

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DER - 9
Tanganyikan District II

October 26, 1953
c/o Barclays Bank
Queensway
Nairobi, Kenya
(Mailed from Kondoa,
Tanganyika)

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The major problem in Kondoa District, as elsewhere in East Africa, is agricultural. The big job of the British colonial administrators here is to raise the African's standard of living and to do this, agricultural production must be increased.

The African at present---as has been his custom for centuries---produces little more, if any, than that needed for bare subsistence. East Africa as a whole frequently does not even raise enough food to feed itself. Corn grown as far away as Illinois sometimes is sold to Africans in areas here where corn---called maize---is grown.

Unless, as in recent times, he is forced to do so, the African peasant generally will not raise a surplus to tide him over in case of famine the following year. Another factor contributing to the food shortage has been that the African---understandably from his point of view---has been tending to plant the easiest and most profitable crop. This frequently is not a food item. In Central Tanganyika, for example, Africans have been turning to the cash crop of castor seed---source of the infamous castor oil. Hence, actual food production has suffered.

Tanganyika as a whole has had to import 44,642 tons of maize from overseas so far this year and it is anticipated that another 30,000 to 35,000 tons will have to be brought in from Uganda before the next harvest---which will be in March and April. This has caused the price of posho---maize flour and the chief item in the African's diet---to shoot up. The controlled price in Kondoa now is 80 cents (about \$0.13) per kilo or 2.2 pounds. Last year posho sold for 50 cents (\$0.07) a kilo. As there has been no noticeable rise in the African's income, this means a lower standard of living for him. African government servants had to be given a 5 per cent "cost of posho" increase.

Agricultural production must be increased---and it must be done in face of three big obstacles: One, the African generally is not interested in producing more. Two, a rapidly expanding population has resulted in the fragmentation of land into agriculturally uneconomic bits and patches. Three---and perhaps most important---the productive ability of the land is declining because the traditional, destructive methods of the African peasant are turning it into a semi-desert.

One British official said to me: "Land and agriculture are the important things out here. Understand them and you'll understand East Africa. What is done in land and agriculture will determine how fast, and how far, the African will advance. Things like who has how many votes in the Legislative Councils aren't important. The key to the African's future is the land."

Sir Philip Mitchell, former Governor of Kenya, has written: "It is an idle dream to suppose that a liberal modern civilization and a high standard of living can be erected on a basis of production and a system of agriculture and animal husbandry which have been evolved to enable primitive tribes to subsist in a primitive way..."

"(The) problem can be stated simply and plainly by saying that an ignorant man and his wife with a hoe are a totally inadequate foundation for an enlightened state of society, a high standard of living and elaborate social services, and that unless an alternative foundation capable of bearing these things can be devised, or, when it exists, can be expanded, a great deal of modern talking and writing about colonial development and welfare is moonshine."*

Tackling these problems in Kondoia is a thankless and frustrating job. "We've got to make them not starve," the official said. "We've got to force them to grow enough food. We can't wait to educate them not to destroy their land---we've got to make them do it, and do it now."

* "General Aspects of the Agrarian Situation in Kenya," Dispatch No. 44 of 1946 from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Nairobi, Government Printer.

Illustrative of what the officials are up against was the remark of Gabriel, an African messenger at the boma. While I was accompanying District Officer Don Barton on a famine relief survey of the Usandawe area of Kondoa District, Gabriel pointed to a nearby hill and said: "Years ago, the Wasandawe used to go up the hill and sacrifice a cow, a goat, a sheep and some pombe (beer). Then, 20 days later, it would rain."

"Do they still do it?" Barton asked.

"No," said Gabriel. "They don't bother now. They know the government will provide food for them if there's a famine."

The productive ability of Kondoa District has been seriously impaired by the erosion in the highlands area, occupied by the Warangi tribe. The desolate appearance of the highlands was mentioned in my last newsletter. The destruction was caused by long years of overgrazing. Huge herds ate up and trampled out practically all vegetation. When the rains came, there was nothing to prevent the topsoil from being washed away. The cutting down of practically all trees for firewood and building material accelerated the process. In Kondoa the land, though fertile, was particularly susceptible to erosion. It is loose because of a high mica content.

One way that the government has gone about tackling the erosion problem is to cut down the size of herds. (Sir Philip, in the same dispatch, said: "There are only two alternatives before the African people---either they eat their surplus stock or their surplus stock will eat them.")

A census was taken at the beginning of 1952 and it was found that there were 118,828 stock units in the Irangi highlands. (One stock unit is one cow or five goats or five sheep.) The government began hammering away at barazas (meetings) with propaganda urging the Warangi to get rid of some of their stock. Some did, but the government found it necessary to decree compulsory sales late in that year. The Warangi were told to sell 8,598 units. Each village area was given a quota and all stock thus sold had to leave the district.

