

The Impact of National Agricultural Strategies and Programmes on Small Scale Farmers of Gwembe District of Southern Province of Zambia, 1964-1991

By

Mwansa Mulenga
Chisekesi Secondary School
Monze, Zambia

Abstract

This article examines the impact of national agricultural strategies and programmes formulated, modified and implemented by the Zambian government in Gwembe District. Using both primary and secondary data, the article demonstrates that despite the various agricultural strategies and programmes implemented in Gwembe, the impact was negligible due to persistent crop failure resulting from droughts and other ecological limitations, failure of parastatals tasked with disbursement of credit, and other services as well as inadequate agricultural storage facilities.

Keywords:

Gwembe, Agricultural strategies and programmes, Ecological constraints

Introduction

Some scholars have expressed scepticism on the development of agriculture in Gwembe due to the district's natural environment associated with ecological constraints. Hantobolo G, Siamwiza B and Chiinda L contended that ecological vagaries such as poor and erratic rainfall, high summer temperatures and irregular flood patterns impacted negatively on agricultural production in Gwembe. Siamwiza and Hantobolo further alleged that government was not unaware of such natural calamities and therefore had put-up clear-cut policies to aid people faced with food shortages through food relief.¹

Hantobolo's work further indicated that between 1980 and 1985 the government encouraged the production of cotton in Gwembe following the establishment of Lint Company in 1978 to deal with cotton production. Though cotton growing was a success, the venture caused another problem. Most small-scale farmers in Gwembe rushed into growing cotton at the expense of food crops leading to even higher poverty levels.²

In their study, Lisa Cliggert et al³ bemoaned the laxity of Gwembe agricultural development on three factors. First were climatic factors, second uncertainties in relationship to land and third the political economy. Cliggert et al explained that the Gwembe valley was known for frequent hunger years due to drought which steadily increased after the 1970s resulting in gambling as far as planting time and the type of crop to plant was concerned. Cliggert et al further noted that majority people of Gwembe complained of shortage of arable land then and years that followed.

Although it can be concluded that there is considerable literature about agricultural development in Gwembe, little attention has been paid to the impact of agricultural strategies and programmes initiated by the government in reducing endemic poverty, considering ecological

¹Hantobolo, 'Ecology, Agriculture and Proletarianisation', p.32; Siamwiza, 'Hunger in the Gwembe Valley: A Case study of Mweemba Chieftaincy', p.2.

²Hantobolo, 'Ecology, Agriculture and Proletarianisation,' p. 36.

³Lisa Cliggert, et al 'Chronic Uncertainty and Momentary Opportunity: A Half Century of Adaptation among Zambia's Gwembe Tonga', *Human Ecology*, 35 (2007), pp. 22-25.

restrictions and topographical factors.⁴ This article therefore demonstrates that despite the Zambian government's intervention in the agricultural productivity of its citizens, some areas still remained highly underdeveloped with high poverty levels. The crafting of this work rested heavily on primary sources from the National Archives of Zambia (NAZ) and secondary sources from the University of Zambia (UNZA) library. Oral evidence was obtained from serving and retired staff from the Ministry of Agriculture. These oral respondents also helped locate some key informants from the community.

The Government agricultural policy from 1964 to 1991

At independence in 1964, the Zambian government under the United National Independence Party (UNIP) envisioned an interventionist agricultural policy to help alleviate rural poverty prevalent at a time. The interventionist agricultural policy incorporated the indigenous Zambian small scale farmers occluded to a larger extent during the colonial era. Through this agricultural policy, the government solely sponsored almost all agricultural and related programmes.

The implementation of the interventionist agricultural policy however, was dependent on how it changed the face of agricultural development. Depending on the effectiveness, the government maintained some of the strategies and programmes while others were modified. The strategies and programmes which proved inefficient or unsustainable, were gotten rid of. The main areas tackled were extension services, settlement schemes and creation of agricultural parastatals to deal with issuing loans, crop production, marketing and pricing.

Agricultural camps

In 1965, the Government of the Republic of Zambia divided the country into agricultural extension camps in order to extend agricultural services to farmer's doorstep. The first six agricultural camps⁵ in Gwembe became operational in 1967, with north, central and south receiving two each.⁶ These were at Munyumbwe, Chipepo, Malima, Sinazeze and Lusitu.⁷ Chipungu contented that by 1969 the regions had an estimated population of 69,000 inhabitants⁸ against the six agricultural camps. This was partly blamed on the district's ecological limitations, which did not fully support agricultural prospects.⁹

In 1971, there were signs of improved yields among the few farmers living in areas where agricultural camps operated. Archival reports cited Munyumbwe and Sinazeze as areas with signs of improved yields.¹⁰ In 1973, farmers at Lusitu appreciated that their production skills slightly improved due to extension services they received.¹¹ However, both reports partly showed that ecological constraints prevented the utilisation of a variety of farming methods resulting in yields being lower than anticipated as reported in the 1975 tour report that:

⁴ Zambia is divided into three major agro-ecological regions, namely region I, II, and III. Rainfall performance as well as the quality of soil differs across these three regions. See also the Government of the Republic of Zambia, (hereafter GRZ), *Second National Agricultural Policy*, 2016, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Lusaka, p.3.

⁵Between 1965 and 1972 a total number of 59 agro camps were opened in Southern Province.

⁶ National Archives of Zambia (hereafter N.A.Z) SP4/2/173, Minutes of the meeting held in Gwembe under the Department of Agriculture, June, 1967.

⁷ NAZ, *Agricultural Broadcasting as an Education Medium in Zambia*, Agriculture Extension Branch Service, Annual Report of 1968-1969, p.6.

⁸Samuel Chipungu, *The State of Technology and Peasant Differentiation in Zambia. A Case Study of Southern Province, 1930 to 1986* (Lusaka: Historical Association of Zambia, 1988), p.144.

⁹N.A.Z SP4/2/173, Minutes of the meeting held in Gwembe under the Department of Agric, June, 1967.

¹⁰N.A.Z MAG 4/2/6, *Agricultural Performance Reports in Southern Province, 1971- 1975*.

