

AGRARIAN CHANGE AND RURAL TRANSFORMATION IN TANZANIA:
ISMANI, CIRCA 1940-2010

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Abstract

Farming is a major sector of informal employment for more than 67 per cent of the active labour force in Tanzania. This means farming is of primary importance to the overall economy. Rural transformations and the future of agriculture in Tanzania depend mainly upon improved access to market outlets, guarantees on improved seeds, and availability of farm-loans. These are essential interventions to transform the rural sector despite the challenges it is facing. An overview of government interventions in future rural development policy and activity is offered here by focusing on Ismani, part of the present-day Iringa District in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Agrarian change in Ismani through the 1940s to the 1970s depended upon government interventions on the one hand, and changes in the physical environment on the other. Initially during this period, Ismani became a national food granary in the 1970s as a result of government interventions. Then this progress turned upside down in the 1980s, when the development of Ismani took on a new dimension due to a rapid decline in maize productivity. In recent years, especially over the last two decades, Ismani has experienced recurrent food insecurity. Evidence of the drastic change emerges from reliance on archival sources, fieldwork interviews and secondary sources collected in 2012, 2013 and 2017. This paper explores the dynamics of maize farming in Ismani, to provide a detailed historical understanding of how a prosperous maize farming area can become, in the space of only a few years, an area which is now rife with localised food insecurity in many of its villages.

Keywords: rural modernisation, agriculture, Ismani, development, maize farming, Ujamaa.

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Introduction

The contribution of the rural sector to the economy of less developed countries like Tanzania is significant. Successful economic planning and development in Tanzania and countries of its nature should focus on empowering the rural sector by modernising it and removing unnecessary challenges to progress (Helleiner 1968 [1966]). This will help to modernise the rural sector and contribute intensively to the national gross income through export of cash crops and assurance of food supplies. In the period between the 1980s and 1990s, there was a primary school textbook used all over Tanzania for school children (*Taasisi ya Elimu* 1983). In this book, there were case studies on different crops: how they were grown and the required climatic and weather conditions for optimal growth. Case studies were sampled from different areas of rural Tanzania producing specific crops in large quantities. One of its chapters was on maize farming in Iringa District that used Ismani as an example of the areas with modern and prosperous agricultural development. This was during the heyday of maize farming in Ismani. Unfortunately, the conditions that brought fame to maize farming in Ismani no longer exist. Such historic maize farming in Ismani has fallen into nostalgic memory among the people of Ismani as well as in the minds of many Tanzanians. Media reports have repeatedly portrayed the development narrative of Ismani, recently painting a very different view now from what existed in the 1970s and 1980s. This paper examines these dynamics, and the sobering ‘development’ from prosperity to utter decline in the region’s maize farming.

Contextualising the study

Classified agro-ecologically, Ismani falls in the lowland and midland climatic zones of Iringa District. Most villages of Ismani division fall in the lowland zone. The lowland zone lies between 900 meters to 1200 meters above sea level. It always receives a low amount of rainfall, between 500 millimetres to 600 millimetres per annum, with a mean temperature between 20° Celsius and 30° Celsius. The zone was endowed with fertile soils with high potential for agriculture from the 1900s to the 1980s. However, farming was hindered by unreliable rainfall and the existence of other farming areas in the District. Out of the four wards of Ismani Division, only two, Kising’ a and Kihorogota, fall in the midland zone. The midland zone is comparatively more suitable for cultivation than the other zones, as it lies within an altitude of 1200 metres and 1600 metres above sea level (Iringa District Profile 2011). The landscape of the midland zone is characterised by scattered mountain hills, plateaus with swamps and ponds. This zone receives an annual rainfall between 600 millimetres and 1,000 millimetres per annum and a mean temperature

between 15 ° Celsius to 20 ° Celsius, making it attractive for settlement and agriculture. Such environmental characteristics provided advantages to some maize producing villages over others, resulting in uneven maize farming achievements in the area.

In colonial Tanganyika, agricultural activities that might have culminated in rapid production and environmental change were observed from the 1930s (Iliffe 1971, 1979; Swai 1980, Luanda 1986). Farming for the market became particularly important during this time when the British colonial government intensified production of crops by launching the ‘grow more crops campaign’ (Iliffe 1979, Swai 1979). Through this campaign, peasants opened new fields in an advantage of price incentives provided by the colonial government (Bowles 1980). The intensity of production increased remarkably after the Second World War (WWII), as a result of the modernisation campaigns of the colonial government. Government intervention became very intense in the future-making of rural Tanzania, with varying levels of success countrywide. The groundnut schemes failed, for example; while tobacco growing prospered, wheat farming in Northeastern Tanzania increased, and maize farming in Ismani succeeded (Iliffe 1971, Hogendorn and Scott 1981, Chuhila 2013, Ayo 2017).

