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Editorial

The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind is a 2019 film based on the true story of William Kamkwamba, a thirteen-year-old boy from Wimbe, Malawi who saves his community from starvation by building a windmill and water pump from various mechanical parts salvaged from a junkyard.

Although the story follows the familiar arc of inspirational films, what is unforgettable is the harrowing depiction of how drought and political decisions converge to create desperate conditions. As Amartya Sen argued, famine is not only about the absolute lack of food – it is about the intersection of political, economic and social forces that deprive vulnerable groups the ability to access food.

The food on your plate today isn't just a combination of inert ingredients subjected to heat – it is a reflection of various structural forces in contestation. Food is power, or more accurately, a power play, and many times what we consider to be our individual preferences are actually the convergence of political interests and decisions that may otherwise be obscure to us. Even though we may have some autonomy on what we choose to eat, the range of options we can choose from is very often determined by bigger forces beyond our direct control.

Imperialism is in the food we eat, said the late great Burkinabé revolutionary Thomas Sankara: "Look at your plates when you eat. These imported grains of rice, corn, and millet – that is imperialism." In fact, controlling the supply and trade of various food items provided the entire impetus for European colonial expansion; spices were particularly valuable because of their ability to be transported over long sea distances and still maintain their flavour and integrity. Coffee, tea, and sugar quickly followed. The result, as we all know, was subjugation of indigenous lands and people, the fallout from which we are still grappling with today.

This is why food has always been linked to the struggle for justice, freedom and dignity. Between 1976 and 1982, there were at least 146 urban protests across the global South linked to steep rises in food prices. More recently, the initial demands of protestors in Cairo's Tahrir Square eight years ago were related to the price of bread. A year prior, a drought in Russia – Egypt's main supplier of wheat – had killed off 40% of the wheat harvest. The price of wheat kept rising, eventually outstripping the consumer wheat subsidy provided by the Egyptian government. With that, the masses took to the streets demanding bread, and the protests spiralled into a wider movement pressing for political and economic change.

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Although the story follows the familiar arc of inspirational films, what is unforgettable is the harrowing depiction of how drought and political decisions converge to create desperate conditions."

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When more powerful countries suddenly acquire the taste for ingredients that are integral to indigenous cultures, it can trigger a price spike that ends up putting the commodity out of the reach of the very people who grow it, as happened with quinoa in Bolivia and Peru, and almost happened with teff in Ethiopia had the government there not banned teff exports.

This issue of *Cha Kula*, produced in collaboration with Nairobi-based online publication *The Elephant*, thus explores the intersection between food and power dynamics in Kenya, both historically and in the contemporary moment. In Joe Kobuthi's article on the colonial forces behind the evolution of food preferences in Kenya today, we discover that even the process of *ugali* becoming Kenya's staple meal is not as benign as you might imagine. Oyunga Pala mourns the disappearance of indigenous seeds and the loss of traditional ways of tending the garden, and highlights the grassroots pockets of resistance that are preserving precious seeds.

Christine Mungai investigates the worrying trend of private corporate power shaping subsistence agriculture in western Kenya, where the well-funded One Acre Fund has thoroughly integrated itself both vertically and horizontally in the region's agricultural economy. Mary Serumaga's piece on the gaps in the Uganda's regulatory framework concerning GMOs highlights the concern that the push for GMOs is less about Ugandans' food security and more about the undisclosed interests of foreigners.

Zeynab Wandati travels to the counties to hear how devolution – and its attendant political contestations – is shaping the agricultural sector, while Paul Goldsmith challenges the notion that agricultural "progress" necessarily means large, consolidated farms of big fields, straight lines, greenhouses, and large grids of sprinklers.

Even in the face of imperialist and market forces, all is not lost. Africa is still home to a veritable treasure trove of indigenous plants that could diversify a food base unfortunately narrowed by the colonial impulse. Africa's own researchers and growers could invigorate these food sources and reverse the tragic epistemic violence of recent decades. This is even more urgent as climate change threatens the viability of current methods of commercial agriculture. Our resistance, it seems, is to be found in the leaves, stems, roots, tubers, bulbs, seeds, pods and flowers of yesterday.

Glossary

Agency: the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.

Food justice: Food justice is communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. Healthy food is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals.

Food sovereignty: Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.

Food system: All processes and labor involved in keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and disposing of food and food packages. It also includes the inputs needed and outputs generated at each step.

Green Revolution: A large increase in crop production in developing countries achieved by the use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, and high-yield crop varieties.

Neoliberalism: The dominant ideology permeating the public policies of many governments in developed and developing countries. Neoliberalism advocates for the reduction of state interventions in economic and social activities and the deregulation of labour and financial markets, as well as of commerce and investments.

Seed sovereignty: A farmer's right to breed and exchange diverse open source seeds which can be saved and which are not patented, genetically modified, owned or controlled by seed corporations.

Structural forces: Those factors of influence (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ability, customs, etc.) that determine or limit the choices and opportunities available to an individual.

Value chain: The set of actors and activities that bring a basic agricultural product from production in the field to final consumption, where at each stage value is added to the product. A value chain can be a vertical linking or a network between various independent business organisations and can involve processing, packaging, storage, transport and distribution.

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Culinary imperialism: The politics and hierarchies of food

By Joe Kobuthi

Food has never been about the simple act of eating; food is history, and identity. Colonialism, as a violent process, fundamentally altered the way of life of a people, including their culinary habits. Even how ugali became Kenya's staple food is part of the story of colonialism.

The violence that accompanied European colonisation of Africa people was a well-known fact. But while a lot of emphasis has leaned towards the political, military and economic changes forced upon the colonised people, the matter of food – the very source of survival – is seldom considered, as Dr Linda Alvarez wrote for the Food Empowerment Project. Yet food has always been a fundamental tool in the process of colonisation. "Through food, social and cultural norms are conveyed, and also violated. Arguably, one cannot properly understand colonisation without taking into account the issue of food and eating," writes Dr Alvarez.

In 1895, Britain annexed the future Kenya as an East African protectorate. However, the expansion of the British Empire was met with resistance in some parts of the protectorate. The British suppressed the opposition by using different methods, from divide-and-rule tactics to military campaigns, signing treaties with local rulers, and controlling food to quell dissent.

The scorched-earth policy of burning crops and killing livestock proved to be a most effective method for suppressing rebellion and subduing the population. In his book, *Kenya Diary 1902-1906*, British colonial official Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen describes this official policy of food destruction in matter-of-fact terms while reflecting on how during his many expeditions the burning of huts, crops and livestock proved to be a very effective means of suppressing dissent and breaking the resistance of African communities.

Once the British consolidated power in the colony, there was an influx of thousands of European settlers who were invited by the colonial government with offers of huge leases for the most fertile land in the country. The fertile expanses that later became the "White Highlands," were opened for settlement through the forceful displacement of the previous inhabitants, most of whom ended up in the drier margins of their former homelands, or became squatter-workers on white farms or were employed by Asian merchants as menial labourers.

The colonial state used white settlers to introduce commercial agricultural production as the mainstay of the colonial economy. For their part, white settlers prided themselves for their "frontier" spirit and they saw themselves as pioneers "taming" a wild country. The state forcibly seized land, livestock and other indigenous assets from certain communities and households on behalf of the settlers and the colonial administration, systematically marginalising and subordinating indigenous African agriculture.

Among the Kipsigis, writes Dr Samson Omoyo in a paper titled "The agricultural changes in the Kipsigis: A historical analysis," describes how colonial manoeuvres depleted the native livestock and land critical for the Kipsigis' economic and social reproduction, clearing the way for the increasing numbers of European settlers. The capital-driven process eroded the Kipsigis' indigenous land tenure systems and gradually undermined and changed their previous way of life.

Joe Kobuthi is a writer and analyst based in Nairobi, Kenya. He is an editor with The Elephant (theelephant.info); his work focuses on deconstructing the Kenyan body politic – its perspectives, contradictions and blindsides.

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Food not only functioned to maintain the European body's superiority, it also played a role in the formation of social identity and Britain's 'civilising mission' across its empire."

This was replicated in many other places in the Kenyan colony. By the mid-1930s, about one-fifth of arable land in Kenya was under the exclusive control of the settlers. In addition, the state provided the settlers and corporate capital with the necessary infrastructural, agricultural, marketing, and credit facilities. Above all, the state sought to create, mobilise and control the supply of African labour for capital.

Cash crop farming quickly became the choice source of income for the settlers, who benefited from the cheap land and the large African labour force that they conscripted. Deprived on land, and pushed into the cash economy by a new coercive tax system, Africans were obliged to work on white farms, and this facilitated the introduction of European food crops. Often, African workers in settler farms were paid in sacks of maize due to its high nutritional value that would create a strong and healthy labour force, and its easy access and availability in the colony.

When the Africans returned to the so-called "reserves", they introduced maize into their subsistence farming systems, cementing its position as the colony's primary staple crop. It ended up replacing crops like millet, sorghum and various tubers, which were commonly found in traditional farming systems. This is how ugali came to be Kenya's staple food – far from being a dietary preference that had evolved naturally over time, the power of the colonial state was very much involved in pressing it onto Kenyan plates.

In 1923, the government announced that it would promote cash crop markets in the reserves. Little came of this because African farmers, who were more intent on providing for local food needs, lacked interest in producing for the export market.

Strong opposition to the planned introduction of cash crops led the colonial government to instead subsidise European production in order to maintain the colony's food security. The indigenous smallholder farmers who attempted to make a living selling cash crops could not compete as a result. Eventually, in 1937, the colonial government reinstated cash crop growing in the reserves as a mainstay economic activity.

As land became scarce and the demand for cash grew in order to participate in the new economy, local Africans increasingly began favouring cash crops like coffee in place of subsistence farming. This made food security in many African households a tenuous affair. Commercialisation resulted in the emergence of new types of households: commodity-producing households; labour-exporting households; squatter households; and working-class households. This massive displacement of people not only deprived Africans of food and ceremony, but also of traditional knowledge of food and its preparation as communities became reliant on the new economic system.

Everything from the loss of teachings about indigenous plants to cultural exchanges thorough regional indigenous markets were destroyed or compromised. As such, African farming systems were forever altered, many traditional practices were lost, and cultural norms were shaken.

But what the colonial economic system didn't obliterate, the church did.