¹¹N.A.Z SP 1/3/61, Gwembe District Tour Report, 12 August 1973 to 16 August 1973.

Despite the extension services being offered in selected parts of the district, the average crop yields were still low. For few farmers adopting new methods in Gwembe north they were now able to harvest eight to ten bags of maize per acre from the previous eight bags or below. In Gwembe south they were able to harvest five bags from the previous two to three bags per acre which was still not encouraging. Generally the environment is not favourable for farming.¹² This meant that it was almost impossible to alleviate rural poverty in Gwembe because yields just slightly improved over a 10-year period.

By 1979, the performance of agricultural camps in Gwembe was still grappling with challenges mainly associated with ecological constraints. This came to light when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Youth and Cooperatives visited the area. He noticed that some areas were more prone to hunger due to inadequate government agricultural services and drought. The affected families relied on wild fruits for survival. The areas cited in the table below show that the hunger situation was very critical.

Table 1: Areas most hit by hunger, 1979

| Parish | Chief |
|------------|----------|
| Bakasa | Singongo |
| Siampondo | Mweemba |
| Kafwambila | Mweemba |

Source: N.A.Z, Ministry of Agriculture and Water Development (MAWD), Dept. of Extension Services, Annual Report for year ended on 31/12/1979

The Parliamentary Secretary expressed sympathy with the affected areas and the people of Gwembe in general. He stated that the area was as distressed as it was in the colonial days despite government efforts through the provision of extension and other agricultural services. The officer's conclusion was that; 'the development of agriculture in Gwembe was hampered by the heat and other geographical factors.'¹³

Between 1980 and 1985, 5,063 cotton farmers were recruited in Gwembe.¹⁴ As a result, the government decided to open more agricultural camps to cater for farmers especially cotton growers. By 1985, Gwembe central and north had five agricultural camps apiece while Gwembe south had four¹⁵ against the population of 96, 874 people.¹⁶ By 1992, the number of agricultural camps in Gwembe was eight for central and north while south had seven.¹⁷

Staffing in agricultural camps

From inception in 1967, staffing levels in Gwembe's agricultural camps were low and inconsistent and this contributed to low productivity. Part of the minutes for the extension meeting dated 9 April, 1969 attended by senior district and provincial officials indicated that demonstrators sent to work in Gwembe could not endure the district's environment and the terrain.¹⁸ This resulted in rapid changeover of staff which was not the case in the neighbouring districts. For instance, in 1967 each agricultural camp was allocated two extension workers. However, utmost, 3-4 extension officers served the whole district instead of twelve. Further, by 1973 no officer had served for a period

¹²N.A.Z, Tour Report of Southern Province, 15 September 1975 to 25 September 1975 .

¹³N.A.Z, MAWD, Dept. of Extension, Annual Report for year ended on 31 December, 1979.

¹⁴Hantobolo, 'Ecology, Agriculture and Proletarianisation,' p.37.

¹⁵GRZ, *The State of Agriculture in Gwembe*, (Lusaka: Government Printers, 1991), p.13.

¹⁶Hantobolo, 'Ecology, Agriculture and Proletarianisation,' p.35.

¹⁷GRZ, *The State of Agriculture in Gwembe*, p.13.

¹⁸ N.A.Z, SP 4/1/97, Monthly Reports, Southern Province, Gwembe Report.

of more than 3 months continuously.¹⁹ This impacted negatively on the agricultural development in most parts of Gwembe.

According to Gwembe District Development meeting of March 1971, farmers at Siampondo, Chaamwe and Kalelezhi had no idea about what extension services were. They complained that their areas were completely neglected by the government.²⁰ During one of the council meetings of 1973, the District Agricultural Officer (DAO) indicated that it would be difficult to improve agricultural skills for majority farmers of Gwembe because only a few privileged had access to the services of extension officers.²¹

The increase in the agricultural extension camps following the success of cotton production in Gwembe between 1980 and 1985 did not move along with staffing levels, as most camps remained without manpower. Table 2 below shows the progression of agricultural camps in Gwembe and the staffing levels from inception to 1992.

Table 2: Number of agricultural camps in Gwembe, 1968 - 1992

| Year | Central | South | North | Total | No of Ext workers | Shortfall |
|------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------|-----------|
| 1968 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 9 |
| 1985 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 13 | 6 | 20 |
| 1992 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 11 | 35 |

Source: G.R.Z, Ministry of Agriculture, *The State of Agriculture in Gwembe* (Lusaka: Department of Agriculture, 1993), p.8.

The above table 2 showed that despite the steady increase in the number of agricultural camps for a period of 22 years, officers still shunned the area. This negatively affected agricultural development of the district. Shoddy housing units as showed in figure 1 below contributed to the shunning of Gwembe District by extension officers.

¹⁹ N.A.Z, SP 1/3/61, Gwembe District Tour Report, 12 August 1973 to 16 August 1973.

²⁰N.A.Z, SP 1/4/51, Minutes of Gwembe District Development Meeting held on 5 March, 1971.

²¹N.A.Z, SP 3/12/31, Minutes of Gwembe District Council Development Meeting held on 12 June 1973.

Figure 1: Housing units for CEOs in Gwembe (Left) and Monze (Right) Districts



Source: Field Research Photos, Gwembe and Monze, May 2019

Governments' failure to implement suitable crops for Gwembe

The government undertook a research between 1968 and 1971 to ascertain which crops could be suitable for Gwembe ecology. In line with the above statement Siamwiiza indicated that: Between 1968 and 1971 a lot of research was conducted in Gwembe on the varieties of crops suitable for Gwembe conditions. Sorghum, millet and maize were tried and it was discovered that the millet variety "EA serere" was suitable and the unnamed variety of sorghum.²²

Despite the findings of the 1968-71 research, no practical steps were taken to see to it that the discoveries made were implemented in the district. The above argument can be equated to Gumbo et al who strongly criticised the government for targeting agricultural research and extension services in the Eastern province on the plateau while neglecting the Luangwa Valley.²³ The above suggestions about two different areas with similar climatic conditions showed that from the on-set, the government considered some areas to be agriculturally 'impotent.'