What Iliffe (1971) calls the cash crop boom in the aftermath of the WWII was also replicated in food crop production. The boom encouraged the farming of crops that were once considered marginal cash crops, together with food crops such as maize. The colonial government supplied maize seeds for free or at greatly subsidised prices to boost production, to accommodate the increased domestic demand in the colonies. Also, it campaigned for increased maize production in public spaces, newspapers, buses and railway stations, which encouraged both peasant and large scale maize farming (Iliffe 1971). The boom years were featured by the emergence of new commercial growers’ associations, including the Maize Growers of Ismani, Wheat Growers of Mbulu, Pyrethrum Growers of the Southern Highlands, and Cashew Nut Growers of the southern part of Tanganyika. Also, there was mushrooming of peasant farmers associations such as the Ismani African Maize Growers Association (Iliffe 1971) and Ismani Native Maize Growers Cooperative (Nindi 1978), which wanted to replace the role of middleman played by Asians in the marketing of maize. These associations were instrumental in negotiating prices in favour of producers. Large-scale progressive farmers benefited more from the associations as they had more to sell than did the ordinary smallholder farmers. After WWII, Ismani became a centre for maize farming and a new frontier for settlement in the District. Modernisation campaigns in

Ismani resulted in major successes in maize farming. The intensity of maize farming after WWII and throughout the first two decades after Independence promoted Ismani into a national grain basket.

Despite all these success stories about the area, however, in recent decades Ismani has fallen into decline. The development of maize farming in Ismani is a story of mixed actors including government interventions, environmental dynamics, and economic imperatives during both the colonial and postcolonial periods. Although in some rural areas of Tanzania the failure of the peasant sector is attributed to ‘land grabbing’ and alienation of the peasantry by large scale farming (Sulle 2015, Mbunda 2016, Bluwstein et al. 2018), the situation in Ismani is different, as will be revealed in the coming discussion.

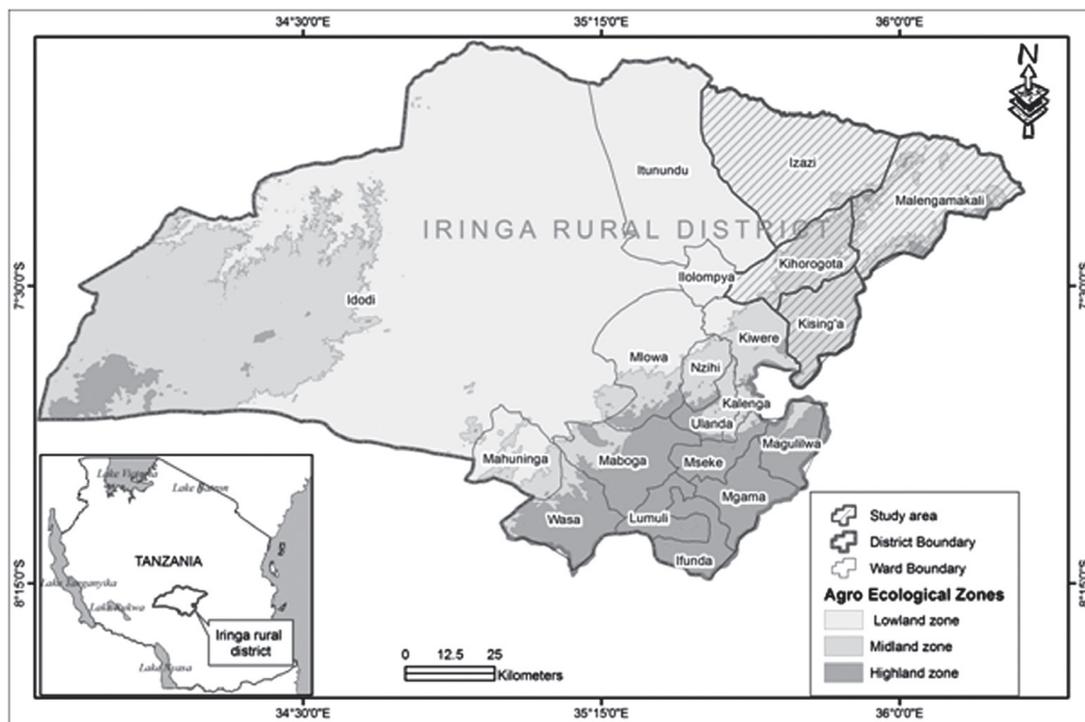


Figure 1: Map locating the study area in Iringa District

Farming during the 1940s to 1961: A period of progress?

Intensive farming did not start in Ismani until the 1940s, as noted earlier. There were several reasons for this – among them were environmental circumstances, poor knowledge about the area and the potentials for lucrative economic investments in nearby areas. Before the 1940s Ismani was not heavily settled, as peasants occupied land elsewhere in the region while others depended on the domestication of animals. Environmentally, there were no perennial crops as most of the land was dry, favouring seasonal crop

cultivation; and the area was tsetse infested. Economically, the opening of Lupa Goldfields in the 1930s in Mbeya attracted many labourers from Iringa District to work in European firms rather than work their own farms (Awiti 1975). Lastly, the productivity potential of the environment in Ismani was not widely appreciated; instead the area was regarded as home to dangerous wild animals (Awiti 1975).