A total of 7,782 units were reported as sold and it is suspected that some of these still are wandering around on the dusty hills.

Compulsory destocking continues this year and the Warangi have been told to dispose of 10,000 cattle and 26,000 small stock---sheep and goats. So far 7,000 cattle and 16,000 small stock have been sold. Steps were taken to make sure that the sales actually took place.

The stock population, though, continues to be high---the last census, at the end of 1952 showed there were 93,000 cattle, 190,000 goats, 81,000 sheep and 2,500 donkeys in Irangi, lowlands included. Cecil Winnington-Ingram, Kondoa's District Commissioner, says half that many would be proper for the land.

A survey to draw up revised quotas for future compulsory destocking is being carried out by Jack Allen, the district Settlement Officer. He has been surveying each village area to decide how much stock each can handle without damage to the land. For the better land, one stock unit per three acres could be allowed, but for the badly eroded areas there should be as much as 30 acres per unit, he has found. The situation is complicated by the fact that some families cannot afford to cut down their herds---even though the stock are destroying the land, the family needs that many for its needs.

Destocking as a whole has met with strong resistance from Kondoa's Africans because of their pastoral traditions. To them, cattle are valued as much as a form of visible wealth as for meat and dairy products.

A second way to deal with erosion is to arrest the actual process. Africans are being urged to construct countour banks on the slopes. These check the rapid runoff of topsoil-laden rainwater. Some resistance to this has developed because countour banks take up space that otherwise could be used for planting. The Africans also are being urged to plant rows of the sisal plant to hold the earth in place and again retard runoff.

It is encouraging when driving through Kondoa to see that many Africans have finally accepted the necessity of countour banks and sisal rows---but much remains to be done.

A third way of fighting erosion is to close the worst areas. The Chakwe area of Kondoa, three square miles in extent, has been closed for five years now. The area, just north of Kondoa town on the Great North Road, is the first in Tanganyika to be closed under a law permitting this drastic step. After five years of rest the land has made a good start toward regeneration. Knee high grass covers the once barren slopes. Across the road the land was not closed and the contrast between the two sections is startling. The unclosed area is raw and devoid of vegetation.

A fourth approach to the erosion problem is to resettle families in new areas. This was done in the case of Chakwe's residents. About half of Kondoa District's 5,750 square miles---all at lower altitudes---is unoccupied by man. It is dense bush and the presence of tsetse fly has kept the Africans out. But when bush is cleared, the fly, deprived of cover, dies.

A large bush clearing project is going on along the Bubu River south of Kondoa. A total of 45 square miles of bush have been cleared this year and it is hoped that another 60 can be cleared next year. Also another huge tract of land at Maweni Ridge to the northeast of Kondoa will be opened up next year.

But there is a new difficulty here. The Warangi dislike the idea of leaving their eroded highlands home. Several reasons are given by them. It is their home, and like men everywhere in the world they are reluctant to leave it. Rainfall is better in the highlands and the soil is of a somewhat better grade---hence cultivation is an easier chore. The Warangi, too, are used to the cool uplands and dislike the idea of moving to a warmer area. They also are reluctant to leave their relatives---relatives tend to live close to each other. Lastly---and to a people who value large families this is highly important---the Warangi maintain that their women are less fertile in the lowlands.

Yet it is believed that the economic pinch is such in the highlands that settlers will be found for the cleared areas. Close supervision of the agricultural practices there is planned in order to prevent the areas from becoming new rural slums.

I spent a day recently inspecting Maweni Ridge with Jack Allen and two officials of the Tanganyika Game Department. One, a middle-aged man, is high in the department. The other is a young ranger. The older man had come to Africa in his youth and had been a professional ivory hunter in West Africa. With money from that, he tried coffee farming in Tanganyika, but went broke. He then joined the game department.

The land at Maweni Ridge is like bush all over East Africa---low thorny trees and bushes. At Maweni, the land is not quite as flat as elsewhere, but is crossed by little ravines. After a while one becomes almost fond of the bush, and the game officials, enthralled by the bush and the game, were like kids in a toy shop. "It's beautiful, just beautiful country. Did you see that impala there? Beautiful, wasn't he?" the older man kept saying.

Herds of the graceful impala and of Thompson's and Grant's gazelle kept bounding across the road---which has just been cut through the bush---in front of the car. Exotic birds fluttered up as we passed. Giraffe paused from nibbling at tree-tops to stare at us and zebra and ostrich hurried away as we approached. We did not see any that day, but the ridge abounds in elephant and the larger buck---kudu and roan antelope---plus some rhino as well.