By the 1930s, the missionary schools and other church institutions had made concerted effort to rid local cultures of their traditions. Although earlier travellers and missionaries like David Livingstone had reported on Africans' healthy diets, many of his predecessors held the racist and eugenicist view that food shaped the colonial body. In other words, the European body differed from that of the African people because the British diet and culinary habits differed from culinary habits of the local Africans. Bodies could be altered by diets—thus the fear that by consuming "inferior" African foods, the British might eventually become like the "natives". Only proper European foods would maintain the superior nature of European bodies, and only these foods and British food sensibilities could also civilise the "African savages" to be more like their colonisers.

In their minds, as one Chloe Campbell suggests in her book *Race and Empire: Eugenics in Colonial Kenya*, food not only functioned to maintain the European body's superiority, it also played a role in the formation of social identity and Britain's "civilising mission" across its empire.

The burning of huts, crops and livestock proved to be a very effective means of suppressing dissent and breaking the resistance of African communities."

The campaign to "civilise" the African was more successful than the missionaries could have ever hoped for. The primary vectors for the cultural indoctrination were the mission schools, churches, and public health programmes responsible for educating Africans. These methods of "education" uniformly reduced knowledge related to the cultivation and preparation of traditional and indigenous foods.

Traditional knowledge was devalued as the education of children was shifted from tribal elders to the imperial powers via the church and school. British education encouraged "sophistication", which included the rejection of traditional foods and methods of food preparation, and an emphasis on British culinary sensibilities and food practices. Traditional cereals, herbs and vegetables were promptly dropped for those with high market value and perceived social desirability in this new colonial order. Thereafter, traditional foods for this emergent African class would only be consumed in secret and infrequently mainly in the African reserves.

The symbolic nature of food was also seen in the imposition of religion, another destructive aspect of the British conquest. In 1930, the Bishop of the Church Mission Society (CMS) Robert Merttins Bird, in a letter to the Christians and elders of the pastorate in Kikuyuland, forbade the consumption of local manufactured alcohol, deeming it evil and devilish, hence the need for it to be abandoned by all members of the church.

This policy, however, didn't take into account that many cultures in Kenya had a long tradition of beer-making, the consumption of which was reserved for ceremonies and cultural events. Just as the church demonised the consumption of local alcohol, there was also a concerted effort by the colonial government to control native alcohol consumption to keep the African labour "productive". Both of these policies reinforced the racist perception that Africans could not hold their liquor and the regulations disrupted production in native cereal grains used in the brews.

In 1963, when Kenya gained its independence, a new class of African elites took power. But as Franz Fanon writes in his seminal text *The Wretched of the Earth*, this class of (mostly) men and women did not reform the colonial state but, in fact, perfected it and exacerbated its venality towards its people. Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, together with his cronies and senior government officials, acquired huge tracts of land and resources as they pleased. While indigenous communities suffered poverty, the confiscated resources became a source of wealth and prosperity for the political and business elite.

The effect of this massive land grab by the elite would consolidate the neocolonial system by replacing "peasant" modes of production with capitalist modes, and the establishment of a new African petit-bourgeois class within sectors of the economy.

> **"Food has always been a fundamental tool in the process of colonisation. Through food, social and cultural norms are conveyed, and also violated."**

Grain Reserves, Government Magic by Mdogo

Their primary occupation would be in “activities of the intermediary type”, as Fanon memorably described it, scheming and hustling, and firmly entrenching their role as mediators for former colonial powers.

These elites, in cahoots with their Western allies, have passed draconian laws, illegally grabbed land, manipulated food and agricultural policies, and engaged in rampant corruption to control the food Kenyans consume. Of these, weaponising corruption has proved to be most effective means. In the maize sector, for instance, since 1965 – when the first maize scandal was reported – the politics of maize has been used by the political class as a system of reward and a means to pacify or punish communities for political expediency – the same tactics used by the white colonialists to suppress resistance.

Today, there has been growing interest in the battle for control over land, food and even seeds in Kenya. Under the guise of improving food security in Kenya, a new wave of food imperialism is taking shape. A series of public-private partnerships are aggressively shaping a food policy geared towards helping corporations access prime resources and markets within Kenya’s food systems. Farmers are being pushed from low-cost sustainable traditional agriculture to intensive, industrial farming with intensive application of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and corporate-owned seeds. This domineering framework to control what food people grow, how they grow and consume it, is in contrast to what many are calling food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty is about the right of a people to determine their own choices with regard to food and agriculture as opposed to having their food supply subjected to external forces, such as imperialism or the global economic market. Food sovereignty, therefore, according to the U.S Food Sovereignty Alliance, states that people must reclaim their power in the food system by rebuilding the relationships between people and land, and between food providers and those who eat it. It must go well beyond ensuring that people have enough food to meet their physical needs.

Food has never merely been about the simple act of eating; food is history, and identity. Hence, colonialism, as a violent process, fundamentally altered the way of life of a people, including their culinary habits. Since European occupation of Africa, its people have encountered a radically altered food system. Therefore, because food choices are influenced and constrained by cultural, political and economic values, they are an important part of the deconstruction and decolonisation of our social identity.

Indeed, for Africa in particular, food and food production has to go beyond just being about health, well-being, economic resilience and cultural heritage; food must be used to restore a balance of power, restore dignity and re-imagine a better future for its people. Food is power.

Food sovereignty is about the right of a people to determine their own choices with regard to food and agriculture as opposed to having their food supply subjected to external forces, such as imperialism or the global economic market.”

In search of grandmother's osuga seeds: An ode to traditional ways of knowing

By Oyunga Pala

The importance of seeds, and indigenous seed cultures, in particular, is a lost consciousness among the contemporary generation of African farmers. Capitalist modes of production mainly focus on high yields, profit, and seed market control, and the result is a tragic loss of indigenous crops and farming methods.

"They tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds."

This poignant quote is attributed to the Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos. It formed part of a defiant response to the Greek literary community who criticised Christianopoulos' poetry as provincial. The poem is part of a collection translated into English by Prof. Nicholas Kostis (1995). The original text read, "What didn't you do to bury me/ but you forgot that I was a seed." My own paraphrasing of those famous Christianopoulos' lines would read: They tried to bury us, we survived but we lost our way and forgot we are seeds.

The importance of seeds, and indigenous seed cultures in particular, is a lost consciousness among the contemporary generation of African farmers. The introduction of hybrid seeds in post-colonial Africa progressively altered farming cultures and food systems.

Commercial and certified seeds accompanied by a retinue of inputs, fertilisers, pesticides and the promise of high yields but only good for one season, have entrapped rural small-scale farmers in exploitative systems of the dominant agro-industry. Indigenous plant genetic varieties have lost significant ground to hybrid varieties and consequently, the disappearance of indigenous food cultures and seed knowledge.

My own awareness of this crisis evolved over decades. I was brought up in a middle-class family, sojourned in Nairobi, chasing the Kenyan dream. My parents had one foot firmly planted in the ancestral village home, back in Gem, Siaya County. As second-generation labour migrants to Nairobi, my parents arrived in the capital city post-independence to secure residence. Courtesy of the civil service, they lived in the formerly "white" sections of the city.

In these new upper-middle-class spaces, backyards were for recreation and not farming. Nonetheless, my parents never lost touch with their roots which was perhaps informed by their acute awareness of the politics of belonging in Nairobi. They regarded the city as a marketplace where capital was accumulated and transferred from the centre back to the deprived margins.

To help offset the living costs of large households and establish a security blanket in the event of political dislocation, they maintained a steady link with rural homes. My father took us to the village every school holiday without fail. We learned to farm, mainly cash crops (maize and beans) as the staple. It was a labour-intensive crop when planted at scale without the aid of mechanisation.

My father was a civil servant securing a measure of comfort after retirement. He invested in mono-cropping modern systems, focused on high yield and scale for profit. It was during these excursions that I began to understand the clear gendered distinction between how men and women farmed. Men approached farming from a capitalistic frame modeled on the colonial imagery of "I had a farm in Africa" – that famous line by Karen Blixen in the book and movie

Oyunga Pala is a Kenyan writer and editor. He is a curator at The Elephant (theelephant.info).

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I have only now come to terms with the significance of my grandmother's garden and the loss we experienced. It is loss of knowledge, memory, culture and food sovereignty that is replicated among communities in the global South enduring the trauma of colonial dislocation."

Out Of Africa – while the women engaged in peasant farming, often associated with allotments around the home dominated by indigenous vegetables.

While seasonal farming of maize was a group family activity, my grandmother maintained a garden outside her kitchen throughout the duration of her life. The kitchen garden was distinguished by plant diversity and the presence of diverse categories of food. There was fruit, tubers, bulbs, rhizomes, an assortment of vegetables, fruiting creepers, medicinal herbs, spices and some grain. Every plant in her garden had a function.

To the unaccustomed eye, it appeared to be an unkempt and overgrown allotment, in stark contrast to the neat rows of maize that occupied our family's three-acre farm. My grandmother practiced an alternative style of farming that involved no pesticides – save for firewood ash – minimal tillage and composting. The allotment remained productive throughout the year.

Her generation employed permaculture principles that Bill Mollison, the Australian educator and co-founder of permaculture, brought to popular consciousness. Her philosophy of food production is captured in Mollison's articulation of permanent agriculture. "The greatest change we need to make is from consumption to production, even if on a small scale, in our own gardens. If only 10% of us do this, there is enough for everyone. Hence the futility of revolutionaries who have no gardens, who depend on the very system they attack, and who produce words and bullets, not food and shelter."

In hindsight, these gardens – a common background feature in most homesteads – served as the main source of the family's daily nutritional needs. They acted as alternative food sources in the likely event of crop failure due to vagaries of the weather, the sporadic pest and wildlife damage and fluctuating market prices.

Additionally, these granny kitchen gardens held something even more precious: a seed bank and a botanical lab where constant experimentation was taking place and heirlooms were preserved. The gardens epitomised food sovereignty in complete revolutionary terms. My grandparents, who came of age in the nascent days of the British colony, suffered the disruption of an oppressive colonial order.

The introduction of a cash economy and wage labour led to new methods of food production, initially as forced labour, and later as a necessity for economic security. While the men farmed to earn money, the women created alternative gardening spaces, delicately negotiating autonomy. A core part of the success of these allotments was seeds and seed sovereignty.

We have lost nearly all of the heritage seeds that my grandmother retained in her little garden. The tall pawpaws and red bananas that I thought grew wild as a child are non-existent. The chillies are gone, as are the medicinal herbs and the diverse indigenous vegetables. The traditional yellow-coloured maize known as *nyamula* of my grandmother's time is now a rare sighting. All that I have left is lemongrass that I went in search of after reading a newspaper article on its economic viability as a poor man's cash crop. In my ancestral village the keepers of the seed are a generation of grandmothers whose significance is lost in the new agriculture order.