The post-WWII period, and especially the 1950s, witnessed what some historians have called the period of 'new colonialism', (Ilfie 1979), or 'the beginning of the end of the great colonial epoch' (Fughes-Couchman 1964). Generally, it was a period of struggle against environmental, political and economic constraints, and a time of regrouping resources and allies, to realise hopes for recovery from the devastation of WWII. The names given to this period described the new strategies and campaigns implemented in the colonies to improve the livelihood of the colonised people and to compensate the homelands of Empire for the losses of the war. Prospects for production opportunities were calculated; new areas were identified, and heavy capital investment was encouraged. It was during such a drive for prosperity that Ismani developed both intensive and extensive maize farming.

The post-WWII period had also witnessed a shortage of food and edible oil in the colonies and abroad (Fughes-Couchman 1964). As a result, the British colonial government promoted small and large scale farming in the Tanzanian territory to cater for the demands of exportable food and cash crops. Because of this, large areas of land were opened in different parts of the colony for production. For instance, tobacco farms were established in Urambo; cattle ranches were opened in Dodoma; and groundnut schemes were established in Nachingwea and Kongwa (Hyden 1980, Hogendorn and Scott 1981). Most of these schemes failed due to poor conceptions, failure to consider environmental particularities and the unavailability of labour. Scholars have divided opinions as to the role of state intervention in the rural development. Some see it as useful while others see it as less useful because of the approaches that states take to control rural progress (Scott 1998, Ostrom 2015). The colonial government in Tanganyika imagined a rural future based on agrarian modernisation grounded on large-scale farming. Many agricultural projects, including the examples mentioned above, tobacco, groundnuts, and ranches were conceived in the 1940s and abandoned in 1950 when the government conceded defeat of its approach (Ilfie 1979). Awiti (1975) and Hyden (1980) acknowledge this period as an important interlude for colonial agricultural development in the colony, as it marked rapid rural transformations.

Rural differentiations became quite remarkable as progressive farmers dominated smallholder farmers throughout the 1940s and 1950s (Ilfie 1979). Strategic cash crops such as sisal and rubber were grown on a large-scale while food crops were mostly a peasant enterprise (Coulson 2013). Large-scale grain production developed in two zones, namely wheat in the Northern Highlands, particularly West Kilimanjaro and Mbulu; while maize was chiefly produced in Ismani (Kjærby 1986). Some scholars have looked at this period as experiencing a ‘peasant mode of production’ where large and small-scale farmers engaged in subsistence farming activities as well as producing for the market (Hyden 1980). Peasants in Tanganyika had an advantage as compared with peasants in other British colonies like Kenya and Zimbabwe (Anderson and Throup 1985, Anderson 2002). Peasants in Tanganyika produced cash crops to an extent of threatening the prosperity of white settlers in areas like Kilimanjaro where coffee cash cropping was dominant (Chuhila 2016).

To meet the wartime and post-war demands the colonial government introduced measures to ensure sufficient food production. One of those measures was the provision of subsidies in terms of free grants to farmers producing maize on land over 25 hectares.² Peasants opened more arable land to benefit from the free grants that as a result increased maize productivity in the area. The second measure was the use of guaranteed return for farmers who would get loss as a result of intensive capital investment in food crop production. They were to be refunded by the colonial government upon failure of their crops.³ This encouraged more investment in food crop production in one way or another as farmers were insured against production-related losses. Peasants with capital expanded farming activities to the limit of their capital increasing both the acreage under maize cultivation and produces. In addition to guaranteed return upon loss in agricultural investment, the government provided acreage grants to some selected applicants in the District. Selected farmers were required to sell their maize to the Colonial Grain Storage Department.⁴ After selling their maize, farmers were paid dues in the manner outlined below by the Director of Grain Stores:

It is emphasised that the Director of Agriculture will only consider payment of acreage grant to planters who can produce either Grain Storage Department purchase receipts in respect of delivery to Government or Agents Stores or written permission

² *The Tanganyika Standard, Saturday, February 12, 1944.*

³ *The Tanganyika Standard, Thursday, August 30, 1951.*

⁴ Tanzania National Archives [TNA], EC B. 833/III/313: Department of grain stores, 1949. Guaranteed prices of maize acreage Grants and reduced prices (1949).

by Provincial Produce Officers or District Commissioners' in respect of direct sales.⁵

In Ismani, only a few farmers qualified for the grants in the period between 1947 and 1950. These were large-scale farmers in Nduli who benefited from acreage bonus in the 1948/1949 growing season.⁶ Under acreage grants scheme, the maize to be used by producers either individually or as a producing company, or institution, or even a group of corporate producers, was first sold to Unga Limited, the only buying agent by the time and then was bought back by producers. The whole exercise aimed at registering the amount of maize grown through government intervention and collecting some cess from the maize produced.⁷ Interventions through price guarantee, guaranteed return, and acreage grants targeted commercial maize farming dominated by progressive farmers while small-scale peasant producers produced for both subsistence and little for the market.