Farmer representatives in the 1972 meeting complained of being compelled to grow late maturing maize variety by commodity demonstrators.²⁴ In support of the view Chiinda bemoaned that:

The non-ecological reason for the endemic famine condition in Gwembe during the UNIP era was because of government legacy of the insistence on adoption

²²Siamwiiza, 'Hunger in Gwembe Valley', p.130.

²³Davison Gumbo, (et-al), *Agrarian in the Nyimba District of Zambia*, p.245.

²⁴ Extension officers promoted growing of maize variety S52 at the expense of local variety kaile

of a 'national' food crop, maize, as opposed to the ecologically adapted crops of sorghum, millet or even cassava.²⁵

Agricultural shows

Agricultural shows designed to bring farmers together with other stakeholders to share productive skills were adopted in the late 1960s. In Gwembe District the initial progression of agricultural shows was unimpressive. The minutes for the Agricultural Show Coordinating Committee dated 4 July 1969, observed that while other districts in the Southern Province were holding agricultural shows by 1969, there was no firm arrangements to host one in Gwembe.²⁶

The first agricultural show to be held in Gwembe was in 1970. The funding of agricultural shows by the government had a direct impact on their organisation and effectiveness through the amount of money allocated. Table 3 below shows requests for funds made by the districts in 1971 and 1972 and the actual disbursements.

Table 3: Agricultural shows funding, Southern Province, 1971-1972

| District | Amount Requested | Actual Disbursement | |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------|------|
| | 1971 and 1972 | 1971 | 1972 |
| Monze | K1000 | K550 | 250 |
| Gwembe | K1500 | K550 | 250 |
| Mazabuka | K1000 | K550 | 250 |
| Choma | K1000 | K550 | 250 |
| Namwala | K1000 | K550 | 250 |
| Siatontola | K500 | K400 | 200 |
| Livingstone | K1000 | K550 | 250 |
| Kalomo | K1000 | K550 | 250 |

Source: NAZ, SP1/11/5, Letter Showing Requests for Funding of 1971/72 Agricultural Shows.

The above table 3 showed downward adjustments to requests made for each district. A report indicated that the sharpest decline in funding was for Gwembe, a district with highest concentration of poor subsistence peasants.²⁷ The justification by the Gwembe agricultural Show organisers to request for large amount of money was that it was difficult to organise a show in the district due to its size, climate, ecology, unbearable terrain and the poor road network.

In 1971, Nga'ndu Magande the Administrative Officer attended the Mazabuka and Gwembe agricultural shows. During his speech in Mazabuka, Magande outlined detailed efforts the government was making in order to improve the plight of the ordinary village farmer. He urged ordinary farmers in the district to take advantage of reduced fertiliser prices, increased maize prices and numerous subsidies which the government offered. Most farmers interviewed at the Mazabuka show felt that the government was doing a lot to improve their lot and it was up to them to take up the challenge.²⁸

Farmers in Gwembe District were equally encouraged like their Mazabuka counterparts to take advantage of favourable government agricultural strategies and programmes. However,

²⁵Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley Tonga,' p.44.

²⁶ N.A.Z, SP1/11/4, Minutes held by the Agricultural Show Coordinating Committee on 4 July 1969.

²⁷ N.A.Z, SP1/11/4, Report on the Provincial Review Meeting held on 22 September 1973.

²⁸ N.A.Z, SP1/11/5, Report on the Mazabuka and Gwembe Agricultural Shows held Between 3 July 1971 to 6 July 1971.

Magande made serious observations on the development of agriculture in Gwembe. He acknowledged that Gwembe was one of the districts lagging behind in agricultural development.²⁹ Though some crops and animals were showcased, farmers display left much to be desired. It was for this reason that Magande wondered why despite Gwembe having potential for goat rearing; only three goats were displayed. The millet display looked attractive and cotton came out to be best. Farmers were urged to grow the two crops since they were drought tolerant. Magande acknowledged that despite government's intervention, the ecology of Gwembe failed the farmers who strove hard to be part of agricultural productivity.³⁰

Magande further attributed the rugged terrain in Gwembe as a major contributor to the district lagging behind in agricultural development. In the usual political rhetoric, he noted that the government was doing everything possible to see to it that the road network of the district was worked on as this was one of the major solutions to agricultural development.³¹

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a drastic shift in the organisation of agricultural shows. The call by the government and other stakeholders for the shows to be self-reliant climaxed. In viable productive areas like Monze District, farmers began to be more organised, coordinated and hosted successful shows compared to Gwembe with a scattered cadre of farmers.³² Between 1982 and 1987, the majority of the farmers who attended the shows were cotton growers and school going children. Sebastian Lubinda observed that by 1990, organisers of agricultural shows in Gwembe had completely lost enthusiasm.³³

Radio farm forum

In 1966 Radio Farm Forums (RFF) were introduced which gave an opportunity to farmers to come together, listen to the radio and discuss thereafter. RFFs incorporated a number of programmes which were meant to help farmers improve productivity. From the time the first three RFFs were introduced in Gwembe in 1969, the rate at which the programme was expanding remained low. Despite this, RFFs attendance in Gwembe at times became prominent surpassing traditional farming districts as could be seen from the sampled table 4 below:

Table 4: Selected Radio Farm Forum Attendance Southern Province, 1970-1971

| District | Place | Targeted | Attendance | Year | Remarks |
|----------|-----------|----------|------------|------|---------|
| Gwembe | Sinazeze | 55 | 50 | 1970 | Good |
| Gwembe | Munyumbwe | 50 | 40 | 1971 | Good |
| Mazabuka | Chivuna | 20 | 11 | 1970 | Fair |
| Mazabuka | Chuunda | 18 | 03 | 1971 | Poor |
| Choma | Batoka | 17 | 04 | 1970 | Poor |

Source: NAZ, Agriculture Broadcasting as Medium of Education among Zambian Farmers.

Table 4 above showed that Gwembe farmers were eager to learn more about agricultural prospects and attendees appreciated the fora. This was despite challenges associated with radio signal in Gwembe. Headman Luumbo indicated that he learnt a lot on the importance of the loans government issued via the Agriculture Finance Company (AFC). He however, complained that what was

²⁹ N.A.Z, SP1/11/5, Report on the Mazabuka and Gwembe Agricultural Shows held Between 3 July 1971 to 6 July 1971.