However, today, most of the village farms have been reclaimed by bush. Those outside the support network of agricultural companies or who lacked capital to fund farming activity sought alternatives after years of diminishing returns on depleted plots. The old ways become even more irrelevant when you consider shifting culinary habits that are fixated on processed staple substitutes of chapati, bread, mandazi and rice – culinary habits that at their inception were a quest for sophistication as an outcome of the colonial project.

In a generation, I have witnessed the disappearance and loss of this knowledge on indigenous seed in not only food crops, but in trees as well. "Commercially viable" species like eucalyptus, pines and cypress varieties are increasingly dominant, and smallholder farmers have created tree farms following the same ethic of plantation agriculture – fast growth, high yield and maximum profit. The indigenous fruits of Kenya are lost to memory and the fruits I now consider traditional, such as mango, guava, and avocado, actually have roots in Asia and South America. The old fruit tree species – like tamarind, baobab, plums and berries – were dismissed for their poor market potential and ultimately could not keep up with the evolving culinary habits. They are increasingly corralled to the corridors of botanical research institutes.

I tried my hand as a farmer recently. My foray into commercial farming was motivated by profit in an uncertain economy. It was an alternative source of income. I approached it armed with all the modern resources I could find: soil tests, fertiliser, certified seed, pesticides and the service of a freelancing agronomist. I decided to try growing indigenous vegetables, considering there is a boom in demand for local veggies on supermarket shelves. I sourced my seed, the Giant African Black Nightshade (locally known as *osuga*) from a reputable company. Seed developers have commercialised indigenous leafy vegetables seed, the huge appeal has followed health concerns of meat and processed food-based diets and a return to healthy, traditional plant-based diets.

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The future of seed commons is going to be grassroots-based and sustained by networks of conscious actors organising to dismantle the power of the agroindustrial complex."

My strategy was mono-cropping with a rigorous pesticide regimen. I had marginal success, but my biggest setback was two pest attacks on a half-acre plot. The modern *osuga* seed simply had no resistance to pests, but I noticed that some hardy version of *osuga* growing almost wild on a corner of my farm – which I had hitherto ignored – would wilt upon pest attack, but quickly recover. It led me to seriously consider looking for alternative seed. The catch-22 of hybrid seeds is the heavy reliance on agrochemicals for guaranteed yield. The Route to Food Initiative (RTFI) recently conducted research that showed at least 33% of pesticide active ingredients that are currently registered and being sold in products in Kenya, have been withdrawn from the European market, due to their serious potential impact on human and environmental health (RTFI, 2019).

This is what set me off in search of my grandmother's *osuga* seeds. The seed stock was not available in my village and in the surrounding villages. Whenever I posed the question, I received a cursory response of, "*Koth nyaluo tinde olal*". Indigenous seeds are no longer available these days. My persistence led me to the vibrant Luanda town market in Vihiga County.

To my relief, I found a constituency of women selling regional varieties of indigenous vegetable seed, measured by the bottle top from as far as Ukambani. The seed retailed for a fraction of the cost of the certified seed I sourced from the local agrovet shop. When I asked the women about the stocks, they replied without hesitation, "*Mbegu iko*". We have seed. They had formed communities where they collected, selected, exchanged, and preserved seed.

I remain aware that these market women in Luanda are an exception rather than the rule. This deliberate stewardship of resilient self-propagating seed is a response to the commercialisation of indigenous vegetable seeds, and in the face of capitalised seed control, they become the face of the resistance movement. Their actions embody generations of knowledge and a tradition of survival in the midst of a sophisticated assault on the diversity of food crops.

Seed preservation is happening on the margins, and is a movement not only confined to Kenya. North America has witnessed a revival of native seed exchange banks as indigenous communities re-imagine management systems to store and protect native heirloom seeds that sustained Native American plant-based foods. Seed Keepers Networks are emerging to revitalise native plant species and the inherent rich cultural knowledge that accompanied traditional food pathways. Alongside that are foodie movements returning to tradition of reclaiming and re-imagining pre-colonial African diets that were largely vegan.

Similar initiatives with global visions, such as the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)'s Smallholder Innovation For Resilience (SIFOR) project, examine traditional knowledge-based innovation systems to strengthen food security in the face of climate change. However, many of these initiatives abide by a funding model that involves foreign experts jetting in with capital to solve local problems that were exacerbated by neo-liberal economic policies.

Where the women are acknowledged, they merely serve as mascots for narratives of rural poverty that appeal to saviour mentality complexes. It is over two decades since my grandmother's passing and I have only now come to terms with the significance of her garden and the loss we experienced. It is loss of knowledge, memory, culture and food sovereignty that is replicated among communities in the global South enduring the trauma of colonial dislocation.

The future of seed commons is going to be grassroots-based and sustained by networks of conscious actors organising to dismantle the power of the agroindustrial complex. The confluence of challenges arising from modern food pathways has triggered a case for re-imagination, not only of what we eat, but how we produce what we eat. What we need is cultural recovery that revitalises the relationship with land and the foods we produce and consume. At the heart of this is replanting our grandmothers' seeds that we ignorantly forgot to bury in fertile ground.

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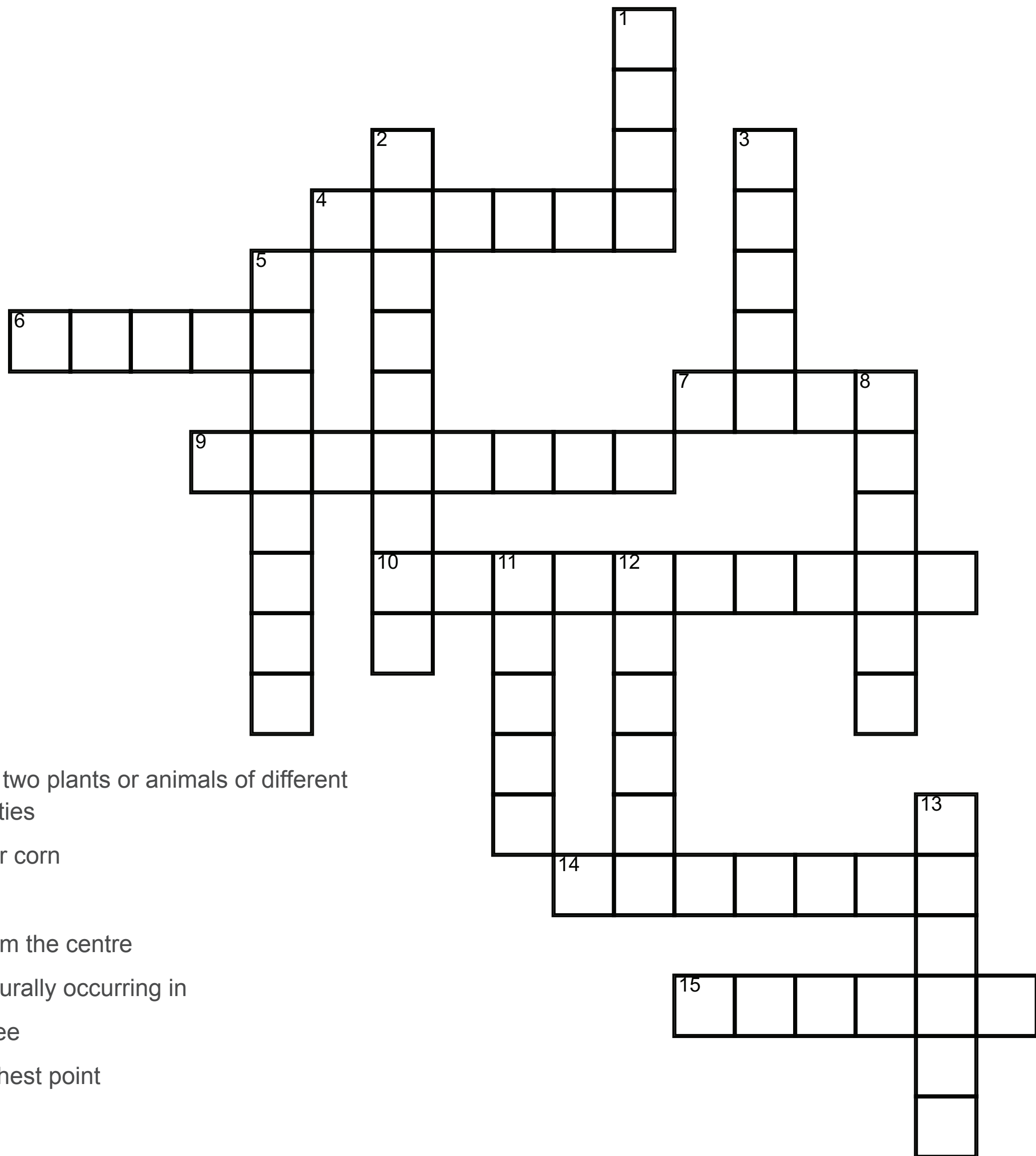
Crossword: Food and power



Across

4 The offspring of two plants or animals of different species or varieties

6 Another word for corn

7 To dig or plough

9 Moved away from the centre

10 Native to, or naturally occurring in

14 A variety of coffee

15 The peak or highest point

Down

1 A wild plant growing in competition with cultivated plants

2 Living together in harmony and for mutual benefit

3 Prefix for seemingly or almost

5 Dominance

8 A tropical grasshopper that can travel in large warms

11 A warehouse

12 A hot, fragrant spice made from the rhizome of a plant

13 A shadowy association working to keep pricess high

The answers for the crossword puzzle are available on www.routetofood.org/cha-kula-crossword-puzzle

Land Lease and Disenfranchisement by Mdogo

THEY'VE POISONED THE AIR, SOIL AND WATER BODIES FOR FLOWERS THAT NO ONE EATS !!

Mdogo Sept2019

When Love Hurts by Mdogo

Timeline in Kenya's agricultural history

1895

The territory now known as Kenya comes under the control of the British, as the East Africa Protectorate. The British suppresses opposition by using different methods including a 'scorched-earth policy' of burning crops and killing livestock and ultimately controlling food to quell dissent.

1918

A series of Resident Native Labourers Ordinances come into force that push Africans to work on settler farms, progressively curtail squatter rights and subordinate native Kenyan farming to that of the settlers.

1923

The colonial government announces that it would promote cash crop markets in the reserves. Little came of this because African farmers, who were more intent on providing for local food needs, lacked interest in producing for the export market.

1937

By this time, indigenous smallholder farmers are finding they cannot compete with subsidised European food production. As land becomes scarce and the demand for cash grows in order to participate in the new economy, local Africans increasingly begin favouring cash crops like coffee in place of subsistence farming. This makes food security in many African households a tenuous affair.