The establishment of the Land Bank in 1947 was another significant boost to large-scale maize farming in Ismani. On inception, the Bank provided loans to large-scale cash crop farmers such as tobacco farmers in Nduli and later extended loans to maize farmers who were mainly non-Africans (Msambichaka and Mabele 1974). It was not until the 1950s when African farmers obtained loans from the Local Development Loan Fund (LDLF) and the African Productivity Loan Fund (APLF). These loan schemes accelerated differentiations in rural areas. Loans were used to expand peasant production by acquiring modern agricultural inputs such as tractors to improve productivity (Msambichaka and Mabele 1974). The Bank provided loans only to farmers whose farms were 50 acres and above that encouraged those with land below 50 acres to expand their farms to qualify for the loans.⁸ As a result, the land under maize farming kept increasing.

Government intervention in supervising maize production, especially in the 1950s, proved to be a catalyst towards expanded commercial production of maize and rapid rural transformation. The provision of acreage grants, loans, guaranteed returns and the introduction of a new taxation system accelerated extensive rather than intensive cultivation of maize. Colonial intervention in the production process also contributed to the replacement of the traditional food crops, such as millet and finger millet, through extensive production of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ TNA, 1949, *op. cit.*

⁷ TNA, 24/A3/21: African staples, permits to retain. ['Cess' is a form of taxation, abbreviation for 'assess' – Ed.]

⁸ TNA, 24/52/3/13: Monthly report for May 1956.

maize. Prior to this period, farmers produced maize only as a supplemental crop. Consequently, by the 1950s Ismani became one of the most important areas for maize production in the Iringa District and Tanganyika at large. There was sufficient seasonal rainfall and the fertility of the soil was still suitable. These facts were acknowledged in a monthly report of the agricultural field officer who wrote:

From reports and personal observation, it is noticed that the most advanced area in the District is Ismani where rains broke early and cultivators have taken every opportunity to push forward with cultivation and planting. Their zeal and enterprise is providing itself worthwhile as excellent germination can be seen in almost every shamba.⁹

Ismani was a prolific maize production area by this time and there were no signs of crop failure.¹⁰ In the 1950s, Ismani had no alternative cash crop to depend upon apart from maize, which thus served the dual purpose of produce for both food and market.

Throughout this period the colonial approach to rural development and peasant production changed significantly. Previously the government concentrated on peasant production as a whole; this changed into a new ‘focal point approach’ after 1950. The change was in response to the nationalist movements of the 1950s as well as to the need to reduce production costs in the post-WWII period. The colonial government thought that promoting African peasantry entirely would create wealthy Africans who, in turn, would increase political consciousness and stability in rural areas (Iliffe 1971).

Instead, in practice, this would later disadvantage the smooth functioning of the colonial enterprises. The focal-point approach to increased productivity concentrated on progressive farmers at the expense of the larger smallholder farming sector (Twinning 1959, Iliffe 1971). This change of approach resulted in the narrowing down of all colonial plans to small scale projects, sometimes based on one clan, or a village, or just a collective of a few enterprising individuals.¹¹ Small-scale projects would benefit from the few extension services provided by a small number of extension personnel that was reduced to match with budgetary constraints facing the peasant sector

⁹ TNA, D3/4: Development: Ismani development, report for the Month ending 31st December, 1951-114/IV/29/552, Report for the Month ending June 1951-114/IV/20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ TNA, LG 9/36/011: ‘Memorandum No.10 for provincial Commissioners’, Conference, January 1957: Focal point approach in agricultural extension work, p.1.

at the time.¹² Farmers on an individual basis did not get assistance from the central government but were instead supervised by the Native Authorities.

Farming during 1961-1971: A period of crisis?

The rural sector in Tanzania at Independence experienced a continuation of the implementation of colonial development policies for a long time. Colonial plans as suggested by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [IBRD] continued in the entire period covering the 1960s to the 1980s. The first Five-Year Development Plan articulated clearly the need to transform the rural sector (United Republic of Tanzania [URT] 1964) drawing heavily from the IBRD recommendations. The plan was ambitious and wished the transformation of Tanzania to be rapid and smooth, in order to satisfy people's expectations of Independence.

Through the First Five Year Plan, Tanzania encouraged, and anticipated, a massive flow of foreign investment in agricultural and industrial sectors (URT 1964). But by the mid-1960s all these great goals proved entirely elusive. Consequently, in 1967 the government resorted to a new plan. This shift was officially articulated in the Arusha Declaration of February 1967. The Arusha Declaration, unlike the First Five Year Development Plan, de-emphasised the role of foreign grants, loans, and investments; instead it stressed self-reliance and dependence upon internally available resources for development. Political slogans such as '*Uhuru na Kazi*' ['Freedom and Work'] and '*Uhuru na Maendeleo*' ['Freedom and Development'] became popular catalysts towards rural development. The implementation of such catch-phrases concentrated the public mind upon self-help projects that included construction of roads, bridges, schools, dispensaries and agricultural activities. Participation in community and self-help projects was treated as a credit to responsible citizens (Jennings 2007). The Arusha Declaration received attention from scholars who viewed it as both a political ideology and a mobilisation strategy for national unity and peace. It succeeded in forging unity with varying degrees of success, among people falling into a growing number of socio-economic and political class differentiations (Schneider 2014, Bjerck 2015).