³⁰ N.A.Z, SP1/11/5, Report on the Mazabuka and Gwembe Agricultural Shows Held Between 3 July 1971 to 6 July 1971.

³¹ N.A.Z, SP1/11/5, Report on the Mazabuka and Gwembe Agricultural Shows Held Between 3 July to 6 July 1971.

³² Interview, Simukoko Bydon J, Retired Teacher, 19 February 2019, Gwembe.

³³ Interview, Lubinda Sebastian, Retired Senior Agricultural Supervisor, 19 April 2019, Gwembe.

happening on the ground differed with what RFFs portrayed as it was difficult for Gwembe farmers to access loans.³⁴

In 1975, three more RFF were created with Gwembe north, south and central receiving one each.³⁵ During this period, around 80% of RFFs programming were biased towards cotton growing as can be seen in table 5 below:

Table 5: RFF in Gwembe dominated by Cotton lessons, 1975

| Date | Place | Topic | Attendance |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------------|------------|
| May, 1975 | Munyumbwe | Pricking cotton | 56 |
| May, 1975 | Chipepo | Cotton General | 52 |
| July, 1975 | Sinazeze | Spraying Cotton | 54 |
| July, 1975 | Lusitu | Agricultural Finance Co. | 21 |
| August, 1975 | Luumbo | Grading Cotton | 44 |
| August, 1975 | Munyumbwe | General Agriculture | 25 |

Source: N.A.Z, Agricultural Broadcasting as an Education Medium in Zambia. Agriculture Extension Branch Service, Annual Report, 1975

The table above showed that of the six RFFs held between May and August, 1975, four were for cotton related topics, while only one was for general agriculture.

During his 1975 tour, the Provincial Agricultural Officer (PAO) was told that most government agricultural strategies in Gwembe were then concentrated on cotton growing. The DAO noted that cotton yields in the district were on the rise because most farmers attended RFFs which supported the growing of cotton resulting in some government officials calling for a balanced approach. The concerned official argued that if not well handled, the production of other crops would suffer because indicators were already showing that the Gwembe environment did not fully support crops like maize.³⁶ Victor Siamatowe a retired Camp Officer confirmed that when he serving Chipepo Camp between 1984 and 1997, RFFs in Gwembe mainly promoted cotton growing.³⁷ Table 6 below shows the number of RFF from 1971-1992 and the shortfall in the number of radios in RFFs.

Table 6: Number of RFFs and the required number of radios in Gwembe, 1971 – 1992

| Year | No. of RFFs | | | Total | No. of radios needed for RFFs | Remarks |
|------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------------|--|
| | Gwembe central | Gwembe north | Gwembe south | | | |
| 1971 | 02 | 02 | 02 | 06 | 06 | 4 working, 2 not delivered |
| 1982 | 05 | 06 | 05 | 16 | 16 | 6 working, 3 faulty, 3 missing, 4 not delivered |
| 1992 | 10 | 12 | 09 | 31 | 31 | 7 working, 5 faulty, 10 missing, 9 not delivered |

³⁴N.A.Z, SP 1/2/29, Southern Province Monthly Report, September, 1971.

³⁵N.A.Z, SP 3/25/48, Gwembe District Monthly Report, 1975.

³⁶ N.A.Z, SP1/101/2/3 Tour Reports of Southern Province 15 August 1975 to 24 August 1975.

³⁷Interview, Siamatowe Victor, Retired Camp Officer, 9 March 2019, Munyumbwe.

The table above depicted that, while there was a steady increase in the number of RFFs from 1971 to 1992, there was no corresponding increase in the number of radios to service the RFFs. It can therefore be concluded that RFFs rarely achieved the objectives they were created for in Gwembe.

Settlement schemes

In 1966 the government introduced settlement schemes with the aim of promoting rural farming. However, from the inception, there were no plans to create any settlement scheme in Gwembe. In this regard Siamwiiza confirmed that some people were moved from the distressed regions of Gwembe's Chief Mweemba to other districts:

After independence Sinang'ombe, Siampondo, Siameja and surrounding villages began experiencing perpetual food shortages. The arable soil around these villages had by then become very poor and was agronomically useless as it was beyond regeneration.³⁸

In 1971, the first 17 families to be resettled moved from Siampondo and Sinang'ombe to Njabalombe Settlement Scheme in Kalomo district after undergoing inductions in new farming methods at Malima Farmers' Training Center (MFTC) in Gwembe north. The resettlement resulted in a huge boost in agricultural production levels for the families which moved. The Minutes of the Second Planning Meeting on Njabalombe Settlement Scheme indicated that:

Phase 1 of the resettlement had been completed successfully and 17 families had been resettled. The maize crop yield had been good and each family had sold an average of 18 bags from the three-acre plot allocated. This was in addition to what was kept for consumption.³⁹

In phase two the government resettled 50 families⁴⁰ though the majority of the people were still not willing to relocate. By 1974 about 62 families had been resettled. Agricultural production of the resettled families improved tremendously compared to their previous experience in Gwembe.⁴¹ The government stationed an agricultural extension officer at Njabalombe to provide services to the newly resettled families. By 1975, the resettled families were able to sell an average of 20 bags of maize from their three-acre plots in addition to what remained for consumption. The average yield of those who remained stood at two to three bags per acre which could not even sustain their own consumption.⁴²

The families which declined to be resettled on the other hand continued to be a source of worry for the government due to continuous exposure to the stressful conditions. As a result, there were calls to aid the people of Siameja, Sinango'mbe and Siampondo through food relief.⁴³ It can therefore be concluded that the creation of settlement schemes impacted on peasant farmers of Gwembe differently up to the time the programme ended in the late 1970s.

³⁸Siamwiiza, 'Hunger in the Gwembe Valley', p.26.

³⁹N.A.Z SP 1/6/5, Njabalombe Settlement Scheme. Minutes of the Second Planning Committee held on 29 August 1972.

⁴⁰N.A.Z, SP 1/6/5, Njabalombe Settlement Scheme, Minutes of the Second Planning Committee held on 29 August 1972.

