability of arable land relative to a growing rural sector becomes critical. The centrality of agriculture and related activities in terms of employment is demonstrated in Table 1.

The role agriculture plays in export earnings today is revealed by the fact that 89 percent of the exports, in terms of value, are agricultural. The estate crops of tobacco, sugar, and tea now outrank by far the groundnuts, rice, and other export products of the smallholder sector.

### The Colonial Legacy

The bias of the colonial administration during most of the British era (c. 1890-1964) was clearly in favor of the one percent of the population which was European in origin and was engaged in estate cultivation in the south. Labor policy, plant research, and development of transport infrastructure clearly had a European tilt. The coercive nature of taxation as well as the direct involvement of government in recruitment facilitated the flow of cheap labor to the European estates. One of the worst manifestations was the legal sanctioning of the *thangata* system, under

Table 1  
Occupations by Industry

Industry	Total numbers	Males	Females
National—all industries	2,288,351	1,231,812	1,056,539
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	1,932,122	936,099	996,023
Mining and Quarrying	2,174	2,140	34
Manufacturing	82,291	67,723	14,668
Electricity—gas & water	4,213	4,003	210
Construction	47,452	44,983	2,467
Wholesale, retail, restaurant & hotel	62,608	50,150	12,458
Transport, storage and communications	23,400	22,776	624
Financing, insurance real estate & business	4,494	3,824	670
Community, social and personal services	82,523	67,170	15,353
Industry not stated	46,974	21,942	14,032
National—rural, all industries	2,133,576	1,108,884	1,023,692
National—urban, all industries	154,775	122,928	31,847

Source: *Malawi Census, 1977.*

which resident Malawians supplied virtually free labor to the estate owners in return for the “privilege” of cultivating what had once been their ancestral lands. Not only were the tobacco, tea, and other crops produced on the European estates of little relevance to the food and other needs of Malawians, but Malawians were legally barred from cultivating coffee, flue-cured tobacco, and other crops which might put them in competition with Europeans.

The majority of African cultivators during the colonial period remained predominantly in the subsistence sector. Involvement in the cash economy was partial (that is, crops were grown for tax and other purposes while farmers continued to produce subsistence food crops) or intermittent (that is, young adult males temporarily left subsistence farming and involved themselves for limited periods in wage employment in a European economic enterprise either in Malawi or abroad).<sup>12</sup>

A further characteristic of colonial agriculture policies and practices was the reliance upon force as a key instrument in achieving innovation. Compulsory recruitment of labor for work on

European estates was common. As was true of other British territories, moreover, each new effort to improve productivity, control plant diseases, or cope with soil erosion on African plots was accompanied by a fine or threat of imprisonment for those who failed to comply. The orders often flew in the face of common sense, such as those requiring the uprooting of healthy crops to prevent the spread of a plant disease, or the British bias against slash and burn cultivation. Moreover, the orders were often issued without the benefit of demonstration plots or even rational explanations. Hence, agricultural innovation tended to be distrusted, and the policies led to a negative bias toward farming on the part of many younger Malawians.<sup>13</sup> The propensity toward compulsion as a necessary ingredient in carrying out the British colonial “mission” is epitomized by the comments of the Director of Agriculture of Nyasaland in 1956:

*One cannot expect an agrarian revolution to take place from scratch in a few years, but one may reasonably be excused mild impatience when, with a little hard work and timely attention to a few elementary agricultural practices, yields of most crops could be raised by 50 percent.*

*straight away. The disappointment would be easier to bear if time were not so pressing, but as each year passes and pressure on the land goes up, the difficulty of pulling out of the slough of subsistence cultivation increases.*

*In an effort to gain on time a measure of compulsion has been used for many years in soil conservation. The policy is vindicated by results. Three quarters of a million acres of arable land have been protected from serious erosion during the past eight years. Posterity will appreciate that result which could not have been achieved by any other means. Neither should the achievement be measured in statistical terms alone for many have grown to appreciate the wisdom of what they were made to do and others have acquired a good habit although not always understanding the full significance of it.<sup>14</sup>*

Colonial efforts at innovation were also often capricious in nature. My micro-study of the Newala district of Tanganyika documented the way that innovation in natural resource management reflected more the whims and prejudices of the British commissioner of the day rather than the broad interests of local cultivators. Seldom did the administrators take into account African "conventional wisdom" regarding the promise and limitations of their physical environment regarding cultivation. As each new commissioner was posted to the district, the African cultivators had only to wait patiently to discover the latest version of the "white man's madness," and then adjust accordingly, forgetting all the innovations of the preceding commissioners. At the macro-level in Nyasaland, the half century of colonial experience with the growing of maize as a cash export crop illustrates this tendency toward caprice.<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing the potential of maize as a crop suitable for export to Europe as well as a device for getting cash into African hands for tax and other purposes, the Department of Agriculture in 1910 began to encourage smallholder production. Although inadequate transport, improper drying techniques, and the 1912 drought gave the experiment a shaky start, the demand for foodstuffs during World War I provided a stimulant to maize production. Once the war had ended, however, the demand for maize abruptly evaporated, and the department once more shifted its attention to European-grown tobacco and tea.

