

Immigrant-Host Community Relations in Malawi's Community Based Rural Land Development Project (CBRLDP)

Paul Kishindo, PhD

Department of Sociology, University of Malawi
Chancellor College, Zomba Malawi
Email: paulkishindo@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Access to land among land-poor households has always been contentious. In Malawi, the government, aware of this, started Community Based Rural Based Land Development Project (CBRLDP), financed by the World Bank. The project brought to the fore the latent antagonistic relationship between immigrants and host communities. This paper examines the antagonistic relationship that developed between one of the beneficiary groups of the project and their hosts in Chigumula village, Traditional Authority (TA) Liwonde's area in Machinga district. Focus group discussion reveals that Resettlement of groups, whether sponsored or spontaneous, carries with it a potential for conflict with resident population arising from among other things competition for resources, status, power and dominance.

Keywords: *resettlement; relocation; beneficiary groups; host community; land redistribution; land poverty.*

Résumé

Accès à la terre parmi les ménages pauvres en terres a toujours été controversée . Au Malawi , le gouvernement , conscient de cela, commencé Projet communautaire de développement rural terrestres (CBRLDP) , financé par la Banque mondiale . Le projet a mis en évidence la relation antagoniste latente entre les immigrants et les communautés d'accueil . Ce document examine la relation antagoniste qui a développé entre l'un des groupes de bénéficiaires du projet et leurs hôtes dans le village de Chigumula , l'autorité traditionnelle zone de (TA) dans le district de Machinga Liwonde . Discussion de groupe focus révèle que la réinstallation de groupes , que ce soit sponsorisé ou spontané , porte en elle un risque de conflit avec la population résidente découlant entre autres la concurrence des choses pour les ressources , le statut, le pouvoir et la domination .

Mots clés *réinstallation ; réinstallation; groupes de bénéficiaires ; communauté hôte ; la redistribution des terres ; la pauvreté des sols .*

Introduction

The age-old movement of people from one place to settle in another has been widely studied and explained. In many African countries the reasons for these movements include search for agricultural lands, natural disasters such as drought, family feuds, flight from witchcraft and ethnic strife. Government policies also bring about movement of people from one place to the other; for example, governments sponsor resettlement projects to achieve certain economic, social and political objectives. Chambers (1969) identifies some of these objectives as: to counteract the drift of school leavers to towns by providing opportunities for market-oriented agriculture; to provide land to landless families as a safety valve through which some displaced members of society could obtain land; and to promote ethnic integration and nation building. In postcolonial Africa, resettlement schemes have generally been associated with rural development. The government sponsored settlement schemes in Zimbabwe, for example, are viewed as show-cases of the transformation of the rural economy through the creation of a class of progressive smallholder farmers producing for the market (Chimhowu and Hulme, 2006). Turner and Hulme (1990) observe that socially, resettlement schemes are one of the most complex development initiatives since they involve not only population movement but the creation of new agricultural systems, homes, infrastructure, services, new sets of social relationships, and rapid modification of existing cultural values and norms. Sponsored resettlement usually entails high costs, for example removal costs, creation of infrastructure such as access roads, water supply, education and healthcare and likely to generate conflict over natural resources with the host community (Cleaver and Schreiber, 1994).

According to Harrison (1983) there is an ever-present danger that a resettlement programme can eat up a large proportion of the agriculture budget of a developing country and siphon funds away from the rural majority towards the creation of elite communities in isolated rural areas. He argues that the majority of settlement schemes in developing countries have been either human or ecological disasters, or a diversion from the central task of improving already settled areas. It is an initiative that can be dispensed with in favour of serious land reform.

From the planner's perspective resettlement is mutually beneficial to the immigrants and host community. The immigrants gain access to land and other natural resources, while in turn the host community benefits from an enhanced capacity to carry out a diversity of community development projects and state provided public goods such as schools, water supply, health facilities and access roads (cf Murombedzi 1999; Ng'ong'ola 2006). However, there is always potential conflict when a large group migrates into a space already inhabited by another. Realistic conflict theory locates the sources, of intergroup conflict in the competition for material resources, power, dominance, status

and other scarce goods where these appear to have a zero – sums fate. Scudder (1985) observes that resettlement schemes commonly underperform because little attention is paid to the relationship between settler families and the communities in which they live. Conflict can negatively affect the resettlement process. This is the thrust of this paper.

Specifically, this paper examines the antagonistic relationship between the Kalungu Trust, one of the beneficiary groups of the Community Based Rural Land Development Project (CBRLDP) and their hosts in Chigumula village, Traditional Authority (TA) Liwonde's area in Machinga district in order to understand its basis. Qualitative research methods were used. Focus group discussions were conducted with members of the trust. Information was collected from the host community using a combination of focus groups and informal interviews. The group village head was interviewed for his perspective on the issue. It also benefitted from a review of project documents and related scholarly works. The study of which this paper is drawn from began in 2006.