2003

A new government comes into power, and an Economic Recovery Strategy Plan is put into action. The plan increases agricultural productivity and access to financial services to rural households.

2008

Kenya suffers from the combination of post-election violence, rising prices for food and fuel internationally and poor harvests nationally, which sent the annual rate of food price inflation as high as 27%. This, and a subsequent spike in 2011, sparks protests both large and small, the most visible and memorable being the Unga Revolution.

2010

A new constitution is enacted, that establishes the right to be free from hunger and have adequate food of acceptable quality. The constitution further devolves most agricultural services to county governments. Devolution comes into force three years later with the election of the first county governments and creation of their respective offices.

1938

Muindi Mbingu leads the Kamba in a campaign to protest forced destocking of their herds. It is a non-violent but highly successful rebellion that gains international attention.

1952

The Mau Mau Uprising breaks out to agitate for a return of African land and an end to colonialism. The British response to the uprising includes coralling many Africans to concentration-camp like villages, and imposing curfews that restrict access to farmland. The result is hunger and even starvation in many households.

1954

The Swynnerton Plan is published, a colonial agricultural policy that aims to intensify the development of agricultural practice in the Kenya Colony. It recommends African farmers be allowed to grow cash crops, be given a major increase in technical assistance, and have access to marketing facilities, all of which were previously available but restricted to the white settler minority.

1963

Kenya gains independence from the British. First president Jomo Kenyatta is quickly embroiled in accusations that his cronies and government are amassing land and property for themselves rather than redistribute them to landless Africans as British officials and most white settlers depart. The land question - and its impact on food security - is yet to be settled even after independence.

1965

Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya is published. It is intended to boost the country's economic growth, but lays the foundation for entrenching decades-long marginalization of areas that are deemed "less developed, negatively impacting food security in those areas.

1984

A severe drought in Kenya tests the limits of subsistence agriculture and household resilience. Many families have to seek food aid.

The case of GMOs in Uganda: A strong regulatory environment must be a prerequisite

By Mary Serumaga

The impression being created is that GMOs are about food security and survival, yet experience shows that they are more about the undisclosed interests of foreigners.

The official introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Uganda has been delayed yet again when President Museveni recently declined to assent to the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Act, first passed by Parliament in October 2017. President Museveni sent the Biosafety Act back to Parliament in December 2017, citing a number of concerns he had with it, which he said were "inimical to our future".

Parliament, he said, did not address those issues to his satisfaction in the reviewed legislation now called the Genetic Engineering Regulatory Act (GERA) passed in August 2019. The name change signals a new understanding of the paramount need to regulate the technology if its promotion is to achieve its ends.

In January 2018 the issues that the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Act should provide for were:

- Preservation of biodiversity in indigenous crops by construction of a gene bank;
- Clarification of the ownership of GMO patents;
- Compulsory regulated labeling;
- Isolation of GMOs from indigenous seeds, including pollen and effluent from GMO farms;
- Explicit prohibition of biotechnology in human genetic engineering;
- Penalties for non-compliance.

The over-arching question is whether Uganda has a regulatory environment capable of protecting the country's biodiversity and commercial interests. It is instructive to note that the National Seed Testing Laboratory was unable to prevent an armyworm invasion in Uganda two years ago. The pest is suspected to have been imported in American produce in the same year the Auditor General reported that a "lack of adequate laboratories for [post-entry quarantine] exposes the whole agricultural sector to risks of inferior crop varieties being imported into the country" – and pest invasions.

In the context of the GMO debate, we must remember that abandonment of, or damage to, biodiversity will lead to dependency on GMOs. Dependency on imported seeds that have to be bought every season with a currency that is weaker each year is not a viable solution to hunger.

Biodiversity is an asset vulnerable to commodification and the duty to protect it can be waived for a "license fee". Wetlands are nominally protected by the constitution but their destruction in Uganda has been achieved under licence from the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA). Where unlicenced, it has happened under NEMA's watch. Wetlands have been neither demarcated nor gazetted and only 0.3% of targeted restorations have been implemented. Yet the same administration is expected to gazette and preserve indigenous plants in a gene bank.

Mary Serumaga is a Ugandan essayist, graduated in Law from King's College, London, and attained an Msc in Intelligent Management Systems from the Southbank. Her work in civil service reform in East Africa lead to an interest in the nature of public service in Africa and the political influences under which it is delivered.

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> **“Dependency on imported seeds that have to be bought every season with a currency that is weaker each year is not a viable solution to hunger.”**

How capable of implementation of the safeguards is the control environment in 2019? Labeling of firms, individuals, seeds, other planting materials and chemicals is key to an audit trail leading back to the origin of specific GMOs and their developers/patent-holders and importers. Reviewing recent performance in the agricultural sector we find 50% of hybrid maize on the market is fake. The Economic Policy Research Centre says counterfeits are putting livelihoods at risk. This is the environment in which GMO labels are going to be relied on.

The national seed catalogue of approved seeds is currently the country’s only protection from seeds deemed undesirable for scientific or commercial reasons. Oversight of the seed registration function – just like oversight over licencing forests, lakes and rivers for commercial use – is not in the public domain. As a result, regulation depends almost exclusively on post-mortem reports by the Auditor General. Abuses cannot be interrupted as they occur but only be reported once the (irreversible) damage is done, as with the wetlands.

To avoid extinction by “co-mingling”, indigenous plants must be isolated from nearby GMOs that could contaminate them. The stipulated distances may constitute the entire area available to the average smallholder farmer, the smallholder possibly being prohibited from growing his indigenous plants in the vicinity of his larger commercial GMO neighbour and thus edged out of the industry. If the commercial neighbour happens to be a foreign investor, it goes without saying who would win that turf war.

In 2017and 2018 there was talk of a plant gene bank to preserve indigenous varieties. Surprisingly, Parliament is attempting to push the legislation through a second time without educating and assuring the public of the existence of the gene bank and whether it meets international standards. The gene bank, which may comprise of plant beds in situ, in vitro specimens or cryogenically frozen material preserved in labs, remains elusive. Whether it was possible in this country to create a plant gene bank in the eighteen months that have elapsed since it was first mooted is doubtful.

Enquiries from a scientist on social media produced the response that there are germplasm collection sites in Uganda in Kawanda Agricultural Research Station and Mbarara. One can only hope that Northern and Eastern produce, such as malakwang and moyaa (shea butter), will also be preserved. However, since then, Entebbe Botanical Gardens, Uganda's 100-year-old Plant Genetic Resource Centre has been encroached on and a sewage treatment facility for a nearby shopping mall built in it. Earlier part of Kawanda was sold to a factory developer.

A legal regime has been proposed to make GMO patent-holders, developers and importers strictly liable for negligent or reckless commercial activities. This is another opportunity for rent-seeking by public officials. As they do with regard to tax-holidays, free land and other incentives, investors may stipulate they will only 'help' (investment is seen as aid in Uganda) if they are indemnified against liability.

One pertinent question that must be addressed in this debate is: who is responsible for a nation's food security? 'Development partners', the international community, philanthropists, World Economic Forum groupies, random anonymous foreigners on Twitter, or the State and its citizens? When food security is being discussed at the World Economic Forum why is Bill Gates there and not independent scientists and maybe smallholder farmers from food-insecure countries? Does it matter that some of those attending are investors in GMOs?

Current attempts to exclude sections of stakeholders on the basis that the industry and scientists know and care more about their well-being than ordinary Ugandans themselves is not a useful approach to promoting the technology.

Given only 1% of potentially irrigable arable land in Uganda is under irrigation, as well as the increasing incidence of drought owing to global warming, it is to be expected that the main rationale adopted for legalisation of GMOs is to ensure food security and end hunger. For context, undernourishment in Uganda rose by an average one percentage point a year between 2006 and 2011 and accelerated to an average two percentage points plus every year from 2011 to 2017, according to data from the World Bank.

Statistics from the GMO industry show that harvests can be tripled for some crops; pests can be resisted and droughts can be survived by GMO seeds. Coupled with the country's

42 million population growing by 3.3% per year, it is easy to make the case for legalisation as soon as possible. Add the promise of legal recognition of citizens' rights as proprietors of the country's biodiversity to be guaranteed a share in biotechnology developed from it and you have a totally seductive package.

Yet in many ways food security is the least convincing argument for GMOs, especially when it comes in intemperate interventions by foreigners with undisclosed interests. Logically, if there were genuine concerns about ending hunger, before the radical proposal of GMOs, African governments and their development partners would have by now exhausted simpler solutions by which Africa could arguably feed itself such as irrigation, high transaction costs and post-harvest losses.

Non-tariff trade barriers would have been dismantled and fairer Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with Europe would be in place. The truth about EPAs was officially acknowledged in a debate in the British Parliament aimed at finding post-Brexit markets. African treaty negotiators were simply out-matched in negotiation. "There was little or no input from the Parliaments…no public debate….[N]o analysis of the long-term impact that their restrictions would have," Lord David Chidgey remarked in Britain's House of Lords.

How much more or less is Uganda prepared to negotiate GMO agreements? President Museveni points out that the introduction of GMOs has implications for Uganda's (food) sovereignty. EPAs and trade barriers will remain tools at

"When food security is being discussed at the World Economic Forum why is Bill Gates there and not independent scientists and maybe smallholder farmers from food-insecure countries?"

We must always remember that biodiversity is an asset vulnerable to commodification.”

the disposal of both genuine and predatory investors in GMOs. Any liability for harm to humans or the environment could be side-stepped simply by stating that incorrect methods were used. Yet it is clear that very few farmers will be able to implement isolation requirements, for example. Going on the experience of the tea industry regeneration scheme (only 20% of seedlings were planted in the correct topography) or rice production (which fell by 72% under the scheme), or coffee (which has only a 42% germination rate) – all failing due to lack of effective extension support – it is folly to assume that introducing GMOs is a matter of reading the instructions on the tin – assuming you can understand the language and are able to read 9-point text on a grey background.

Extension support in Uganda is almost totally absent since government agricultural extension workers were retrenched under the 1990s structural adjustment programme. The military deployed under Operation Wealth Creation is an ineffective substitute. It was expected that the private sector would fill the gap but the Kenyan experience is instructive; organic farmers in Machakos reported that seed sellers deploy salesmen under the guise of extension workers – hardly impartial advice.