⁴¹Siamwiiza, 'Hunger in the Gwembe Valley', pp. 140-141.

⁴²N.A.Z, SP 1/14/75, Report on Government Survey on Areas in need of Food Relief, 1970-71.

⁴³ N.A.Z, SP 1,101/2/3, Tour Report of Sothern Province, 15 August 1975 to 24 August 1975.

Loans and credits

Despite a clear-cut policy from the government that rural farmers should be assisted to improve their agricultural productivity through credit, organisations charged with the responsibility of issuing loans discriminated against some regions. Gwembe farmers were among the most discriminated against. The AFC's stance was that credit was to be disbursed only to farmers within reach or easily accessible.⁴⁴ Gwembe farmers, who by the remoteness of their district and rugged terrain, were inevitably considered beyond reach and consequently they infrequently received credit as showed in table 7 below:

Table 7: AFC Credit Disbursed in Southern Province, 1971 to 1973

| District | Choma | Kalomo | Monze | Mazabuka | Livingstone | Namwala |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Year | 1971 | 1971 | 1971 | 1971 | 1971 | 1971 |
| No. of loans | - | - | 135 | 415 | 35 | 72 |
| Amount disbursed | - | - | K45,686 | K112,756 | K9,867 | K35,588 |
| Year | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 |
| No. of loans | 581 | 370 | 287 | 540 | 84 | 310 |
| Amount disbursed | K581,086 | K499,457 | K271,103 | K524,603 | K45,286 | K255,205 |
| Year | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 |
| No. of loans | 1091 | 439 | 559 | 549 | 90 | 367 |
| Amount disbursed | K1,131,571 | K551,077 | K534,257 | K560,355 | K52,606 | K150,357 |

Source; NAZ, SP1/2/26, AFC Report, 1971 see also 1972 and 1973

Table 7 indicates that Gwembe district was not a recipient of AFC loans during the period 1971 to 1973.

A review meeting held on 5th March 1972 indicated that while production in other districts was improving, in Gwembe it was still poor because farmers depended on their resources to acquire farming implements. However, it was difficult for farmers in places like Chaamwe, Sinang'ombe and Kalelezhi among other areas to find resources to buy farming implements.⁴⁵

A number of stakeholders raised concerns about the prevailing situation in Gwembe as far as credit was concerned. During the 1973 Agricultural Show, the chairman in his opening remarks noted that:

I would like to register displeasure on the credit facilities for local farmers in Gwembe district... it has no officers' resident for processing of applications for loan facilities. I therefore request for acceleration of efforts to post officers for the finance company.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ N.A.Z, SP 1/4/51, AFC Quarterly Progress Report, Fourth Quarter, 1972.

⁴⁵ N.A.Z, SP 3/12/31, Minutes of the Meeting held to Review Loan Applications in Gwembe on 5 March 1972

⁴⁶N.A.Z, SP1/11/6/66, Welcoming Remarks to the Fourth Provincial Agricultural Show, 1973.

In the same vein the Minister of State Aaron Milner protested and lamented: “Why should there be limitations to farmers getting loans? What will become of those farmers without access to loans?”⁴⁷ Such concerns at times worked in favour of a few Gwembe farmers as shown in table 8 below:

Table 8: Beneficiaries of Credit in Southern Province, 1975

| District | No. of Applicants | No. Accepted | No. Rejected |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Choma | 1,735 | 1,555 | 185 |
| Livingstone | 150 | 97 | 53 |
| | | | |
| Namwala | 195 | 126 | 69 |
| Monze | 190 | 135 | 55 |
| Mazabuka | 1,556 | 1,556 | - |
| Gwembe | 163 | 100 | 63 |
| Kalomo | 218 | 217 | 01 |

Source: N.A.Z, SP 1/101/2/3, Tour Reports of Southern Province, 15-24/08/1975.

The above table showed that despite Gwembe being a vast region the number of applicants for the loans was low and still some were rejected.

The majority of farmers considered for loans were those linked to extension services mainly from Munyumbwe, Chipepo, Lusitu and Sinazeze.⁴⁸ The loans given slightly improved crop yields especially in Gwembe central and north in the 1975/76 farming season.⁴⁹ However, the DAO was quick to mention that it was going to be difficult for the farmers to pay back the loans because yields at Chipepo were affected by floods, while Lusitu and Sinazeze experienced droughts.⁵⁰ Ecological hitches among other reasons therefore could have prevented credit organisations from issuing loans to Gwembe farmers. According to the 1978 AFC report, there were more than 500 applicants from Gwembe central, almost 300 from south and about 600 from the north, giving a total of around 1400 of which only 60 were considered.⁵¹

In the early 1980s, government directed its energies to cotton production in Gwembe. Lubinda showed that most cotton farmers had access to loans through Lint Co, AFC and later Zambia Agricultural Development Bank (ZADB). For instance, between 1982 and 1985 900 to 1500 farmers benefited from the loan schemes offered by the AFC and ZADB.⁵² However, Lubinda stated that most of the beneficiaries of the loans were influential persons leaving out those who really needed help.⁵³

In 1987, AFC and ZADB were merged to form Lima Bank. During that period Gwembe farmers were taken back to the days when they were rarely considered for loans. The number of people with access loans was trimmed further. Oral data indicated that on average only about 20 to 30 farmers in Gwembe District were able to access loans per year during the tenure of Lima Bank.⁵⁴

Seed and fertiliser support programmes

⁴⁷ N.A.Z, SP3/20/19, Minutes of an Emergence Meeting for District Governors and other officials held at Buseko Hall on 28 August 1970 to discuss procedure connected with Agricultural Loans.

⁴⁸ N.A.Z, SP 1/101/2/3, Tour Reports of Southern Province, 15 August 1975 to 24 August 1975.

⁴⁹ N.A.Z, SP 1/101/2/3, Tour Reports of Southern Province, 15 August 1975 to 24 August 1975.

⁵⁰ N.A.Z, SP 1/101/2/3, Tour Reports of Southern Province, 15 August 1975 to 24 August 1975.

⁵¹ N.A.Z, MAG 4/1/6/16, Annual Report on Operations of the AFC, January to December 1978.