Between the wars, the vagaries in production and export of maize sometimes reflected rainfall or locust infestations, but more frequently it

mirrored the distressed state of the British economy or the whimsy and demands upon the time and attention of understaffed colonial administrators. During the depression the export of maize and maize flour in 1931 was 311,452 pounds (at a value of £558). The next year maize exports dropped to 5,400 pounds (at a value of only £9). Although maize picked up slightly in the ensuing years, it was not until World War II that demand skyrocketed, reaching a high of 7,805,917 pounds in 1942.

At the end of the war, demand once more dropped. The attention of the department turned to other crops, the drought of 1949 caught the protectorate with almost no maize reserves, and a severe famine gripped the area. In response, the government in 1950 initiated a policy of purchasing every ear of maize presented for sale. This led to a record export crop of 28,500 short tons, the bulk of which was shipped to Southern Rhodesia. Almost in glee, the Director of Agriculture proclaimed in 1950 that "maize is now the principal cash crop of the Protectorate."<sup>16</sup> By 1953 maize exports had climbed to 40,000 tons. Caprice reasserted itself in 1958 as the government elected to curtail maize purchases, arguing that the 1950 policy had brought too much marginal land under cultivation and had threatened Nyasaland with becoming a monoculture. Export of maize, moreover, had depleted local reserves and made the protectorate vulnerable to a repeat of the 1949 famine. Marketing facilities were intentionally withdrawn from areas of low yield, and prices were pegged so low that growers refused to sell their maize at two-thirds of a penny per pound. Limiting production of maize continued to be British policy until independence came in 1964, and it was indeed a factor in generating support for nationalist opposition to British rule.<sup>17</sup>

While the various twists and turns in British policy may have made good sense to colonial administrators who were responding to global prices, shifting demands within the empire, or even enhanced knowledge regarding the use of fertilizers or crop rotation, the switches in policy made little sense to the isolated smallholder in a remote village of colonial Nyasaland. As a consequence, the sustaining of agricultural innovation and securing a commitment to cash crop cultivation among smallholders became more difficult to accomplish once Africans had inherited the reins of power.

Finally, the colonial legacy must include the harsh facts that the revenues secured from the





*Traditional maize storage* (Photo courtesy Malawi Information Department)

sale of agricultural commodities or the payment of hut and poll taxes by Africans did little to transform the conditions of life for rural Africans. The major infrastructural changes benefited either the government itself or the small expatriate community of merchants, planters, and missionaries. Public expenditures on health, education, African agricultural and veterinary services, and other service programs were meager. In many instances the protectorate government expected these services to be provided by the Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, or other Christian missions.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, one way the colonial administration dealt with unemployment, creating a cash-oriented population, and handling health and other service programs was to encourage the “export” of young Malawians to work in the mines of Southern Africa.

#### **External Labor Migration**

External migration during the colonial period had a profound impact upon Malawian culti-

vators. Indeed, one of the final moves of the British administration would have been to convert Malawi into a permanent pool of migratory labor for the benefit of white economic interests in the ill-fated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Recruitment of Malawian labor for work in Southern Africa had commenced in earnest around 1934, recruiting workers from Mzimba and Kasungu in the central and northern regions.<sup>19</sup> Professor Robert Boeder suggests that in the peak years of recruitment, as many as 10 percent of adult Malawians were absent from the country. Only part of the story is revealed in the data in Table 2.

The 1977 census data suggest that a higher proportion of laborers were engaged through unofficial channels. In the 1977 census, over 17 percent of the 15- to 50-year-old population of both sexes had spent some part of their lives working abroad. With respect to just the 12 months preceding the 1977 census, 208,068 Malawians indicated they had been working or

**Table 2**  
**Malawians Recruited under Contract,**  
**for Labor in South African Mines**

1968.....	35,036
1969.....	40,992
1970.....	61,622
1971.....	65,951
1972.....	81,628
1973.....	76,227
1974 (through April).....	31,650
1975.....	.....
1976.....	.....
1977 (through December).....	18,206
1978.....	16,431

Source: *Malawi Statistical Yearbook, 1979* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1980).

visiting Mozambique, Tanzania, or Zambia, whereas another 79,882 had been in other countries, primarily South Africa. To many Malawians, particularly the young adult males, labor migration has become a way of life and serves as a rite of passage comparable to the circumcision rites at puberty.<sup>20</sup>

In defense of officially sanctioned recruitment, it has been argued by both colonial and post-independence governments that migration provides government with foreign exchange earnings that would not have otherwise been realized. In the absence of industrial forms of employment at home, moreover, it provides the marginal cultivator with the cash needed to purchase consumer items, pay school fees, and in other ways participate in the cash economy. The wives and other dependents who remain behind in the rural sector also benefit through the dispatching of remittances via postal money orders and other channels. Just using the figures for the officially sanctioned recruitment efforts, a total of kwacha 29 million (one kwacha = US\$1.18, 1981) was transmitted in 1974-75 through the South African Employment Bureau of the Malawian government, which banked earnings until the migrants return.<sup>21</sup> Since census data and researchers suggest that many laborers are recruited through unofficial channels, the total amount remitted home in a given year or earnings repatriated in the form of consumer goods by returning migrants must be substantial.