The adoption of the Arusha Declaration in 1967 symbolised two major things for the newly independent Tanzania. In the first place, it implied a change in economic planning from reliance on what Michael Jennings (2007) calls the colonial development paradigm, to a nationalist rural-oriented development paradigm. Also, the declaration signalled the transition of the economy from one that was highly dependent upon foreign assistance to an economy based

¹² Ibid.

mostly on the utilisation of internal resources. However, the declaration did not reject outright gifts and loans, but instead emphasised that these would be accepted if and only if they were being made in the interest of national development.

To spell out explicitly the intended contrasts between the pre-Arusha Declaration situation in economic planning and the newly anticipated system, the Declaration announced:

Our government and different groups of our leaders, never stop thinking about methods of getting finance from abroad. And if we get some money or even if we just get a promise of it, our newspapers, our radio, and our leaders, all advertise the fact in order that every person shall know that salvation is [was] coming or is [was] on the way. If we receive a gift we announce it, if we receive a loan we announce it, if we get a new factory we announce it – and always loudly. In the same way, when we get a promise of a gift, a loan, or a new industry, we make an announcement of the promise. Even when we have merely started discussions with a foreign government or institution for a gift, a loan, or a new industry we make an announcement – even though we do not know the outcomes of the discussions (Nyerere 1968).

This showed the dissatisfaction with externally oriented economic thinking at the time, which the Arusha Declaration aimed to change. Nyerere became very focussed upon this agenda, but he was disappointed by his subordinates and colleagues on many occasions. The implementation of this approach stumbled in part because Nyerere lacked the full commitment of fellow leaders who effectively had befriended him in sunlight only to betray him by moonlight (Chuhila 2019).

Until this time, commercial maize farming still dominated the local economy in Ismani. The adoption of the Arusha Declaration in one way promoted the large-scale production of maize as it encouraged progressive farmers. On the other hand, it subsequently gave way to placing restrictions on continual intensive capital investment in agriculture by well-off individuals. The government increasingly favoured the communal development approach controlled by the ruling party and the state instead of private enterprises (Schneider 2004, 2014).

The transformation from capitalist-oriented production in Ismani into communal production schemes grew out of the increasing gap between rich, progressive farmers, and small-scale peasant labourers, a growing schism that socialist ideology regarded with dismay. Under the capitalist-oriented production phase of Tanzania's agricultural development history, rich farmers expanded to areas formerly owned by small farmers through the purchase of land and the use of mechanised farming, all of which required capital outlay and resources to establish. The few rich farmers capable of these investments owned and controlled the economy at the expense of a great majority of smallholders and peasants who became impoverished – something that was not anticipated by the Arusha Declaration. Smallholders and landless peasants continued to grow poor while the number of labourers forced to give up their own plots and start working for progressive farmers continued to increase. Small producers became tenant labourers as the only way to avoid destitution; tenant farming, which serves no purpose but sheer survival, was the only means available for their subsistence.

Villagization and maize farming, 1971 to 1985

State control of the rural sector through *Ujamaa* in Tanzania followed both courses, that is, direct and indirect coercion on one side, and encouragement of voluntary initiatives on the other. Compulsory resettlement included total planning and movement of people's settlements into closer proximity to each other, to facilitate service delivery. Under this category, poor ecological knowledge of the environment affected the new residents. On the second count, indirect coerced resettlement included joining *Ujamaa* villages to receive relief food from the government especially in areas with food insecurity. When villagers faced famine they had no option but to join in at an *Ujamaa* village (Sumra 1975). In areas where peasants voluntarily moved, they were able to find suitable land for agricultural activities and farming continued without significant problems. The areas like Songea under the famous Ruvuma Development Association (RDA) and Handeni-Tanga experienced both coerced and voluntary movement at the same time. In the areas with voluntary *Ujamaa* associations, *Ujamaa* projects succeeded, and they failed in areas where force was used (Havnevik 2010, Ndomba 2014). In Urambo, western Tanzania, tobacco farming expanded its acreage but large-scale farmers faced challenges from the government. Large-scale tobacco farmers had their land and machinery confiscated in favour of communal farming. This resulted in extensive farm labour activity but it reduced productivity (Ayo 2017). In Ismani where forced resettlement took place and large progressive farmers abandoned the area, *Ujamaa* projects did not achieve much (Chuhila 2013).

People in the Iraqwland, where ecological considerations were not given priority, experienced failure of *Ujamaa* programmes and their livelihoods crashed (Lawi 2007). In general, the villagization policy in Tanzania had varied impacts depending on the area where it was implemented.

Reflecting upon these examples, the development narrative of *Ujamaa* approach in various areas of Tanzania yielded mixed results. On the environmental side, villagization had far-reaching implications because there were no proper feasibility studies done to assess the potential environmental impact. Lawi (2000, 2007), Kjekshus (1977a, 1977b), Friis-Hansen (1987) and Kikula (1999) provide general evaluations of the environmental impacts of villagization and resettlement schemes of the 1970s. They argue that the impact resulted from the concentration of people in small areas due to the clearing of new areas for settlement and farming. Lawi adds that these clearing interventions disturbed the conventional social-ecological considerations which would otherwise guide people's choices of settlement areas in Iraqwland (Lawi 2007). On the whole, the failure to consider ecological factors of the new areas affected the communities that were relocated, the outcome being overall reduced rural performance and productivity, among other negative results.