⁵² Lubinda, interview.

⁵³ Lubinda, interview.

⁵⁴ Siamatowe, interview.

Gwembe District's situation regarding input supply and distribution revealed deep-seated discrimination and insurmountable ecological and topographical challenges. As a result, the programme failed to wholly mitigate poverty levels in the district. A November 1968 Report affirmed that all the districts in the province with the exception of Gwembe had seed and fertiliser readily available for the people with local purchase orders from the Credit Organisation of Zambia (COZ) and on cash.⁵⁵ In meeting held on 9 April, 1969 it was revealed that the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) had input requirement estimates for all the districts under its jurisdiction except for Gwembe. The GMB blamed the Department of Agriculture for non-submission of the necessary information for Gwembe. However, Lundwe from the Department objected to the accusation by drawing the participants' attention to minutes numbered MRD/5/6/11 which showed that the Department had played its part and that the problem therefore was with GMB which failed to deliver inputs for Gwembe.⁵⁶ The accusation and counter accusation between the Department of Agriculture and GMB was an indication of disorderliness at institutional level.

Gwembe's situation regarding input supply and distribution became a concern to most stakeholders. In 1970 the DAO complained that the biasness in the operations of government parastatals regarding input supply and distribution sent Gwembe farmers into a panicky mood. In the same vein, Chiinda bemoaned the operations of agricultural state agencies when he noted that, "It was typical of agricultural state agencies to shun agricultural peripheral zones like Gwembe."⁵⁷

In as much as there were reports on shortages of fertiliser in other districts which had access to seasonal credits and subsidised inputs, the situation for Gwembe was worse as noted in one of the reports in 1973, "the non-availability of fertiliser and lagging behind schedule loans for Gwembe was unprecedented."⁵⁸ Table 9 below shows the distribution of seed and inputs in Southern Province between 1972 and 1974.

Table 9: Inputs supplied and distributed in Southern Province, 1972 - 1974

| District | Choma | Kalomo | Mazabuka | Namwala | L/stone | Monze | Gwembe |
|-----------------|--------|--------|----------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| Year | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 | 1972 |
| Ordered | 34,890 | 15,200 | 30,233 | 20,343 | 7,456 | 32,222 | - |
| Received | 34,690 | 15,200 | 30,123 | 20,043 | 7,456 | 32,124 | - |
| Balance | 200 | Nil | 110 | 200 | Nil | 98 | - |
| Year | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 | 1973 |
| Ordered | 40,905 | 16,000 | 32,678 | 21,714 | 8,654 | 34,890 | - |
| Received | 40,905 | 15,623 | 32,500 | 21,714 | 8,004 | 34,890 | - |
| Balance | Nil | 377 | 178 | Nil | 650 | Nil | - |
| Year | 1974 | 1974 | 1974 | 1974 | 1974 | 1974 | 1974 |
| Ordered | 40,800 | 17,412 | 33,098 | 22,041 | 8,112 | 34,342 | 16,345 |
| Received | 40,724 | 17,412 | 33,098 | 22,041 | 8,112 | 34,342 | 8,788 |
| Balance | 176 | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil | 7,557 |

Source: N.A.Z, MAG 4/2/6, Agricultural Performance Reports in Southern Province, 1972-74

Statistics above showed that Gwembe was discriminated against in the supply and distribution of inputs. The discrimination was associated with the district's ecology, poor road network, hilly and

⁵⁵ NAZ, SP3/25/48, Southern Province Extension Monthly Reports, November 1968.

⁵⁶ N.A.Z, SP1/2/29, Minutes of the Meeting of the Provincial Coordinating Committee held on Thursday, 9 April 1969.

⁵⁷ Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley', p.45.

⁵⁸ N.A.Z, SP1/2/29, Southern Province Monthly Reports, September, 1973.

rocky terrain. This contributed much to the low crop yields in the district.⁵⁹ Though in 1974 Gwembe received an allocation, it was still low. Just above half of what the district ordered was allocated.

Despite showing some signs of improved yields during the 1974/1975 farming season, there was a reduction in the number of inputs supplied to Gwembe for the 1975/1976 farming season. The DAO expressed disappointment that instead of increasing the share, there was a reduction. The district only received 3,250 bags of chemical fertiliser. This was 5,538 bags less than what was received for the 1974/75 farming season and the DAO bemoaned that:

It is going to be difficult to motivate farmers in Gwembe to reach the desired agricultural productivity. Today as we go in the field to distribute subsidised inputs. 5,558 bags will be subtracted from what we distributed last year. What will we tell those who benefited last year and will not this year? What will we tell those who are eagerly waiting to be added to the beneficiary list this year? The endemic poverty in Gwembe will be worsening every year. If people are putting the natural environment as a determining factor to receive agricultural implements, then Gwembe will always lag behind because very little or nothing will be done to improve the status quo.⁶⁰

Poor input delivery and distribution within Gwembe was at times as a result of miscommunication. In 1978, three trucks belonging to Nicholas Transport of Chisekesi set off to deliver an unspecified amount of seed and inputs in Gwembe. A miscommunication between National Agriculture Marketing Board (NAMBOARD) and the transporter resulted in the inputs heading in the wrong direction, but within Gwembe. In the process the trucks got marooned at Chiyabi in Gwembe north. After two weeks of no communication, the transporter Mr Nicholas Couverers decided to recall his trucks back to Monze District.⁶¹ No effort was made to send the inputs back to the right destinations. This partly explains why the Central Statistical Office (CSO) reported that Gwembe experienced a crop failure in that year coercing the state to provide emergency relief food.⁶²

In 1981, farmers at Chisaanga, Lusitu, Kayuni and Simaambo temporal depots received about 2,345 bags of inputs out of the required 8,456 for the four areas. This number was too small to meet the demand.⁶³ This caused a near-stampede as farmers scrambled for the limited inputs. In October 1987 farmers at Chaamwe, Sompani and Chipepo spent close to a week waiting for the delivery of an unspecified quantity of inputs because the truck carrying them had broken down. A NAMBOARD representative complained that servicing Gwembe had always been a challenge since 1964 and this almost became a 'ritual'.⁶⁴

Worse still, Gwembe in most instances was the last district to receive the inputs further reducing the chances of farmers to cultivate at the onset of the rainy season. It is for this reason that Chiinda argued that crop production in Gwembe remained low because of ill-timed intervention by the government coupled with ecological factors such as floods, droughts, poor transportation infrastructure, hilly and rocky terrain.⁶⁵

Crop marketing

⁵⁹ N.A.Z, SP 1/11/6/66, Southern Province Report on Crop Marketing Season, 1972 to 1973.