The balance sheet on migratory labor, however, is highly complex. On the negative side, the element of coercion was a key factor in the early

period and may still be so today in the form of family or peer pressure. In the colonial period, the threat of fine or imprisonment for failing to pay one's hut and poll taxes in cash certainly propelled otherwise reluctant young males into the migratory experience. Other physical consequences also emerged: coming from a milder climate, many of the Malawians were reported by South African mine owners to be more susceptible to pneumonia, tuberculosis, and other respiratory illnesses.

The social consequence of migration is partly revealed in the 1977 census data which show a 48 to 52 differential between males and females at the national level. Indeed, the absence from the country of young males on two- to three-year contracts causes a considerable disruption in family organization. Even today, among the poorest strata of Malawian society, females often must struggle to combine both male and female economic and social roles in the absence of the mine-laboring husband from the homestead.

In terms of domestic economic development, the advantages of labor migration must be set against the losses sustained by the absence of healthy young males who could be contributing their talents to improvement and expansion of agriculture and the related fishing and forestry sectors. Survey research on the part of several social scientists does not reveal that the returned migrant is a more innovative farmer than one who remains at home or that he had acquired any skills that can be usefully be channeled into development efforts at home. As my own data from Tanzania suggest, the Malawian returnee often "blows his earnings" on consumer items and is quickly reabsorbed into rural life.

Given the mixed consequences of external labor migration it is not surprising that the policies and postures of the Banda government have undergone adjustment in the period since independence. Initially, Banda opted not to follow the lead of Tanzania in curtailing all labor recruitment efforts involving contact with white supremacist regimes in Southern Africa. Banda argued that Malawi was a poor country with only land and people as its primary resources. If, at the time of independence, the only way his government could help feed the people as well as secure the needed additional revenue to fund health, education, and agricultural programs was to continue labor recruitment, then his government fully intended to do so. On the other hand, as economic opportunities did develop at home



through agricultural growth, the expansion of processing industries (rice mills, textile mills, fruit canning, and the like), and the construction of the new capital at Lilongwe, Malawi has reduced its export of mine labor. Indeed, in 1974, using the occasion of the crash of a plane carrying Malawian workers to South Africa, Banda brought recruitment efforts to a complete halt. As Table 2 reveals, the resumption of official recruitment in 1977 has been at a considerably reduced scale. And the figures in Table 3 indicate a declining interest in labor migration, suggesting that internal growth is closer to the take-off stage than earlier realized.

### The Two-pronged Development Strategy

The government of Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda, which assumed power on July 6, 1964, did not entirely reject the legacy of British colonialism, and Nyasaland's constitutional position as a protectorate has had a lasting impact on agricultural development. In contrast with Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, where a major portion of the best arable land was literally confiscated by European economic interests, the protectorate status did limit land alienation. At the height of colonial rule, the European and Asian community had attained only a fraction of one percent of the population, and only 2 percent of the land was allocated to non-Africans on a freehold or leasehold basis.<sup>22</sup>

Leaving aside the estates, and the extensive mountain tops and forest areas (which are designated as public lands), roughly 80 percent of the land is still being cultivated under customary tenure, with usufructory right of occupancy being the basis for land allocation. Traditional chiefs and elders, who enjoyed official recognition and status under the British policy of Indirect Rule, continue to play a role today in land allocation, even though modern law and recent practices—including land registration—have modified their authority. The amount of land under the control of a given family head is related to his family needs, and to a certain extent the holdings expand and contract as his obligations increase or diminish. Average size landholdings on the part of smallholders are roughly 4.7 acres (1.9 hectares) in the central region, 3.5 acres in the north and 3.2 acres in the south. Rather than consolidated holdings, however, each household head controls a number of land fragments which vary in soil quality and in distance from water sources or village settlements. While less efficient economically, fragmentation has furthered the traditional goal of distributive justice.

In the absence of mass land alienation—and despite the *thangata* sharecropper system which was outlawed after independence—Malawi has been spared the lingering racial conflict of some of its neighbors. Unlike many developing societies, moreover, it has also been spared the problems posed by a landless proletariat.