The introduction of GMOs has also been accompanied by ‘super’ herbicide-resistant weeds that require more toxic chemicals to control. The GERA will, if the President’s stipulations are followed, also govern (he says prohibit) the use of glyphosate, the ubiquitous herbicide owned by the largest purveyor of GMO seeds and suspected of causing cancer. Globally, twenty-nine other jurisdictions have banned or intend to ban glyphosate. Unless specifically addressed, it could end up being dumped in Uganda (along with DDT) in an aid package as part of a requirement for use with their GMOs.

It is argued that a case-by-case introduction of GMO plants may be feasible. Nothing could be more legally hazardous. A sound regulatory environment is a prerequisite for the legally safe adoption of GMOs. If, for example, the proposed Genetic Engineering Council develops regulations based on future research curtailing or banning some of the early investors’ activities, Uganda could – would – be liable for the investors’ financial losses under the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system. Under this mechanism, investors are able to challenge public welfare legislation in countries in which they invest.

Regardless of outcomes (which are often unfavourable to the target State) the arbitration procedure is very costly. For the investor it would not be a bad deal. They would simply calculate how much they expected to profit and be compensated for that without even having done the work. Unscrupulous investors have taken advantage of this legal loophole in other countries where they invest in controversial areas and simply file a suit once the domestic government eventually curtails their activities by law.

But there are other interests, such as those of domestic scientists who desire and need freedom to operate. Museveni highlights the importance of domestic research. It is unfortunate that some Ugandan scientists receive warnings about GMOs as indictments of their ability to deliver domestically developed GMOs. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is an opportunity for Uganda to invest in scientific research.

If GMO solutions implemented were home-grown and the fruits of Uganda-funded research, there might be less suspicion and resistance. If the GERA provided any certainty that Ugandan GMOs would be protected and used ahead of imports, the discussion would be different. As it stands now, foreign players are the most vocal and aggressive in this matter because they stand to gain the most by dominating the market. They can also afford to pay for propaganda and, let’s face it, bribes. It is imperative to fight for the rights of domestic scientists and to ensure their research is actually theirs and not commissioned by the GMO lobby.

One (private) ring to rule them all: A case study of One Acre Fund

By Christine Mungai

In western Kenya, many farmers only have good things to say about One Acre Fund's activities in their communities, as the organisation fills a gap created by the abandonment of smallholder farmers by government authorities. But more questions arise on how exactly the organisation is able to circumvent the cartels that have gripped the sector, and on the structural inequalities that the company exploits and even exacerbates.

In Yala, Siaya County, Friday is market day. Wares of all kinds – farm produce, household goods, plastic knick-knacks and second-hand clothing – are lain out, the place is buzzing with activity. We arrive on Friday around 1pm, with the sun high in the sky and just as Friday prayers are concluding at Yala mosque. Around the corner from the mosque and the market is Yala's NCPB (National Cereal and Produce Board) depot. The place is still and eerie, the warehouses seem deserted, a railway track that runs through the depot has long rusted.

The only sign of life here is at one warehouse, which has been hired by One Acre Fund, a non-profit organisation that supplies smallholder farmers with assets including seeds and fertiliser on credit, which are then paid back at the end of the season. One Acre Fund says it works with 400,000 farmers in Kenya – the majority in western Kenya, though it is now venturing further afield into other regions – providing not just financing for the critical assets, but also agricultural extension, training, support and crop insurance. Its loan repayment rates, going by its own data, are at 98% which is extremely solid for any financial service provider. And, especially one that directly serves rural, smallholder farmers –a constituency that is considered risky or otherwise unattractive to investors.

I first heard about One Acre Fund six years ago, when a book was delivered to my desk for review while I was a reporter at *The East African* newspaper. The book was titled *The Last Hunger Season*, written by American journalist Roger Thurow who spent a year in western Kenya chronicling the lives and seasons of four Kenyan farmers who had signed up to One Acre Fund.

The book was a beautiful piece of non-fiction: quite soon into the narrative, one gets invested in the stories of these four farmers, and far from merely being a glowing puff piece for the organisation, Thurow handled the story with nuance and particularly brought out the risks and uncertainties that rural smallholders are constantly grappling with. As a result of low prices of maize at harvest time, and a lack of proper storage, most maize farmers end up selling their maize at almost throwaway prices, only to become net buyers of maize through the course of the year. In fact, as Thurow notes, the maize farmers in his story were actually food insecure and battled hunger at certain times of the year.

This, combined with the vagaries of nature and various unexpected costs, such as an illness in the family or an unforeseen expenditure at a child's school, means that whatever benefit they received from One Acre Fund's activities were ultimately tenuous: there were just too many moving pieces in their lives to contend with.

Still, during my recent visit to the western region at least, the positive testimonies of One Acre Fund's activities in the region are many. In Bungoma, Kakamega and Vihiga, nearly all the farmers we spoke to had heard of One Acre Fund, and many gave us effusive accounts of how since signing up to organisation's programs, land that was producing measly yields or had even been abandoned altogether quickly started turning around.

Christine Mungai is a writer and journalist based in Nairobi, Kenya. Her work has recently been published in The Elephant, The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, CNN Opinion, Popula Magazine and Al Jazeera English. She was a 2018 Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

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Ayuma Michelle @ayumyum
Replying to @OneAcreFund
But that's where you're wrong @OneAcreFund
Your hiring process isn't fairly unique.
It's unethical, unreasonable, and compromised by internal politics.
Your generic and inauthentic responses are clear proof.
Own your mistakes.
#toxicworkspaces
#someonetelloneacrefund #kot

simoMark @SImo_phd · Feb 11
#SomeoneTellOneAcreFund
Applying for a job in this organization especially when are over qualified it is extremely wastage of Time

Halima @halimansangou · Feb 11
Applying for a job at @OneAcreFund is a waste of time really. All you'll get after answering a stupid question like, "what type of snake are you?" is a regret email. What's the point
#SomeoneTellOneAcreFund

Martin Njeru Mbogo @MartinNjeruM · Feb 11
Replying to @ayumyum and @OneAcreFund
I applied for a job @OneAcreFund on LinkedIn, after the 2nd stage I was sent a vague regret email & the job re-advertised soon after. I raised the issue with the then HR only to get outcries from persons with similar experiences.
#someonetelloneacrefund

Celia @YSL_celia · Feb 11
Replying to @ayumyum and @OneAcreFund
Glad to know my rejection was not based on assumptions of under qualifications but on racial grounds . Why say you put farmers first in Africa then deny Africans managerial positions?
#someonetelloneacrefund

Becoming.... @Faridahbm · Feb 11
Replying to @OneAcreFund and @ayumyum
Does anyone pass your interviews or a reserve for specific individuals? My friend who was interviewed by you thinks otherwise. Wasting job-seekers' time
#SomeoneTellOneAcreFund to stop discrimination.

Chematia Kandie @ChematiaKandie · Feb 14
Stop pushing Africans to the breaking point@OneAcreFund ,we are tired.#someonetelloneacrefund

Kennedy Ombat @OmbatMachedil · Feb 12
Replying to @OmbatMachedil @DessTTutu and @Ms_Otieno
They are killing the morale and passion for individuals like me who have had dreams of working in such an organization because of the belief in their vision and mission..
#SomeoneTellOneAcreFund

grace macharia @gmacharia1 · Feb 11
Replying to @wmnjoya @ayumyum and 2 others
OAF is simply a cog in the wheel within a very toxic and biased hiring system by NGO's in Africa. Talk of #neocolonialism.
Kudos @ayumyum for calling them out.
#SomeoneTellOneAcreFund

Winnifred Akiso, a communications officer at One Acre Fund, tells me that to join the program, farmers must be part of a group of about 16 farmers, and pay Ksh500 ($5). With that payment, they get a loan equivalent of about Ksh8,000 ($80) worth of certified seed, fertiliser, pesticide and crop insurance. The company provides extension services such as soil testing and planting advice, drawn from a treasure trove of crop, weather and soil data. The organisation has now expanded to Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi and Ethiopia.

I meet Benson Manyonyi, who runs One Acre Fund's *duka* in Bungoma town, a repurposed 40-ft container that serves as a shop where farmers can come and buy all kinds of inputs – not just seed and fertiliser, but also chicken feeders, pesticide backpack sprayers and even the humble panga. Although not a farmer himself, Benson tells us of the travails at his parents' two-acre piece of land, not far from the town centre.

"They had totally given up on farming," he tells me. "On that two-acre piece of land, they would till half an acre, and the most they could get was a mere two bags of maize."

"My parents would buy inputs from local agrovet shops, but the seed would either yield very little, or even not germinate altogether. Fertiliser was often adulterated with gravel and sand, and there was really nothing they could do. They might complain to the shop owner, but then they didn't really have options. It was very discouraging, and I told myself I would never be a farmer if this is what it meant – constantly throwing money away."

He tells me that since joining One Acre Fund's program, his parents harvested 37 bags on two acres at the end of last season. "It's really unbelievable that it's the very same land that I saw causing them so much pain."

Because of low prices of maize at harvest time, and a lack of proper storage, most maize farmers end up selling their maize at almost throwaway prices, only to become net buyers of maize through the course of the year.”

Wilbroda Wangila is another farmer in Bungoma, who owns half an acre on which she grows maize, beans and groundnuts (*njugu*). Until a few years ago she had given up on farming too – it was taking too much of her time, energy and money – she was earning an income by working on other people's land as a casual day labourer, or *kibarua*. On that half-acre, it would be a good season if she got two bags of maize on it; often it was less, one-and-a-half or even just one bag of maize.

“I signed on to One Acre Fund in 2010, and today I'm harvesting seven bags of maize on that same piece of land,” she tells me. “Two bags are usually enough to feed my family through the season, so last year I sold five bags of maize. I bought *mabati* (iron sheets) and finally finished building this permanent house,” she says as she proudly shows off her living room, pouring us copious amounts of tea and insisting we eat more *njugu*.

Stories like these abound in the homes we visited, and most farmers complained angrily about faceless, shadowy “cartels” that had ensnared the supply chains for seed, fertiliser and inputs of all kinds. The land in western Kenya is fertile but underperforming, they tell me, because of the poor quality inputs and the agrovet cartels that they believed were politically protected.

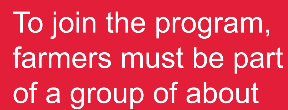
“How can someone supply fake seed and fertiliser year after year, you report them to the police and the local chief and nothing happens?” Benson says. “They always walked around here like there was nothing you could do to them. And that's what most people believe – they are untouchable. And you know rural people are sometimes a little docile and they learn to live with such situations. People like my parents don't want to stir up trouble.”