Although the period from the 1970s experienced several socio-economic and political challenges throughout the country, the villagization programme created a new legacy in Ismani and it is vividly remembered in the area. It is remembered because of its influence on maize farming. Villagization changed the history of maize cultivation in Ismani at large from a prosperous centre of rural markets and surplus, into a dependent recipient area of subsidies and food relief.

The villagization programme was preceded by the implementation of the Iringa Resolution, which was another big step towards improving the rural sector (Tanganyika African National Union [TANU] 1972). To reflect its emphasis on agriculture, the Iringa Resolution of 1972 was commonly referred to as *Siasa ni Kilimo* [Politics is Agriculture]. *Siasa ni Kilimo* aimed at organising agriculture in a way which would ensure food self-sufficiency for peasants countrywide. Additionally, TANU wanted to guarantee improved quality of food, promoting production of export crops, and availability of adequate raw materials to enable basic industries to launch (TANU 1972).

At almost the same time, the Ismani Maize Credit Programme was introduced to boost maize farming. The credit scheme did less, as there was a contradiction in the expectations for rural transformation because the

government plan confused large-scale producers with smallholder farmers. The credit scheme served three main objectives.

Firstly, it wanted to replace large-scale capitalist oriented (market-oriented) farmers by cooperative communal based farmers. Although the objectives for this were not articulated, communal farming involved the production of both food and commercial maize (Mohele 1975). However, production for the market was hindered when large-scale farmers decided to relocate from Ismani, while smallholder communal farmers were unable to mechanise agriculture in the same way their progressive neighbours had done. As a result, neither food nor market-based maize was cultivated satisfactorily. What followed in Ismani of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s was a struggle for survival and a disintegration from proud production of maize in Tanzania to an area with localised food insecurity in many of its villages.

Secondly, Ismani maize credit scheme targeted to increase the productivity of maize in the area. This was done through the application of upgrades in crop husbandry, new fertilisers, and improved seeds. Unfortunately, all these attempts to increase productivity failed, because the people who were forced to join in *Ujamaa* villages sabotaged *Ujamaa* production. Sabotage occurred through stealing seeds and produce, working with obvious laxity in *Ujamaa* farms, and embezzlement of communal property by village leaders and authorities. These behaviour patterns occurred in all areas where villagization was enforced and was not initiated or propelled from the community members themselves (Nindi 1977, 1978; Sumra 1975). This led to the decline of farming in Ismani instead of rural progress. Similarly, as indicated earlier, maize farming in Ismani depended on large-scale capital-intensive farmers who at the time of these efforts had moved from Ismani. In this case, modernisation of farming in Ismani was ill founded. The abrupt shift from progressive farming to communal farming signalled the end of Ismani's pride in maize cultivation. The reorganization of settlements and production in Ismani during the villagization programme was not supported by the will of the majority. The traditional land tenure was abolished through the implementation of the villagization policy. For a long time, villagers left the region to find new land and to forge new social capital relations. As a result, peasants lived in *Ujamaa* villages but went far to work back on their old farms. This trekking to and from farms wasted a considerable amount of time, hence reduced the actual labour performed on the farms. Overall, *ujamaa* farming in Ismani is remembered as having exacerbated rather than providing a solution to peasant's problems. Working in *Ujamaa* farms was not as productive as working on individual farms. Progressive farmers who

owned tractors were forced to work on *Ujamaa* farms before starting to work on their plots. This decision was unpopular among large-scale maize farmers.

The last objective of the Ismani maize credit scheme was to improve the incomes of the *wajamaa* through guaranteed crop prices that were regulated by cooperative societies. This was unrealistic because not all villages were given credit and even those given credit did not manage to improve the livelihood of the people, because the rates and schedules set for loan repayments were prohibitively high. In the early days of the scheme – the 1971-1972 and 1972-1973 growing seasons – some successes were registered by maize farming. Nevertheless, the sustainability of both food and commercial maize farming was threatened. There emerged loan-serving farms, sabotage of *Ujamaa* projects and continued decline in the acreages cultivated because of lack of capital, machinery, and upkeep of equipment after the relocation of large-scale producers (Mohele 1975). In the end, the villages given credit produced a loan – serving maize while those that did not receive loan produced both maize for food and market (Mohele 1975).

To indicate the inefficiency of the operation, in 1971-1972, it was revealed that an average of 595 kilograms per hectare was produced on *Ujamaa* fields; while at the same time and in the same environment, individually-owned farms produced an average of 869 kilograms per hectare (Nindi 1978). This example demonstrates that the success in maize farming in Ismani did not depend on the investment of industrial inputs. Rather, it depended upon the knowledge of the environment, soil quality and characteristics, locally determined growing seasons, and market incentives. All these conditions existed during the colonial period and were discarded during the *Ujamaa* period in favour of state-directed agriculture. Closely related to the decline in productivity, another challenge was on how to distribute the produce amongst the members of a particular *Ujamaa* village. A number of villages failed to distribute produce to members, nor did they properly distribute the income generated by *Ujamaa* produce. This situation resulted from poor harvests that had to be sold to repay the loans in *Ujamaa* villages. In turn, this discouraged members from committing themselves in *Ujamaa* projects, as it became clear that producing communally was costly, time-consuming and yielded no meaningful returns. Due to this challenge, and of course, the national commitment towards agriculture, the National Maize Programme was introduced in 1973 to increase maize acreage and reduce the import of food but did less to reverse the situation in Ismani (Nindi 1978).