Table 3

#### Migratory Experience of Malawians, aged 15 and over: 1977

Age Category	Numbers in total national population	Worked abroad on official contract	Worked abroad without official contract
15-19	539,756	1,482	2,583
20-24	447,962	22,698	5,961
25-29	435,695	66,803	11,643
30-34	304,778	52,483	12,731
35-39	275,362	49,290	17,367
40-44	202,733	32,737	19,304
45-49	217,811	35,650	25,469
50-54	146,093	18,941	19,037
50 +	482,077	50,940	76,130

Source: *Malawi Statistical Yearbook, 1979* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1980).

Without such pressures, Malawi has been relatively free to pursue a two-pronged development strategy relative to land.

The first prong of the strategy committed the government to the retention and expansion of the estate sector (a move Robert Mugabe elected to emulate after Zimbabwe's independence, despite his commitment to socialism). The relative efficiency of estate agriculture and its role in export earnings could not be ignored. Increasingly, however, Malawians are displacing or supplementing the expatriate owners and managers, and the tenure in the new acreage is leasehold rather than freehold. This means that the estate cultivator must pay a nominal rent to the traditional authority and that the land still remains within the customary domain. The significance of Banda's continued support of the estates was revealed in 1970, when estate exports surpassed the export earnings from the smallholder sector. Since 1968, moreover, estate farming has experienced a 17 percent annual growth rate, while the smallholder sector has been comparatively sluggish. Estate export earnings have risen from kwacha 9.8 million at independence to a peak of kwacha 107.6 million in 1977.<sup>23</sup>

Some critics of the government's continuing attention to estate agriculture seem to overlook the important connection between success there and success of the government's efforts to improve smallholder farming. As Shankar Acharya, research adviser to the World Bank, points out, it was no coincidence that Malawi, which chose to increase "...its specialization in agricultural exports together with some diversification into new agricultural commodities [is one of the few countries] which sustained the most favorable environment for private peasant agriculture."

Without the exchange earnings from tobacco, sugar, tea, and other exports, Malawi would lack the means to import the fertilizers and other inputs needed to improve smallholder agriculture and to finance the rail and road network linking the village and national economies. Without export earnings Malawi would also lack the means to create the import substitution and agricultural processing industries which are giving it greater economic independence and improved employment opportunities for those who cannot be absorbed into agriculture directly. For no matter how unsatisfactory the conditions of estate employment may be, relative to those of

smallholder tenure, constraints on arable land will simply not permit every adult Malawian to remain a smallholder.

For both economic and political reasons, however, the second prong of the development strategy—the improvement in smallholder agriculture—has assumed greater priority. Malawi, Kenya, and the Ivory Coast are among the few states that have rejected the mechanized state farms or the collectivized village settlement strategies, on the one hand, and the laissez-faire drift with respect to peasant agriculture, on the other. These three states, in the opinion of one World Bank adviser, evidence genuine efforts to increase the productivity of smallholder agriculture by sustaining "...remunerative price incentives for peasant agriculture, while providing government support through the development of transport infrastructure, research, and extension service."<sup>24</sup>

Although smallholder farming is less significant with respect to export earnings, 85 percent of all agricultural production in Malawi actually derives from smallholder activity. The bulk of that activity is the production of maize, beans, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, cassava, rice, wheat, coffee and some raw materials for domestic industry, such as tung oil, cotton, and fire-cured tobacco. Although much of this (estimates range from 50 to 75 percent) is consumed as part of subsistence, a sizable share is marketed through ADMARC (Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation), a government purchasing corporation, for resale in either the domestic or export markets.

The value of smallholder exports (both food and nonfood) climbed from kwacha 12.2 million at independence to a high of kwacha 61.2 million in the bumper crop year of 1977. The value in recent years has averaged kwacha 43.3 million. On balance, smallholder production is directed toward enhancing the income of smallholders as well as the achievement of self-sufficiency in food for both urban and rural residents. There is considerably less emphasis upon smallholder involvement in the export economy. Maize, for example, which is one of the major crops, has not been exported in recent years, in order to build up a famine reserve. The wisdom of this bore fruit in the drought year of 1980.

#### **Incremental Pragmatism**

Dr. Banda's two-pronged strategy has set Malawi on a course of economic development distinct from that of most of its neighbors.