"It's a shame," said the older man. "All this beautiful land will be cut up. The elephant will be killed off or driven away and the other game will all leave. The Africans will move in and in 10 years this will be another desert." The reason for our tour that day was to acquaint the game department men with the terrain so they could move in later with their high-powered rifles to drive the elephant out---by shooting enough of them so the rest will leave.

The game must go---human needs come first. One hopes, though, that the administration will be successful in its efforts to keep the Africans from turning Maweni Ridge into another slum.

The job of increasing agricultural yields in Kondoia has met with still another obstacle: the present system of land tenure.

All land is owned tribally, though a man may have an occupation right to his shamba, or cultivated plot, generally of five or six acres in extent. Grazing land is communal and since the land is no one's in particular, no one looks after it. Everyone grabs what he can from it. There is no rest for the land---until it has sunk to the level where it cannot be exploited further. In the communal pastures, the worst erosion is seen.

With an expanding population and an expanding man-made desert, a shortage of productive highland shambas has developed. In the past, shambas were divided equally between the sons on a father's death, but, because of the degree of fragmentation occurring, the Africans have been discontinuing this practice. The shortage of land has resulted, too, in cases where a man, unable to acquire enough land around his home, owns a tiny patch there and several other tiny patches in scattered places many miles apart. In neither case is efficient agriculture possible.

The introduction of the erosion-preventing sisal hedges around fields have tended to promote better farming. It has been found that once a man has labored in planting a hedge, the land has acquired a new value for him and he is not as apt to let it go to ruin.

Winnington-Ingram would like to see the introduction of paddocking---or fenced pastures used only by one farmer. Grazing would be less intensive and again the African would tend to regard it as his own property and hence something to be looked after. "We want to relate a particular piece of land to a particular person," Winnington-Ingram said.

In the new settlement areas, he would like to see experiments conducted in 40-acre individual plots, with a fixed limit for grazing.* Some communal grazing would be allowed in adjoining mbuga areas---or savannah land inundated with water most of the year. Grazing there is possible only during the four or five dry months of the year, hence individual paddocks would not be too feasible.

* This was done at the Makueni settlement in Kenya (DER - 6).

Whether the government will succeed in putting paddocking across to the Warangi in the near future remains to be seen. Communal grazing is an old tribal custom and resistance would be considerable. Colonial administrators are well aware that though the African can be pushed along, he can be pushed just so far at any one time.

Despite the immensity of the overall task of raising agricultural production, Winnington-Ingram thinks that it will succeed in time. The sheer pinch of economic necessity will force the African into line, he believes. The speed with which the innovations are accepted will accelerate as the Africans begin to see the advantages to their pocketbooks.

Typical of this was the planting of cassava. Dried cassava root is ground into a flour. The government decreed five years ago that Africans had to plant cassava as an anti-famine measure.

"Nope, cassava won't grow here," was the African response. The government, backed by the opinions of agricultural experts, refused to budge. The Africans had to plant cassava in communal plots. These were to provide planting material for distribution to each shamba. The cassava grew well.

Today practically all Africans in the district are growing cassava. The district grew all that it needed this year and Africans realized some cash by selling it to famine areas. Chief Heri recently said that the communal plots could be abandoned; so much was being grown on shambas that the plots no longer are needed.

Looking to the future, Winnington-Ingram believes that no considerable increases in production will come about until there are radical changes in the basic organization of farming.

As an example there are only a few plows in Kondo District now. A man with an oxen and a plow can turn up many times the amount of land that another man can cover with a hoe. But the first man finds that with the increased amount of land turned up, he needs labor.

Labor, though, cannot be obtained in Kondoa when it is needed. Planting, weeding and harvesting must all be done during certain very short periods and at those times the men in the district are busy with their own tiny shambas. Hence the plow cannot be put to full use.

Production would be increased if there were a class of landless Africans. Labor would be available and larger shambas would be possible. But almost every African is a landowner now and he hangs on to his land tenaciously, tiny though it may be, as he knows he owes his freedom to this. As a land owner, he has a considerable amount of freedom. He takes orders from no employer and has no real obligations except that he meet his taxes. He may work for someone else for a while, but there is always land to which he can return.

An alternative in Winnington-Ingram's opinion would be the development of larger sized individual holdings on lines perhaps of the 40 acres envisioned for the resettlement areas.

A third alternative would be the development of collective farms such as the Gezira cotton growing scheme in the Sudan---which existed long before the Russian versions.

Perhaps, Winnington-Ingram suggests, a balance will be struck between the three, modifying each here and there as circumstances demand.

In the last 50 years the white man ended the great evils of the ~~of the~~ old East Africa---slavery, starvation, inter-tribal wars and epidemics. Now another challenge lies ahead. If wisely pushed and guided, the African could go through in a matter of decades what it took the western world centuries of work, strife and war to evolve.

Sincerely,



David E. Reed

Received 11/2/53.