⁶⁰N.A.Z, SP 1 /4/51, Minutes of Gwembe District Development meeting held on 12 October 1975.

⁶¹Interview, Maaya Norman, Former Head Driver, Nicholas Transport,12 September 2019, Chisekesi.

⁶²N.A.Z, MAG 4/1/6/16, Urgent Meeting held at Gwembe District Council to Assess the extent of Crop Failure in the district, 8 May 1979.

⁶³Maaya, Interview.

⁶⁴Maaya, Interview.

⁶⁵Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley', p.47.

The challenges Gwembe District faced in input delivery and distribution were also highlighted during crop marketing. Table 11 below shows the amounts of maize sold in the Southern province in 1973.

Table 11: Number of bags of maize purchased in Southern Province, 1973

| District | SPCMU purchases | NAMBOARD purchases | Commercial | Private buyers |
|-------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Choma | 8, 414 bags | 117,928 bags | Nil | Nil |
| Gwembe | Nil | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| Kalomo | Nil | 156,416 bags | Nil | Nil |
| Livingstone | 1,397 bags | Nil | 77,729 bags | Nil |
| Mazabuka | 63,487 bags | 231,875 bags Sorghum- 6235 bags | Nil | Nil |
| Monze | Nil | 69,372 bags | Nil | Nil |
| Namwala | 2,345 bags | Nil | Nil | 1,541 bags |

Source: NAZ, SP1/3/60, Department of Marketing Annual Report for the year ended 1973.

The table above showed that while farmers of the same status in other districts sold their crops to the Southern Province Cooperative Marketing Union (SPCMU), NAMBOARD and private buyers, Gwembe farmers had no access to such privileges despite the governments' policy advocating rural agricultural development to alleviate poverty.

During the 1973 marketing season, the PAO toured the province and was surprised to find farmers waiting at some seasonal depots in Gwembe with produce for that crop marketing year. Munyumbwe, Lukonde and Bunyete had 470, 360 and 306 bags of maize and other crops respectively.⁶⁶ When he queried why that was happening and especially that seasonal depots were almost closing, the farmers said the days NAMBOARD promised to buy and pick the crop had elapsed. The local people reported that this was the type of treatment they underwent every year. They indicated to him that NAMBOARD avoided the district because of the bad state of roads and rough terrain.⁶⁷ The PAO concluded that:

There was need to have mobile depots for selling seed in Gwembe because farmers faced challenges in acquiring seed, fertiliser and other farming implements. Further, the area was thought not to be conducive for farming because of the mountainous, rocky and hilly terrain.⁶⁸

Crop marketing in Gwembe was also hampered by lack of storage facilities. The construction of mobile depots and holding sheds by NAMBOARD developed at a slower rate. When some stakeholders questioned the slow pace at which sheds were being erected at Bbondo Munyumbwe, Chaanga and Kanchindu in 1974, Maboshe M, the overseer of the project complained of erratic funding from the central government.⁶⁹

In an interview, Lubinda revealed that the construction of sheds and depots in Gwembe central had started during the era of NAMBOARD in 1973. The contractor just erected four slabs at one point and one structure with a roof and the pillars. The informant alleged that the government realised that the project was bound to be a white elephant as agricultural production levels in the

⁶⁶N.A.Z, SP 1/3/61, Gwembe District Tour Report 12 to 16 August 1973

⁶⁷N.A.Z, SP 1/3/61, Gwembe District Tour Report 12 to 16 August 1973

⁶⁸ N.A.Z, SP 1/3/61, Gwembe District Tour Report 12 to 16 August 1973

⁶⁹ N.A.Z, SP 1/3/60, Report on the State of Construction of Sheds in Southern Province, 1974.

district were very low compared to neighbouring districts.⁷⁰ The following photos are of the main agricultural storage depots in Gwembe and Monze districts.

Figure 2: Gwembe main agro-storage facilities- 1 incomplete shade and 4 slabs in a bad state



Source: Field Research Photo, Gwembe, 12 May, 2019.

Figure 3: Monze main agro storage facilities- 24 Silos, 9 complete shades and 6 slabs.

⁷⁰Lubinda, interview.



Source: Field Research Photo, Monze, 15 May, 2019.

The above figures confirmed that Gwembe was inferior when it came to crop marketing and storage. It was for this reason that most of the crop bought from Gwembe was taken to Monze for storage. At times the little produce bought and stored in Gwembe went to waste due to derisory storage facilities.

The people of Gwembe relied on seasonal mobile depots operated by NAMBOARD. In Gwembe north, the following seasonal depots operated in 1975; Lusitu, kayuni, Lusitu Sub-Centre, Jamba, Siamwiinga, Chaanga and Sianyoola which collected a total number of 1,234 bags of maize and minimal amounts of other crops.⁷¹ The issue of seasonal depots contributed to the low collection of crops in the district.

The NAMBOARD's method of changing buying points every year also impacted negatively on the farming community of Gwembe. Simukoko commented that every year NAMBOARD came up with new sites for seasonal depots depending on the anticipated harvest and political influence.⁷² Poles, tapping tents and logs set at the base were used to create storage space. This method was condemned by farmers and other stakeholders because it contributed to the destruction of the little harvest farmers in the district had sweated for, in an event of extreme heat and early rains especially with the unpredictable situation in Gwembe.

Pricing

The policy of pricing agricultural produce by government did not help to improve the lot for the people of Gwembe. In 1968 an official from Agricultural Rural Marketing Board (ARMB) observed that the pricing policy based on the line of rail was unrealistic because it did not consider actual conditions from nonviable areas.⁷³ However, during the 1974-75 crop marketing season, all forms of discrimination were gotten rid of and uniform prices were introduced in all the depots across the country regardless of the location.