Rather than a grand ideological blueprint, however, Banda's approach might be labeled "incremental pragmatism." Unlike Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zambia, which have with great flourish embarked on a path of socialist development, Malawi has explicitly opted for a course of economic growth that combines many traditional values and institutions with a continuity of the private enterprise and state direction of the economy it inherited from the British. As one critic has acknowledged, the Malawian emphasis on:

*...individualism, the need to expand the scope for entrepreneurial ability, and the willingness to promote the position of the estate enclave in an export oriented economy did not cease to be operative at the end of the colonial period. Capitalist development along the lines and within the framework handed on from the colonial period, was intensified and accelerated rather than interrupted.*<sup>25</sup>

While concern with raising the lot of the rural poor remains a top priority to Dr. Banda, increased production is regarded as a necessary prior step to more equitable distribution. As Dr. David Kimble has commented about Malawi:

*...in Malawi there are few, if any, restrictions on what you can legitimately earn. Here no attempts are made to discourage entrepreneurship or to distribute wealth before it has been created. But if you earn a lot, then whoever you are in Malawi, you can expect to be taxed fairly and systematically....*<sup>26</sup>

The profit motive provides one of the primary stimuli to increased production. Although the estate sector as well as some of the more successful smallholders employ many thousands of Malawians on a wage basis, the overwhelming number of Malawians engaged in agriculture do so as members of private household units. Institutionalized cooperation above the family level is encouraged as traditional forms of interfamily and community cooperation are being augmented by farm clubs, credit groups, and other units concerned with the modernization of agricultural production.

The role of the state in the direction of the economy is substantial nevertheless. The expansion of the road and rail network, the creation of the new capital at Lilongwe, and the distribution of water facilities and governmental services are part of a calculated strategy of economic growth. The marketing activities of

ADMARC (discussed below) are equally central to the continued involvement of smallholders in the growing economy.

It is not merely Dr. Banda's different ideological course that has set him apart from many other African leaders and has earned him the label of "Africa's Odd Man Out"—a title he accepts with amusement. What has irritated his critics is his acceptance of the "historic reality" of South Africa. It has been his position that the capital, technology, and trade potential of Africa's most significant industrial economy can be skillfully manipulated as instruments in improving both the Malawian infrastructure and the standard of living of his people. While stridently condemning the policy of apartheid, Banda appears to have utilized South African economic linkages in achieving a greater degree of economic independence from South Africa—in terms of transport, migratory labor, and food imports—than is enjoyed by the more avowedly liberationist leaders who criticize him. Indeed, the recent acceptance of Malawi as a full-fledged member of the Southern African Development Coordination Committee (SADCC) seems to provide a validation of sorts for the course Banda has pursued.

Complementary to his policy of establishing economic linkages with South Africa, President Banda has forthrightly pursued agricultural development assistance from the other so-called "pariah" states that most other African states have rejected on ideological or strategic grounds. Thus, Israel, Taiwan, and South Korea have become important sources of trade and investment. The Chinese from Taiwan have been particularly significant in the expansion of rice production. In addition, the dependence upon South African economic links has been diminished during the past five years as both public and private sector links have been expanding with respect to the United States, Canada, the members of the European Economic Community, Japan, and other capitalist-oriented states.<sup>27</sup> Most of these non-African linkages are directly or indirectly related to food and agriculture. The EEC, for example, absorbs 70 percent of Malawi's exports. In contrast with the expanded links with other capitalist-oriented states, the only diplomatic or other links Malawi maintains with socialist countries are with several of its immediate African neighbors and, most recently, Algeria and North Korea.

### **Instruments of Development: Self-Reliance, Discipline, and Leadership**

The ability of the Malawi people to achieve self-sufficiency in food production is obviously the result of a complex set of factors. While it is often ill-advised to engage in cultural or national stereotyping, the frequency with which outside observers comment on the industriousness and cooperativeness of the Malawian people cannot be ignored. The agricultural enterprise and industriousness of the "Marawian" people noted by several nineteenth-century European travelers,<sup>28</sup> was echoed constantly by expatriates of broad-based experience in Africa whom I encountered in Malawi in 1980 and 1981. As one Malawian official himself commented, "Hunger and poverty in our culture are associated with shame; we do not regard this merely as a misfortune inflicted on us." Another Malawian commented that "Hunger is our best teacher." Thus, the attitude that one is responsible for his or her own fate appears, without the need for coercion, to be a widely accepted aspect of Malawian culture. One Danish expatriate summarized it: "Others in Africa talk about self-reliance; Malawians are among the few who practice it."

As is true of Ghana, Uganda, and other countries where the people manifested similar traits at an earlier stage, it is apparent that the qualities referred to above can be dissipated in the absence of sound leadership or in the failure of the political system to satisfy basic needs over a long period. Other observers of colonial Nyasaland, during the nationalist struggle of the 1950s for example, commented how the feeling of betrayal with regard to the inclusion of Nyasaland in the white-dominated Federation had brought to the surface long-festering discontent with the arbitrary colonial rules and regulations regarding cultivation and other uses of natural resources.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, at the time that Dr. Banda returned to Nyasaland in 1958 after his long self-imposed exile in America, Europe, and West Africa, there was a decided hostility in Malawi toward the agricultural policies and practices of the British.