Apart from the Ismani Maize Credit scheme given to peasants directly, the government also established agricultural credit schemes, which were

given to middlemen to enable them to buy crops from producers, while the cultivators received production credits (Msambichaka and Mabele 1974). Such credit schemes were applied countrywide and started in 1962 through the Agricultural Credit Agency (ACA). The ACA provided loans to individual farmers, to groups of farmers or to government institutions engaged in agriculture. The second loan scheme was through the National Development Credit Agency (NDCA) that came into being in 1964. NDCA did not register achievements, as up to its dissolution it had only reached one *Ujamaa* village countrywide. The establishment of the Tanzania Rural Development Bank (TRDB) in 1971 was the most comprehensive programme to finance agriculture in the rural areas. It covered many sectors of the rural sector by supporting *Ujamaa* villages especially those engaging with the production of food crops, such as maize and wheat (Msambichaka and Mabele 1974).

The *Villagization* campaign of 1974 is reckoned to be the most transformative wave for rural development and agrarian change in Ismani. Yet the transformation was not as planned: the campaign propelled the change from the area's being a prosperous place to an impoverished one. The 1974 *Villagization* campaign discouraged progressive farmers in favour of communally owned farms, and cultivation that had been small in scale and faced several challenges to operating the farms. Ownership of large farms was shifted to villages, while some land was distributed to former labourers at the rate of three hectares per head. The evidence at hand shows that it was difficult to incorporate the former progressive farmers into *ujamaa* cooperative work as we have pointed earlier.

The most remembered incident associated with the negative impacts of *Ujamaa* farming in Ismani was the murder of Dr. Wilbert Kleruu, then Regional Commissioner for Iringa. Dr. Kleruu is claimed to have been one of the most committed socialists determined to implement *Ujamaa* principles in support of the president, Julius Nyerere. On Christmas Day of 1971, Dr. Kleruu went to Ismani to review the farming and implementation of his orders in the region. Unhappily, he found one of the large-scale farmers of maize in Ismani, called Said Mwamwindi, cultivating his privately owned farm. Mwamwindi had worked for most of his time on *Ujamaa* plots but during the holiday he wanted to cultivate his private shamba. Dr. Kleruu ordered him to stop, abused him both physically and verbally, especially by insulting him over his parents' graves (Lofchie 2018). This made Mwamwindi so angry that he decided to gun down the Regional Commissioner at Mkungugu Village.¹³ The death of the Regional Commissioner created tension among all big producers of maize

¹³ Interviews with Magidanga 2011, Chunga 2011, and Mkwama 2011.

in Ismani; henceforth the implementation of villagization in the area became even more difficult than it had been already.

Mwamwindi had started farming in Ismani together with other progressive farmers in the 1950s. In that decade, he owned only three acres of land and worked as a lorry driver. He continued to buy land and to expand his cultivated plots so productively that by the 1970s he had over 160 acres (Nindi 1978). This indicates that he was one of the most progressive farmers in the area that Operation Ismani targeted. It also illustrates the type of anger that a person can build up when his hard-earned assets and wealth are threatened. The aftermath of the death of the Regional Commissioner brought more distress than progress to the area; peasants became suspicious of political leaders, and leaders grew highly distrustful of peasants. It became increasingly arduous to convince people to work in *Ujamaa* villages at all. Local leaders and state technocrats feared that what had happened to Kleruu in the course of doing his work with zeal and good conscience might also happen to them (Nindi 1985, Lofchie 2018). Consequently, production in *Ujamaa* villages continued to decline.

Maize farming and the challenge of environmental change, 1985 to 2010s

Environmental change in Ismani has been such a gradual process that it went generally unnoticed until the second half of the twentieth century. The environmental decline could be attributed partly to the extensive supply of fertile arable land, which made it easy for peasants to leave exhausted soils to fallow and restore, while working in new plots (Awiti 1975). Environmental change in Ismani manifested itself in various forms, including changes in vegetation cover, soil exhaustion, unreliability of rainfall, drought, and decline of crop yields. It has been argued here that commercial production of maize was responsible for the change of the socio-economic relations in Ismani since the 1950s. Through commercial production of maize, Ismani gained fame and became an important feeder based on the agricultural output by large producers. Initially smallholder subsistence farmers were not left behind, as they were assured of good yields sufficient for ample food supplies even from the minimal acreage they cultivated.