But even as the upbeat stories abound on the ground in western Kenya, things are different among a more urban, middle-class constituency. One Acre Fund's headquarters is in Kakamega, a purpose-built facility which ticks all the right boxes for eco-features (its internal walls are made of maize stalks!), and hosts over 500 office staff – including agronomists, soil scientists, and weather specialists, and even in-house artists and graphic designers. The organisation has more than 3,000 employees in total, the majority being field staff, extension officers and supply chain/ logistics managers. The staff roll has been expanding rapidly, and the company frequently posts job vacancies on various online platforms.

However, every now and then complaints bubble up on social media, especially Twitter, of the company seemingly re-advertising the same jobs over and over again, and taking applicants through a rigorous process that includes answering extensive case studies and test scenarios. Some suspect that the company is harvesting data and extracting labour from prospective job applicants as a form of “free” market research. There are also recurring complaints of huge pay gaps between local and expatriate staff, a grievance replicated in many organisations in Nairobi, a city whose reputation of opportunity – “Silicon Savannah” – has attracted investors and expatriates from far and wide, but has also ended up rapidly gentrifying certain parts of the city and deepening resentment among qualified locals who sense their value, labour and expertise is diminished simply because they are not expatriates.

One Acre Fund responded to these complaints – including a #SomeoneTellOneAcreFund hashtag – with a blog post published by the company's co-founder and executive director Andrew Youn saying that their hiring process is “fairly unique” and that they are working on making the hiring process shorter and putting out better feedback, but iterating they “never reuse candidate exercises or share them beyond the hiring committee.”

I speak to Maurice Otieno, general manager of Mettā, a members' club that supports entrepreneurs, connecting them with investors and creating spaces to collaborate. He highlights more structural challenges that have led to companies like One Acre Fund – and a handful of others in the tech space including Twiga Foods, Tala, Branch and a few more – taking up the bulk start-up and investment funds available in the region. For its part, One Acre Fund has received numerous grants, including $100,000 from the John Deere Foundation, $300,000 from the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, $765,000 from the Skoll Foundation, $10.5 million from the Perishing Square Foundation, and more in partnerships with the MasterCard Foundation ($10 million), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ($11.6 million) and others.



To join the program, farmers must be part of a group of about **16 farmers**

and pay **Ksh500**

With that payment, they get a loan equivalent of about **Ksh8,000**

worth of certified seed, fertiliser, pesticide and crop insurance.

Some suspect that the company is harvesting data and extracting labour from prospective job applicants as a form of “free” market research. There are also recurring complaints of huge pay gaps between local and expatriate staff.”

The question though, is how One Acre Fund is managing to do this in a bandit economy, as former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga described Kenya. How is the organisation able to circumvent the cartels? Is it a case of swapping one cartel out for the other?"

"The reality is if you are dealing with foreign investors, they really want to hear the 'we-are-saving-Africa' story. As a local entrepreneur you are entering a space with certain narratives firmly in place," he tells me.

"It's understandable we are angry [about the apparent racism in the space] but the question is, how do we navigate these realities? Local individuals and companies have the money, but we have found it to be a real struggle to get them to invest in great local ideas. Most of it goes into real estate. Perhaps it has to do with how many of these people made their money – if it is through unorthodox means, then they hold on tighter to it."

Maurice adds: "This might be unpopular to say, but I think there's also some reluctance by local investors to invest in sectors that most foreign money is going to – such as AgriTech, EdTech and HealthTech. Local investors tend to want to put their money in the shiny, glamorous, business-to-business solutions, especially FinTech which is the hot new thing today," he tells me.

But Phares Kariuki, CEO of Node Africa, an information management firm, strongly disagrees with this view. "This is a very problematic statement," he says. "First of all, new innovations struggle to find capital in all economies. Tech companies took a while to become an attractive sector for investment, even in the US."

Phares adds that secondly, local Kenyan investors have been putting their money in 'boring' businesses that folks haven't heard of; it's literally the foreigners going into the shiny spaces.

"It was local investors, knowledge, developers and government policy that made Kenya one of the most connected countries in Africa and made it the attractive place it is now for immigrants and expats. And about not wanting to serve the poor --- look at companies like Equity Bank that brought banking services down to the villages, where people had long been overlooked. Safaricom's 'Please Call Me' and Sambaza features, were all ways of servicing the needs of the poor. It is not only foreigners that want to help poor people – they just monopolise the narratives and make it seem like they are the only ones doing so; they are good at storytelling."

I see the gaps even more starkly on the ground in western Kenya. When you consider that a whole swathe of smallholder farmers were basically abandoned to their own devices by Kenyan authorities, left to contend with substandard seed and fertiliser and lack of credit, to the point where they had given up on farming, then entities such as One Acre Fund can come in and fill a gap that has been allowed to fester. The silent NCPB depot in Yala is proof of this -- One Acre Fund is able to find warehouses to rent because NCPB is not working the way it used to. The reason for this is, to some extent, neoliberal policies in the agricultural sector that diverted government investment away from places like western Kenya.

It didn't have to be this way – with private (neoliberal, foreign-funded) solutions to public problems. The gaps are so stark, and the bar so low, that even small interventions – only reliable seed, for example – can have a huge impact.

The question though, is how One Acre Fund is managing to make such big gains in a bandit economy, as former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga described Kenya. How is the organisation able to circumvent the cartels? Is it just a case of swapping one cartel out for the other?

"I no longer believe that that the people who caused this structural inequality through colonialism, racial segregation, exploitation and more, are the ones who can resolve it," Phares concludes. "Author Anand Giridharadas speaks about this phenomenon in his book *Winners Take All*. In Kenya, people who have privilege in the largest economy in the world – the US – come to Africa and many times capitalise on the very structural problems that they claim to be solving. These companies are, in fact, exploitative – they exploit local talent and labour, as well as taking advantage of the 'white saviour' narratives."

But I obviously couldn't say this to Wilbroda that day. She was just really happy about her new house and the progress she has made in her life. "You know, I only went to school until Standard 8," she tells me. *"Lakini sasa ninaheshimika, kama mtu anafanya kazi ya mshahara."* I'm respected in the community, like someone with a salaried job.

I left feeling upbeat, I must admit Wilbroda's positivity had rubbed off on me. But it still worries me that one company could have so much power, could have so thoroughly integrated itself both vertically and horizontally in the region's agricultural economy. Nearly half a million farmers are beholden to one company, benevolent or not – and this ultimately impedes on their sovereignty and autonomy should the music change at some point down the road.

Maize, mangoes and devolution: Voices from the grassroots

By Zeynab Wandati

The agriculture sector was one of the first to fully devolve service provision to the county governments, underscoring the importance of county governments' role in ensuring food security. But, the report from the ground is a mixed bag.

Wilfred Mailu has lived around mango trees all his life. His parents had a few trees scattered around the home as he grew up, and he liked the smell of ripe mangoes.

"I don't think there is a fruit in this world that captures my heart the way mangoes have," he says, a hint of excitement dancing in his ageing eyes. "Is there anything sweeter than a mango, really? That obsession with the fruit is the reason I am a mango farmer today."

Mailu lives in Makueni County and is now one of the thousands of mango farmers whose efforts have made Makueni County the biggest mango producer in Kenya.

However, it wasn't until five years ago that he started making good money from mango farming. Officials from the county government visited his village, Kawala, and encouraged horticulture farmers in the area to combine their efforts to have greater bargaining power in the market. That is how the Kawala Smallholder Horticultural Farmers' Group was born.

"Before 2013 we incurred huge losses in our farms. Each tree on my farm yields about 200 mangoes per season, but more than half of it went bad in the field due to lack of access of a good market. It was bad. They paid us between one shilling and three shillings per mango," Mailu says.

"Post-harvest losses were the single biggest challenge that the farmers here faced. In many cases, a farmer would lose up to 120 mangoes on each tree," says Sammy Ndivo, an extension service provider with the county government. "That was the first thing we had to work on when agriculture was devolved. We needed to figure out how to stop those loses.

Mailu is now the chairman of his cooperative. In the five years that the group has existed, he has seen his earnings from mangoes grow twenty times. "Now I sell each mango at a minimum of 23 shillings. Since we are now aggregating our produce and have a cold storage facility, we can negotiate for better prices for our mangoes," he says. "I would be lying if I said that devolution hasn't helped me as a farmer in this county. It is because of devolution that we have a good market for our mangoes and that we are finally making good money out of mango farming."

In 2018, Makueni county built and opened a fruit processing plant, one of the first tangible multi-million shilling developments of the devolved units. The plant was built with the proceeds of a Ksh125million grant from the European Union. The county says it pays farmers 15 shillings per mango delivered for processing, much better that the three shillings many of them previously earned at the farm gate. This processing plant now provided a ready market for the 12,000 mango farmers in the county.

"Devolution is the best thing to ever happen to Makueni. If agriculture had not been devolved, a lot of the things you see in this county today wouldn't exist, says Lawrence Nzunga, the County Executive Committee Member of Agriculture in Makueni County. "We wouldn't have our farmers organised into groups and we would definitely not have the industries that we have built, such as the mango processing plant or the Kathonzweni Dairy."

However, while mango and dairy farmers in Makueni sing praises for the county government, vegetable farmers are not as happy. According to them, while devolution has empowered the average farmer to produce more and at

Zeynab Wandati is a television journalist based in Nairobi. She is currently the Business Editor at Nation Media Group's NTV Kenya. Zeynab runs an innovative weekly TV feature, Food Friday, which focuses on all aspects of food security from the farm to the plate.

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better economies of scale, the county government hasn't put as much effort in linking vegetable farmers to a market, as it has for fruit and dairy farmers. One such disgruntled farmer is Pius Ngila.

"Here in Makuyu where I live, we're are all vegetable farmers. Our market is very local so we never get money from outside this area. My neighbour is my customer. What that means is that we often incur losses in terms of lower prices, because we are all growing the same thing at the same time, targeting the exact same market. What the county should have done for us to find us a market outside Makuyu, perhaps even an export market. This would create us more wealth and motivate us to scale up production," he says.

Ngila's farm is a beautifully tended five-acre piece of land, in Makuyu, Kaiti Constituency, on which he tries out different crops, using both irrigated and rain-fed agriculture. Given the slope of the land, he has built terraces to stop soil erosion. For many of the farmers in this county, pulling off a successful cropping season is quite a difficult task, given the little rainfall that the area receives. In many occasions, the farmers have to contend with 250mm of rain a year, or none at all. This has in turn kept the county permanently listed among those in perennial drought and in need of food assistance.