Recognizing that the economic survival of Malawi depended upon increasing its agricultural output and productivity, Banda in 1961 accepted the portfolio for agriculture in the pre-independence Cabinet. During most of the period since 1964, moreover, President Banda continued to hold the additional title of Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources, in order to emphasize the importance he attaches to this

activity. The one persistent theme, which is peppered throughout most of his principal speeches during his 17 years as head of government, was laid out in his speech broadcast on July 6, 1966 at the time Malawi changed its status to that of a republic:

*As I have said so many times before, self-government, independence and even Republican status does not mean loafing. It means hard work. Money will not rain on our shoulders like manna from heaven just because we are independent or we are a Republic. No. We have to work hard to develop our country. Money comes from the soil in the form of maize, groundnuts, rice, tobacco, cotton and other products of the soil. We must work hard to produce more maize, more tobacco, more cotton, in order to develop our country.*

Much of the literature on postindependence politics in Africa has concentrated on the role of the single charismatic leader in transforming localized communities, characterized by subsistence economies, into modern nation-states with complex global-oriented economies. Certainly the Malawian case is one of the more striking examples in which the course of development bears the imprint of the thought and dedication of a single individual. The role of Malawi's President as a teacher of his people in the ways of modernity is evident in the daily press, in casual conversations with officials or smallholder farmers, and in the banners along the highways on ceremonial occasions. That this didactic role is most clearly evident in agricultural and natural resource development stems in part from the fact that Banda came to power by mobilizing Malawian hostility to the *thangata* system and to the coercive agriculture rules laid down by colonial administrators. He managed, on the eve of independence, to have the British reject the policy of coercion. Expansion of extension services, the founding of Bunda College of Agriculture, and the frequent evidence of exhortation to transform agriculture demonstrate the commitment to change by education and persuasion—although some forms of coercion must exist in any society.

With the constant example set at the top of the hierarchy, governmental leaders at all levels—from Cabinet Ministers down to traditional chiefs—appear to reinforce the President's emphasis on the virtues of hard work and, in particular, the need for greater efficiency in agricultural production. During my visits to Malawi in 1980 and 1981, hardly a day went by without the Blantyre *Daily Times* reporting new exhortations

along this line. Thus, the M.P. from Rumph East, on tour of his district, urged his constituents to grow macadamia trees as other people have been growing tobacco or tea. He called on every Malawian "to work hard on the land and other fields of development in order to raise the living standards of their families."<sup>30</sup>

The government press is replete with mini-sermons on (1) growing as many crops as they could sell to ADMARC; (2) avoiding the practice of shifting cultivation in favor of adopting more modern methods of farming; and (3) the evils of cutting down trees "wantonly, as this could encourage desert in the country." Similarly, the Speaker of the National Assembly urged his constituents to (1) clear their fields as soon as they finished harvesting; (2) buy fertilizer when money is still left over from the last harvest; and (3) avoid selling their entire crop, so that they have a famine reserve on hand, through the dry season.<sup>31</sup> Such exhortations would become almost a daily litany.

Also central to the transformation of agriculture and the rural way of life has been the leadership role of the Malawi Congress Party. While much has been made in the literature about the mass base of Tanzania's Revolutionary Party (the former TANU), in many respects the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) rivals it in terms of its grassroots support and its utility as a two-way channel of communication between the leaders and the masses. I have already noted in a previous *UFSI Report* on the Malawian clean water project, the key role of the MCP in generating enthusiasm for self-help projects. United Nations and other expatriate advisers have provided additional testimony to this author on its influence at all levels in the implementation of self-help programs. Working through the District Development Committees, the traditional chiefs, and the appropriate ministries,

the Congress Party has aided programs in rice production, the vaccination of children against polio, providing clean water to the rural areas, and other phases of development. One respected scholar who has spent close to 35 years engaged in research and teaching in west, east, north, south, and central Africa has stated, in commenting on the grassroots nature of the Malawi Congress Party:

*Unlike what has happened in many other African states, where the energetic postcolonial parties have either died a sudden death or withered away to become paper organizations only, the Malawi Congress Party has grown from strength to strength.... In Malawi today, there is a unique system of government and administration for development with a unique and delicate balance between authority and participation....<sup>32</sup>*