The notoreity of Ismani has changed radically in recent years. While in the 1950s and up to the 1980s it was famous for its capacity to feed a large part of the country with maize, from the last decade onwards things have turned upside down. The production of maize no longer provides gainful employment and villagers live with food insecurity and in abject economic poverty. This

situation is evidenced through both the public media and in oral reports.¹⁴ The situation worsened in the 2000s when many peasants were unable to produce yields sufficient for sale or to meet their own food needs. This desperation was described in an interview with Lukelo Kihogota, a smallholder producer in Ismani, when he recalled the practices of *Siasa ni Kilimo* and then added: “we have no alternative than to depend on relief food.”¹⁵ Mr. Kihogota used to be a good farmer over the years; he sold surplus maize to the needy, but now he fails even to produce enough for his family. This is not a unique situation for him alone; it cuts across the majority of the families in many Ismani villages. All this indicates in recent years, starting from the onset of the twenty-first century, the degree to which Ismani has been facing recurrent food shortages. Nowadays starvation in Ismani does occur, resulting from regular crop failures as an outcome of unpredictable weather conditions and shifts in farming preferences from maize to commercial crops like sunflower and tomatoes. Families in many villages of Ismani in recent years are familiar with chronic undernutrition and in some cases, they depend on green vegetables as their only food source, especially during the rainy season when food shortages reach their peak. The most affected areas are Malengamakali Ward and Ikengeza village in Nyang’oro Ward.

Food insecurity in Ismani was addressed at some point in the URT legislature, when a Member of Parliament, Ms. Pindi Chana commented, “the District Council agricultural projects should target to increase productivity, especially in those areas with hunger such as Ismani where every year there is a need to send relief food” (Bunge la Tanzania 2010). Such statements demonstrate the extent to which a former national grain basket has deteriorated to a place of destitution with routine acute food shortages. Other news headlines in recent days include: ‘Four Years Drought turns into a Great Hunger in Iringa’,¹⁶ ‘Hunger: Malengamakali, People Live on Green

¹⁴ Tumaini Msowoya, ‘Ukame wa Miaka Minne Wageuka Balaa Kuu la Njaa’, Mawazo Malembeka, ‘Njaa: Malengamakali, Wananchi Wanaishi Kwa Mboga za Majani’, *Radio Report*, http://radiofreeafricatv.com/2011/njaa_malengamakali_wananchi_waishi_kwa_mboga_za_majani-Accessed on 21.10.2011, at 1300hrs.

¹⁵ Interview with Lukelo Kohogota 2011, p. 12.

¹⁶ Tumaini Msowoya.

Vegetable,¹⁷ '9,000 People Face Hunger in Iringa',¹⁸ and 'Ikengeza to Face Severe Food Shortage'.¹⁹

Conclusion

There is no way we can generalise the impact of state interventions in rural sector development in Tanzania. State interventions' influence varies depending upon a range of factors. On the production side, good yields depend in part upon the incentives that peasants receive out of what they produce, which makes them motivated to produce more. In the absence of incentives, smallholders deviated from productive labour in a range of ways. Environmentally, the impact of state control programmes depends upon the specific local conditions of the soil which is under the cover of a specific crop. Both the state intervention and environmental dynamics have had parallel effects in the decline of maize farming in Ismani during the postcolonial period. In the colonial period, government interventions boosted productivity because the activity of farming and decision making that goes along with it was left in the hands of individual farmers; correlatively, the environment favoured maize farming in that region. Circumstances radically changed on both fronts in the postcolonial period. After Independence, the emphasis of the central state shifted to communal production at a time when the fertility of the soil was also increasingly exhausted. The approach used in bringing people into communal villages for farming was fatally inappropriate. Villagers experiencing the coercion did not understand the government's plan properly. This led to sabotage of *Ujamaa* projects, disaffection at worksites and unsatisfactory distribution of the produce from *Ujamaa* communal labour; all these factors were hindrances to prosperity.

However, we should not put too much credit on the colonial government's finesse in agricultural management as responsible for the productivity boon; it is important to recall the fact that the Ismani District had been opened for intensive farming in the 1940s, at a time when the soils were still fertile enough to allow high productivity of maize for the entire colonial period. Following this especially from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, soil fertility

¹⁷ Mawazo Malembeka, 'Njaa: Malengamakali, Wananchi Wanaishi Kwa Mboga za Majani', *Radio Report*, http://radiofreeafricatv.com/2011/njaa_malengamakali_wananchi_waishi_kwa_mboga_za_majani- Accessed on 21.10.2011, at 1300hrs.

¹⁸ [Http://www.ippmedia.com/fronted/?!=29291](http://www.ippmedia.com/fronted/?!=29291), 'Watu 9, 000 Wamekumbwa na Balaa la Njaa Iringa', Accessed on 21.10.2011, at 1330hrs.

¹⁹ Irene Mwakalinga, 'Wakazi wa Ikengeza-Iringa Kukumbwa na Uhaba wa Chakula', http://www.tbc.go.tz-tbc_local_general/1501_wakazi_wa_ikengeza_iringa_kukumbwa_na_uhaba_wa_wa-_chakula.html. Accessed on 22.10.2011 at 0953hrs.

deteriorated. When coupled with other production problems, the net effect severely depressed the outcomes of maize farming. Ismani demonstrates an outcome for agrarian productivity that results from a failure to appreciate the cumulative impact of incremental environmental change and an inadequate inclusion of local knowledge and agency when programming and executing rural transformation.

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