⁷¹ N.A.Z, SP 1/11/6/66, Southern Province Report on the 1972/73 Marketing Season.

⁷² Simukoko, Interview.

⁷³ N.A.Z, Agricultural Rural Marketing Board Report, 1966

The 1977 review report on pricing revealed that there was need to reconsider the agricultural pricing policy if poverty was to be alleviated. Some areas were less viable which meant they needed attractive pricing for agricultural produce to encourage farmers to continue cultivating.⁷⁴ The bone of contention was that the cost of production in regions like Gwembe was incomparable with any of the neighbouring districts. If all the necessary farming implements and inputs were given to farmers in the district, the yield was estimated at 1.8 metric tonnes per hectare.⁷⁵ In the neighbouring districts of Monze, Choma, Mazabuka and Kalomo with the same quantity of farming implements and inputs, the yield was estimated to be 2.6 metric tonnes per hectare.⁷⁶ Such variations limited Gwembe farmers to be part of the robust subsistence agriculture.

Lint Company and cotton production

Cotton production was one of the most successful government programmes in Gwembe District. Since cotton was a drought tolerant crop, it suited well with the Gwembe ecology which was prone to drought during most farming seasons. As early as 1971, the impact of cotton was felt on Gwembe as it became the main crop for the district.⁷⁷

Cotton production mainly impacted positively on the people of Gwembe because they were able to easily access cash after sales. This partly explains why organisations that provided relief aid to poverty-stricken households of Gwembe excluded about 12,874 people.⁷⁸ This period also saw a steady increase in the number of cattle from 29,404 animals in 1972 to 139,965 in 1985.⁷⁹ Chiinda attributed this improvement to the increase in the number of cotton growers with cash at their disposal. A retired cotton farmer Victor Siankululu of Chipepo boasted that:

Cotton farming turned me into a real man because I was able to acquire whatever I desired. I built two houses and managed to furnish them exclusively. As for women, I cannot remember the exact number of concubines I had, but I had four legal wives and 26 children of which 15 are well educated using proceeds from cotton sales.⁸⁰

In 1985, there was a huge increase in the cotton yields for the Gwembe. Chiinda argued that due to biasness which came with cotton growing, in the 1985/86 farming season, the yields reached an unprecedented 9,723,211 kilograms.⁸¹ Cotton production in Gwembe advanced at a fast rate. According to Hantobolo Gwembe was the leading producer of cotton in Southern Province. However, food shortages in the district became the order of the day because the majority farmers devoted most of the land to cotton production at the expense of food crops.⁸² Businessmen from the Tonga plateau ceased this opportunity and began taking food grain to Gwembe for sale. This meant that as farmers bought food grain from plateau businessmen, they externalised part of the profit made from cotton sales.⁸³

In 1985, government opened a cotton ginnery in Gwembe to process lint cotton from Gwembe and the Tonga plateau. The opening of the ginnery helped Gwembe cotton farmers to sale their cotton at their doorstep. Further, some people were employed as permanent or seasonal

⁷⁴N.A.Z, MAWD, Department Marketing and Co-operatives, Annual Report for the Year ended on 31 December 1976

⁷⁵N.A.Z, MAG 4/1/6/16, Monthly Report on Agricultural Marketing, June, 1977

⁷⁶Interview, Munthali Davy, Senior Agricultural Officer, Gwembe. 22 April 2019, Chisekesi.

⁷⁷N.A.Z, SP 1/14/75, Report on Government Survey on Areas in need of Food Relief, 1970-71.

⁷⁸The excluded people were able to buy grain for domestic consumption.

⁷⁹Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley', p.50.

⁸⁰Interview, Siankululu Victor, Small Scale Farmer, 6 May 2019, Gwembe.

⁸¹Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley', p.45.

⁸²Hantobolo, Ecology, Agriculture and Proletarianisation, p.37 see also Siamwiiza, 'Hunger in Gwembe Valley', p.134.

⁸³Hantobolo, Ecology, Agriculture and Proletarianisation, p. 37

workers and this undoubtedly uplifted the lives of individuals, the community and the district's economy in general.⁸⁴

In the late 1980s, the shrinking Zambian economy affected the operations of Lint Co leading to a drastic reduction in cotton production in the district. While in the 1985/86 farming season the cotton yield for Gwembe stood at 9,723,211 kilograms. The yield drastically dropped during the 1990/91 season to 4,140,036 Kilograms.⁸⁵ A number of other ventures were also affected due to the reduced inflow of cash. For instance, the cattle population reduced from 139,965 in 1985 to 92,713 in 1990.⁸⁶

Conclusion

This article demonstrated that between 1964 and 1991 the Zambian government attempted to implement a number of national agricultural programmes and strategies in Gwembe in order to help small scale farmers to alleviate poverty. However, most of these strategies and programmes failed to promote agricultural productivity among Gwembe farmers largely as a result of ecological and topographical factors which militated against agricultural development in the district thus forcing most government workers from the agricultural sector to shun the area. Further, in more instances, the government failed to honour its obligation to fully support farmers through the proposed strategies and programmes. Farmers also shunned some important activities which could have helped them improve their agricultural productivity. The article has further showed that initially, cotton production impacted positively on the farmers of Gwembe because it contributed significantly to changing their economic and social livelihoods. However, by the late 1980s the cotton fortunes had dwindled forcing some farmers to discontinue the venture.

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⁸⁴Mulope Mulope, Retired Camp Officer, May 2019, Gwembe.

⁸⁵Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley', p.45.

⁸⁶Chiinda, 'A History of Gwembe Valley', p.51.

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Mulenga Mwansa is an historian and a teacher at Chisekesi Secondary School in Monze, Zambia. He holds a Master of Arts degree in History and a Bachelor of Arts with Education degree in History and Civic Education obtained from the University of Zambia in 2021 and 2014 respectively. Mulenga has a Secondary Teacher's Diploma in History and Religious Education from-National-In-Service Teacher's College, Zambia obtained in 2007. He is also a holder of a Primary

Teacher's Certificate from Kasama College of Education, Zambia awarded in 2002.