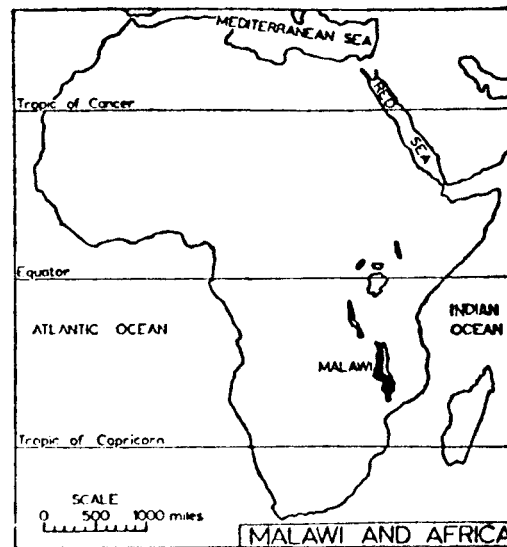
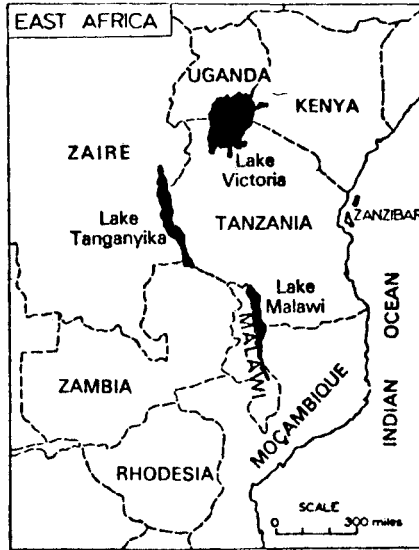
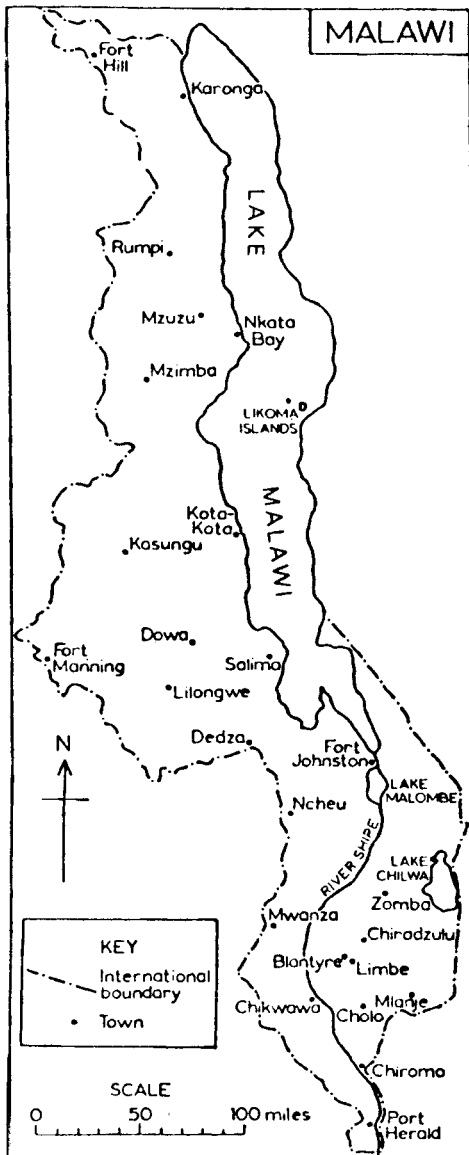
The demands for self-sacrifice embodied in the Malawi Congress Party's four cornerstones—"Loyalty, Unity, Discipline, and Obedience"—seem to have a credibility in Malawi that similar party slogans elsewhere on the continent have long since lost. To paraphrase one Malawian official, "we in Malawi feel that political commitment and development must go hand in hand, with the former being a precondition for the success of the latter."

Indeed, the vitality of the MCP in facilitating agricultural objectives is demonstrated as much in the ad hoc organization of the people into farm or credit clubs or into village self-help groups as it is through the formal party structures, such as the Young Pioneers or the Women's Organization. The Pioneers, through its commercial wing, Spearhead Enterprise, dramatizes the self-help commitment to development through production of vegetables for export and domestic consumption.

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Maps after A.D. Young

**MALAWI PROFILE**

*Population:* 5.6 million (1977 census); 2.6% growth rate; population density: 59 per square kilometer; main ethnic groups: Chewa, Nyanja, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tumbuka.

*Religion:* Traditional faiths 40%; Christian 40%; Islam 15%; other or mixed 5%.

*Geography:* size 94,276 square kilometers, approximately the size of Pennsylvania. Capital: Lilongwe (90,000); commercial center: Blantyre-Limbe (170,000).

*Government:* Presidential Republic, Member of the Commonwealth.

*Independence:* July 6, 1964.

*Constitution:* July 6, 1966

*Head of State:* President for Life Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda.

*Branches:*

1. Executive, President (Head of Government, Chief of State), plus Cabinet.
2. Legislative, unicameral Parliament (78-member National Assembly, 5-year term).
3. Judicial, Magisterial Courts, Traditional Courts

*Political Party:* Malawi Congress Party.

*Suffrage:* Universal adult

*Political Subdivisions:* 24 Districts, 3 subdistricts.

*Flag:* Black, red, and green horizontal stripes with half a red sun in the center of the black stripe.