County official Nzunga acknowledges that they are yet to reach or change the life of every farmer in the county, "but we are working on it. In the few years that we have existed, we have grown the sector tremendously," he says, cheerfully. "At the time of devolution, we only had nine dairy cooperatives in Makueni. But today we have grown them to 21 and by the end of September, all these cooperatives will have joined together to form one union, so that they can sell their products as one entity. That's growth."

Makueni county officials are expressing optimism that in the next three years, it will have broken free from shackles of food insecurity, as it introduces its farmers to modern farming methods that are resilient to climatic changes. One such method is conservation agriculture, which Caroline Masimbi, a primary school teacher, has been trying out for the last three years. She grows maize on her two-acre piece of family land.

"I remember how much of a fight it was to get my husband to let me try out conservation agriculture. The land had been unproductive for so long and the rains barely came, so he had given up on farming. When I finally convinced him to do conservation agriculture and we tried it out, we saw tremendous change," she says, a glint of joy in her eyes.

"For the three years that we have practiced conservation agriculture, we haven't tilled the land at all and the yields have grown from the two bags we harvested previously, to 24 bags now. I even have surplus maize to sell."

Farmers are paid

15 shilings

per mango delivered for processing, much better that the three shillings many of them previously earned at the farm gate.

One of the greatest challenges we are facing as devolved units is that farmers, and everyone else, expect us to solve all the problems within the sector with the snap of a finger. Come on, that's expecting too much."

In Busia County, I hear the same upbeat remarks from county executives. "For Busia County, agriculture has significantly grown and improved people's livelihoods. Nearly 80% of our people derive their livelihood from agriculture. Our food poverty level has gone down from 60% at the time of devolution to below 40% today," says Dr Osia Mwanje, CECM of agriculture. "This means that most households now have the capacity to have all the three meals per day. We have also been able to increase the acreage under various crops by at least 30%."

"One of the greatest challenges we are facing as devolved units is that farmers, and everyone else, expect us to solve all the problems within the sector with the snap of a finger. Come on, that's expecting too much," says Dr. Osia. "Yes, we should have done a lot more by now, but this unrealistic demand placed on us is putting pressure on counties to deliver."

Mathews Wanjala, the agriculture county executive in neighbouring Bungoma says that although counties have a role, they cannot take full credit for transformation. "Yes, the sector has grown, but remember there are very many players in the industry, including non-governmental organisations, institutions of higher learning, research organisations and development partners. So devolution is not exclusively responsible."

In Makueni, for instance, the conservation agriculture project is spearheaded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, with funding from the European Union. Through that project, more than 1,000 acres of land in the county has been brought under conservation agriculture, and several tractors made available for farmers. Smallholder farmers – especially those on very small pieces of land, in the region of less than half an acre – have been trained on how to use jab planters, the goal being to disturb the soil as little as possible.

While some counties celebrate themselves for growing agriculture under devolution, other farmers feel that agriculture performed better under the national government. Extension services are crucial in agriculture, but since 2013, they say those services seem to have fizzled out.

"Agriculture should not have been devolved," laments Charles Muriuki, a coffee farmer in Ndaro-ini, Nyeri County. "The idea behind devolution was to bring the government – services, really – closer. But ask any of the farmers around here if they have ever seen any extension officer coming to visit them. The national government did a better job."

Farmers have also complained of multiple cess (a kind of tax) on produce, which is charged when agricultural goods cross county borders. The farmers say the multiple charges pushes up the cost of production, in turn impacting on the overall cost of food. In 2018, for instance, the national government had to intervene and mediate between the county government of Mombasa and tea farmers, over a Ksh32 per packet of tea cess that Mombasa County had imposed. Eventually, Mombasa agreed to drop the demand.

Counties have acknowledged the implications of the multiple cess on produce, but say there is little they can do about it because with the low funding from the national government. The counties are under immense pressure to grow their own source revenue, and cess is one way through which they do that.

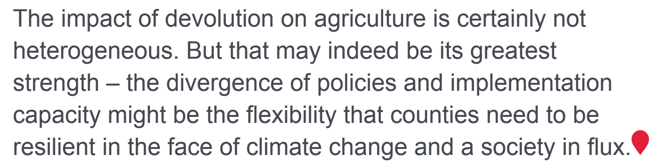
"When we used to have the centralised system on government, the national government would send money directly to sub regional offices to support agriculture directly. But now money comes as part of the sharable revenue and increasingly, we are seeing some counties getting less and less allocations," adds Mr Wanjala of Bungoma County.

"These allocations do not even conform with the Malabo Declaration where African heads of state committed to set aside 10% of the national budget to agriculture. It is up to the counties to decide what their priorities are. In Bungoma last year we got about 7% for agriculture, this year we got 8%. It is higher than last year's allocation but is still lower than the 10% required by the Malabo Declaration."

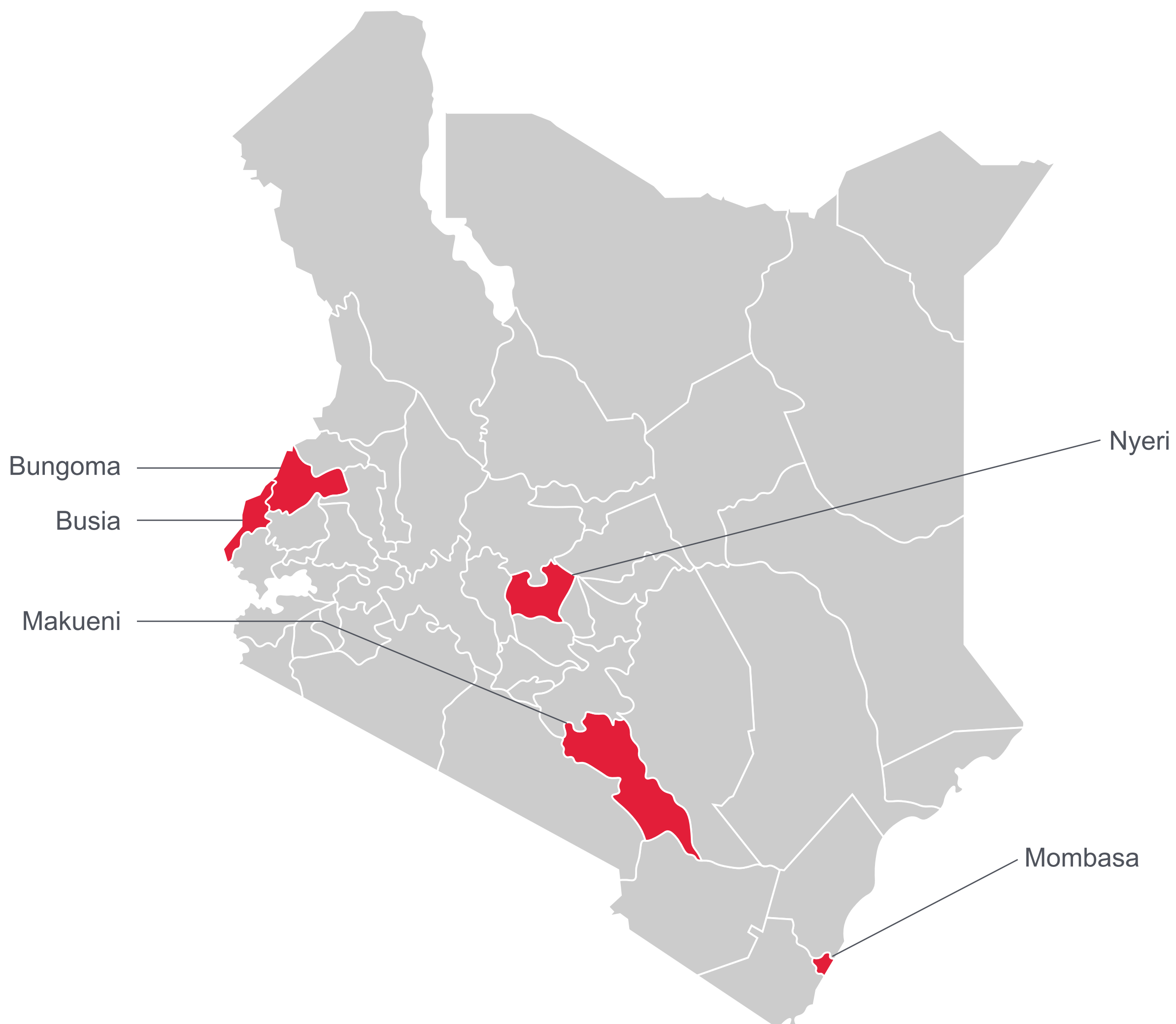
It is important to note that the Ministry of Agriculture – at Kilimo House in Nairobi, the one under the national government – was allocated Ksh53 billion in this year's budget, yet nearly 100% of the agricultural functions are devolved to the counties. So why is the national government still allocating a lot of money to the ministry? "As counties, we feel that devolution is being sabotaged by the government itself by the low funding. We can't even start new agricultural programmes due to the low funding," said Mr. Wanjala.

The lack of an effective regulatory framework is another obstacle. “For us to be able to effectively implement all the devolved functions as is required of us, we must first put in place some policies and regulations because we cannot operationalise the devolved functions without the attendant policies and laws in place, particularly by the county governments,” argues Dr Osia, Busia’s agriculture minister. “These bills are currently on the floor of the county assembly.”

“Farmers need to understand that devolution did not come without challenges,” he concludes. “The single biggest challenge that counties face is the cost of implementing the devolved structures. For agriculture, most things were devolved including crop husbandry, animal husbandry, livestock production, veterinary services and fisheries. The cost of implementing agriculture has not well been outlined. How much do you require to implement all the agricultural devolved functions? We don’t really know.”



The impact of devolution on agriculture is certainly not heterogeneous. But that may indeed be its greatest strength – the divergence of policies and implementation capacity might be the flexibility that counties need to be resilient in the face of climate change and a society in flux.



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Another view of "progress": The persistence of small farms in Kenya

By Paul Goldsmith

Kenya's agricultural policy has frequently failed to recognise the importance of smallholder farming, which has proved to be more resilient than large-scale agriculture projects. But the two don't necessarily have to be at odds.

I once drove up the eastern side of Mt Kenya with a manager working in the California horticulture industry. We passed through the Mwea irrigation scheme's mosaic of rice plots and the smallholder coffee zone in Embu. After crossing the Thuchi River, we passed by a mix of tea farms, coffee plots and patches of small fields of maize, pulses and bananas framed by the heavy tree cover blanketing the hills and valleys.

The Meru lowlands stretched out to the east, the miraa-dotted slopes of the Nyambene Hills loomed close as we approached Meru town. In the space of three hours we had transected one of the region's most agriculturally variegated and productive landscapes. Two days later we drove across the northern saddle of the mountain, leaving the smallholdings created by late colonial-era settlement schemes before cruising past the wheat fields of Kisima and Marania farms and their neighbours.