## NOTES

1. Uma Lele, "Rural Africa: Modernization, Equity, and Long-Term Development," *Science*, Vol. 211 (Feb. 6, 1981), p. 547. See also by the same author "A Revisit to Rural Development in Eastern Africa," *Finance and Development*, Vol. 16 (Dec. 1979), pp. 31-35. Another World Bank adviser suggested that between 1967 and 1978, food production *per capita* declined by 7 percent in Africa, in contrast to increases of 7 to 8 percent in Asia and Latin America. Shankar Acharya, "Development Perspectives and Priorities in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Finance and Development*, Vol. 18 (March 1981), p. 17.
2. Address to the FAO General Council in April 1981.
3. The IBRD *World Development Report, 1980* (August 1980), p. 59, indicates that the growth in manufacturing (6.7%) was the highest for any of the 36 least developed countries.
4. European Economic Community Statistical Office, *ACP Yearbook of Foreign Trade Statistics, 1968-1976*, pp. 411ff.
5. (pseudonym) Samuel J. Waterford, "Kamuzu's Maverick Rule," *Africa Report* (September-October 1980), pp. 10-11.
6. Uma Lele, *Science*, p. 547. She does comment, however, that the three states do have problems of "distribution of benefits between agriculture and industry, and within industry."
7. In the three years preceding the 1980 drought, Malawi was self-sufficient in maize and was a net exporter of rice. It imported during 1977-1979, some 47,000 tons of wheat, mostly for expatriate consumption. Imports (in tons) of maize, rice, and wheat for some of Malawi's neighbors during that same three-year period were: Angola, 425,000; Mozambique, 884,000; Tanzania, 504,200; and Zambia (wheat and maize only), 535,000. Source: mimeographed working papers for SADCC conference on "Food Security," 1980.
8. The 1977 census indicates that 4 percent of the population lives in urban areas. The rate of increase between the 1966 and 1977 census has been 6.4 percent for Blantyre, 5.9 percent for Mzuzu, 2.0 percent for Zomba, and 15.8 percent for Lilongwe, which was a relatively minor urban area before being designated as the new capital.
9. See John B. Webster, "Drought and Migration: The Lake Malawi Littoral as a Region of Refuse," in Madalon T. Hinchey, ed. *Proceedings of the Symposium on Drought in Botswana* (Gaborone: The Botswana Society, 1979), pp. 140-157.
10. Prior to the censuses of 1966 and 1977, population estimates were crudely based on reported payments of hut taxes. It was assumed that the African population had grown at an annual rate of 2.8 percent between 1901-11; 2.2 percent between 1911 and 1921; 1.5 percent between 1921 and 1926; 4.4 percent from 1926 to 1931; 2.2 percent from 1931 to 1945; 3.3 percent from 1945 to 1966; and 2.9 percent from 1966 to 1977.
11. Reports of bauxite, phosphates, graphite, and some semiprecious stones have not attracted developers, at this writing.
12. See Martin Chanock, "Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi," in Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons, eds., *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 396-409.
13. See my chapter on innovation in *Colonial Rule and Political Development in Tanzania: The Case of the Makonde* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. 126-162.
14. Nyasaland Protectorate. *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, for the year 1956*, Part I (Zomba: Government Printer, 1957), p. 1.
15. See analysis of Nyasaland Protectorate, *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the year 1911* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1912) and each year, in seriatem, through 1962-63.
16. *Ibid.*, 1951, Part I, p. 3.
17. *Ibid.*, years 1953 through 1963.
18. See Leroy Vail, "Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case," in Palmer and Parsons, eds., *The Roots of Rural Poverty...*, p. 389.
19. Vail, "Railway Development and..." p. 389.
20. During research I conducted among Cichewa-speaking persons on the Tanzania side of Lake Malawi in 1955, I discovered that the migratory experience had provided a form of social ranking among young males, based upon the distance traveled from the Mbamba Bay area. Those who had traveled to the chrome mines of Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) or the copper mines of Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) were accorded social preference over those who had stayed home and fished on the lake. On the other hand, the migrants to Zimbabwe or Zambia were outranked by those who had worked in the gold mines of South Africa or who had acquired employment as dock workers or domestic servants in Capetown.
21. *Malawi Statistical Yearbook, 1979* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1980).
22. In Southern Rhodesia, the 5 percent European minority claimed 50 percent of the land. In the Republic of South Africa today efforts are being made to redirect

the settlement of the 87 percent who are Africans on 13 percent of the land, with the rest being reserved for Europeans.

23. Shankar Acharya, "Development Perspectives and Priorities in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Finance and Development*, Vol. 18 (March 1981), p. 18.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

25. Martin Chanock, "Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi," in Robin Palmer and Neil Persons, eds., *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 396-409.

26. "The University and the Nation," Address to the Congregation. Held in Zomba on July 29, 1983.

27. European Community Statistics Office. *Analysis of Trade between the European Community and the ACP States Series Trade Flows, 1979*, pp. 1.61-1.63.

28. Quoted in Chanock, "Agricultural Change and...", pp. 400-401.

29. *Ibid.*

30. June 10, 1981.

31. June 17, 18, 1981.

32. David Kimble, "The University and the Nation," address to the Congregation held in Zomba on July 29, 1978.