The road now carried us past the uniform blocks of horticulture farms and greenhouses stretching across the high plains of the mountain's northwestern quadrant en route to Nanyuki. Over a plank of some insanely delicious beef at one of the town's famous local nyama choma joints, my guest tells me she was impressed by the kick-ass agriculture she saw during our trip.

I remarked that we had crossed an area that produces the world's best tea and Arabica coffee, and the country's most sought-after potatoes, French beans and other vegetables that grace European tables. I also informed her that we had skirted the range hosting Africa's most sophisticated agroforestry system. "That's interesting," she said, clarifying that she was referring to "the area of proper farms we passed through this morning." I, on the other hand, was talking about the smallholder farms.

Those crossed wires in our conversation were emblematic of the binary in most people's imaginations, one that assumes large consolidated commercial farms are "proper farms" and smallholder plots are not. Agricultural progress according to this framing invariably means big fields, straight lines, greenhouses, and large grids of sprinklers, as the comments of the manager underscored.

In Kenya, smallholder farmers generate the larger portion of overall agricultural value, but they are often marginalised in policy discourse. Assumptions about the superiority of large-scale agriculture have remained unchallenged since the migration of Europeans to the Americas, Asia, and Africa. The colonisers came, saw, conquered, and converted the wide, open spaces they found into plantations producing sugar, cotton, rubber, tobacco, soybeans, and a long list of other crops for export to the industrial world.

When European diseases decimated the indigenous inhabitants in the New World, the planters plundered Africa to replace them. It is important to remember, however, that large-scale agriculture's global hegemony grew out of military firepower, capital, technology and ruthless exploitation of labour, not superior crop and animal husbandry. The reign of King Cotton, for example, relied on increasing quantities of land and imports of African labour to compensate for rapid soil fertility decline.

However, in Africa, the "modernistion-or-bust" project ran into serious headwinds. A matrix of physical, climatic, spatial, and social factors complicated the installation of large-scale agriculture production in Africa. In Kenya, for example, commercial agriculture and ranching developed by European settlers is only partially responsible for the agricultural sector's progress. During the early decades of

Paul Goldsmith is an American-born anthropologist who has lived and worked in Kenya for over 40 years.

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colonial rule, free land and inexpensive labour facilitated the establishment of European-run commercial farms.

After World War I the government offered land concessions to British war veterans boosting the population of approximately 6,000 white settlers in 1917 to 20,000 in 1936. This, and extensive policy and extension support, helped the estate sector to diversify, which now came to encompass coffee, tea, cattle, sisal, cotton, wattle, and other export commodities that sustained the colony’s finances. Expansion raised the demand for African labour while fueling frictions over land between settlers and their African neighbours.

While all this was going on, indigenous producers evolved intricate mechanisms of adaptation and risk management to shifting environmental conditions and chronic climatic instability. The over 100,000 African squatters on white-owned farms by 1947 demonstrated their resilience in new circumstances. Despite the restrictions they faced, African small-scale producers out-performed the white estate owners in many ways. They reinvested their surplus livestock into their herds until there was strenuous competition for pasture on the estates between the white-owned and African-owned herds. This prompted restrictions limiting the size of cultivated plots and the number of livestock the Africans were allowed to keep. The number of days of labour Africans owed to their estates also increased over time, doubling from 90 to 180 days a year.

Dependence on native labour in effect led to the parallel development of two distinct systems on the same landholdings at the same time – small-scale for the Africans and large-scale for the settlers. The contradictions inherent in this situation, combined with the political threat of the Mau Mau, forced a rethink that led to the Swynnerton Act in 1954, which allowed Africans in the reserves to produce export crops. The sectoral duality generated by these developments has vexed Kenya’s agriculture policy ever since.

Kenya gained independence committed to preserving economic stability while satisfying the political expectations of its citizens. The latter translated into the transfer of settler lands under the Million Acre Scheme, support for the cooperative movement, and the deployment of small farmer extension services. The structural inequalities symbolised by the contrast between the landed elite and the masses nevertheless fueled strident opposition to the Jomo Kenyatta government. Like the colonialists before them, both capitalist and socialist governments’ rural policies in Africa more broadly, were predicated on the need to introduce modern scientific agriculture. The choice was as stark as the difference between a tractor and a short handle hoe.

There were many attempts to introduce large-scale agricultural projects in independent Africa – sometimes described as “policy experiments”. Some worked and many did not. The funding flowed despite the repeated failures like the Bura Irrigation Scheme in Kenya, which was at one time the world’s most expensive at one time. Attempts to rectify flaws in the scheme proved futile when the Tana River changed course in the 1980s.

How do we explain the failure to acknowledge the results of such “experiments”? In a 1988 article, Goren Hyden attributed the syndrome to Africa’s monoculture legacy, which he defined as “mono-cropping in agriculture, single fixes in technology, monopoly in the institutional arena, and uniformity in values and behavior.”

Asia’s breakthrough was an outgrowth of research into two basic commodities – wheat and rice. The same approach has not worked in Africa because technical requirements needed to contend with multiple crops systems, variations in soils, spatial differentials complicating access to water, markets, and service, local pests and diseases, transport and communications infrastructure, and political variables linked to ethnic constituencies, to name a few of the factors determining the productivity of small farmers.

Research attesting to the more efficient per capita and land unit output of small farms also indicated that there was still considerable scope for raising household incomes by enhancing the productivity of labour. In an article in the same edited volume featuring Hyden’s monoculture legacy thesis, Christopher Delgado noted, “It is unlikely that more than 5% of current African food production comes from large farms. A 3% growth of productivity of smallholders would be equivalent to a 60% growth of productivity on large farms.”

The Kenyan government’s support for small-scale dairies, tea production, and the efficacy of extension services furnished proof. Like the case of colonial squatters before them, smallholder producers began outperforming the large

Large-scale agriculture’s global hegemony grew out of military firepower, capital, technology and ruthless exploitation of labour, not superior crop and animal husbandry.”

farms and plantations. Kenya and its bimodal policy frame was often cited as a success story at the time, but was this because government policy focused on concentrating the limited resources available in relatively fertile areas?

The failure to replicate these successes further down the ecological gradient invoked a more complicated set of variables. Other state-supported initiatives, such as smallholder cotton, floundered, and even a tested policy like fertiliser subsidies proved difficult to implement because the cost of delivering the input to small farm households often ended up cancelling out the benefits, especially during years when low rainfall or other external factors reduced output.

During the early 1980s Kenya's agricultural sector reached the zenith of its development under state control. A matrix of factors, including lower prices and higher market uncertainty, declining civil service terms of pay, gradual closure of the agricultural land frontier, and the highest demographic growth rate in recorded history explain subsequent developments.

Institutional entropy set in. The food security problem became a full-blown national crisis around the same time as government mismanagement of strategic maize reserves exacerbated the impact of a famine in 1984. This concretised the case for the structural adjustment policies that came into effect during the following years, which included foreign trade liberalisation, civil service reforms, privatisation of parastatals, and liberalisation of pricing and marketing systems. It also involved relaxing control of government agricultural produce marketing and reforming cooperatives.

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Even so, the policies designed to increase efficiency and decrease state involvement in the economy did not reverse the decline in agricultural production. The outcome was "a quasi-stagnant society" qualifying the observation Thomas Picketty offered in his 2014 book, Capital in the Twenty First Century: "wealth accumulated in the past will inevitably acquire disproportionate influence". In Kenya, the consequences included the revolt of smallholder coffee farmers in Nyeri, the burning of sugarcane fields in western Kenya, the collapse of cooperatives, the commercialisation of livestock raiding in the rangelands, and the rise of cartels that seized control of export commodities and local produce markets.

Since then, subsequent developments in rural Kenya invite us to revisit Picketty's choice of words in the observation cited above: the reference to "quasi-stagnant" is indicative of a larger dynamic. From an ecosystems perspective, the turbulence arising across Kenya's agricultural sector and the hollowing-out of state institutions corresponds to the release phase in ecological cycles. It is analogous to forest fires removing old growth, allowing regrowth and revival of species suppressed by the canopy of large trees. In the context of human societies, it refers to transitional episodes that create opportunities for innovation.

For present purposes, we can equate Picketty's quasi-stagnation with the onset of a transitional phase of reorganisation leading to renewal. I was once part of a team that undertook a three-year study of commercial agricultural models in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia. Initially motivated by the problem of large-scale agribusiness investments, the team's general conclusion underscored the emergence of large- and medium-size commercial farms in the three countries.

My personal take was slightly different. I was struck by the resilience of smallholder households in our surveys and life histories. Without getting into the intricacies of the data, several factors support this. The time series data showed improved food security for most of rural households sampled, and a corresponding decline in conflict over land:

only one respondent complained about the ownership of the large farms and plantations in the area.

While the poorer families were hard-pressed to make ends meet, the diversification of income generation strategies indicate that even a small half-acre plot defrays the cost of food purchases while providing a base for participating in the rural economy. The process of consolidation underpinning the large farm formation across agro-ecological zones is underway, but it is slowed by the reluctance to sell land and a correspondingly high incidence of leasing land. This is also true for large holdings outside our Mt. Kenya research area, such as the Rift Valley, where owners are holding on by leasing out parcels to smallholders.

The successful estates and horticultural firms have developed mutually beneficial links with their smallholder neighbours. This is based on outsourcing production, the sharing of technological innovations from the production of certified seed potatoes to electronic wallets facilitating rapid and verifiable payments to contract farmers, and multi-stakeholder participation in the management and conservation of water sources.

At the end of the day, dualities deceive. Large commercial enterprises and smallholder farms are not necessarily at odds with one another in practice. Our observations attested to the synergies generated by the large-scale/small-scale symbiosis that began to emerge during the final years of the colonial era. It would do well for Kenya's policy framework to reflect these collaborative opportunities.

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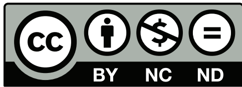

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The Route to Food Initiative is a publicly funded programme of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Nairobi. Through the initiative, a Route to Food Alliance has formed that works towards realising the Human Right to Food in Kenya. Our activities aim to influence the political approach to food security and target avenues related to policy development and implementation at national and county-level. Additionally, the initiative relies on creative communications and an influencer-led campaign to promote innovative solutions to the problem of food insecurity. We engage with mainstream and alternative media to shift the emphasis of hunger and unaffordable or inadequate food to a discussion about food rights.

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