The Community Based Rural Land Development Project

Malawi's bimodal agricultural economy is characterized by a highly skewed land distribution especially in the southern region. Among smallholders the distribution of land holdings is concentrated between 0.2 and 0.4 hectares, with an estimated 30% cultivating less than 0.5 hectares (Republic of Malawi and World Bank, 2007:154). On the other hand the average tobacco estate is 34 hectares and the average tea estate is 1,400 hectare (CLC consultants, 1998:14). The existence of large estate deprives smallholders of much needed agricultural land. The 1997 Integrated Household Survey demonstrated a direct link between rural poverty and access to land. The rural poor were predominantly found in households cultivating less than 0.5 hectare (National Statistical Office, 1998).

The Community Based Rural Development Project (CBRLDP) was conceived as land redistribution initiative using market principles. Land-poor households would be empowered through the provision of grants to buy land from private land owners on 'willing buyer, willing seller' terms. The World Bank, at the cost of US\$27 million, and a Malawi Government contribution of US\$2.8 million, funded the project. The 'willing buyer, willing seller' approach was preferred by the World Bank on the grounds that it respected private property rights as opposed to nationalization and compulsory acquisition which are believed to victimize private landowners. The project rolled out its pilot phase in July 2004 in the four southern region districts of Mangochi, Machinga, Mulanje and Thyolo. It was expected that by the end of the pilot phase in June 2009, 15, 000 land poor households among the 1.8 million who, on average, own less than one hectare of land would have been resettled on at least two hectares of land (World Bank, 2012). The project planners assumed that tobacco estate owners in Mangochi

and Machinga and tea estate owners in Mulanje and Thyolo would be willing to sell the whole or a portion of their under utilized or undeveloped land. The ultimate goal of the project was to contribute to poverty reduction through the provision of land-to-land poor households and improved agricultural productivity.

To be eligible for registration households had to be Malawian, owning between 0.2 and 0.4 hectare of land and experiencing recurrent food insecurity, but with adequate family labour to enable them to cultivate larger parcels of land than they currently did. Additionally, they had to be willing to affiliate themselves to beneficiary groups¹⁰⁸ comprising between 25 and 35 households for purposes of buying land and settling upon it. These beneficiary groups were essentially self-selected groups of friends, kin and neighbours from a group of villages under a common group village head. It was assumed that these pre-existing ties would form the basis of social support and collective action in the resettlement area. There were screenings of applicants for registration, in line with the project guideline, by specially elected Community Oversight Committees (COCs). Successful applicants were required to surrender their current parcels of land to lineage leaders for reallocation to family members remaining behind. The surrender of land would symbolically delink them from the village and part of their own history. COCs, created for the purpose, in the resettlement areas, would facilitate integration of the immigrants into their host communities. The project planners did not envisage the development of enclaves within the resettlement areas.

Qualified households were entitled to a US\$1,050 (then about MK147,500) Uniform Ceiling Grant (UCG). Its use was specified as: 30% for acquiring land; 10% to cover settlement costs; and 60% for farm development. It was paid in tranches and available for one agricultural year only. It was assumed that by the end of one year the beneficiary households would have established themselves firmly enough as not to need further financial assistance from the project. This however, could only be possible if within that period the relocated households were able to produce surpluses and find markets to sell at a profit. The evidence however, suggests that this expectation was based on an unrealistic assessment of the situation on the ground as many resettlement areas were located long distances away from the nearest Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC)¹⁰⁹ market and not easily accessible due to poor access roads (Ng'ong'ola, 2006:8).

Two hectares of land were deemed to be adequate for subsistence needs and a sustainable livelihood. Households in a beneficiary group pooled their resources to buy an estate which was then subdivided into holdings of two hectares for each household. District Land Officers (DLOs) facilitated contacts between leaders of beneficiary groups and potential land sellers in the receiving districts. Apart from the leaders involved in

¹⁰⁸ For legal purposes beneficiary groups are registered as 'Trusts'

¹⁰⁹ ADMARC is a parastatal organization whose mandate is to buy smallholder produce and resell it on the local or international markets.

the land transactions the rest of the members of a beneficiary group saw their new home for the first time on arrival in the resettlement area. The newly arrived migrants had two major tasks at hand: the construction of a shelter; and the preparation of the land in readiness for planting. As most of the land bought by beneficiary groups tended to be abandoned or undeveloped land, getting it ready for crop production involved a lot of labour effort.

The first relocations occurred in November 2005 and involved four beneficiary groups comprising 126 households. Three of the beneficiary groups relocated within their home districts of Mangochi and Machinga. The Kalungu Trust relocated from Thyolo to Machinga because there were no land offers from the estates. In Mulanje and Thyolo most private land is owned by descendants of European settlers who had benefited from a racialised colonial policy that promoted large scale export oriented agriculture, or international companies that had bought the land from them. The expatriate land owners viewed the project as a mere government ploy to repossess the land and they refused to cooperate (World Bank, 2012:15). The reluctance of expatriate land owners to release land to land poor households exposes a major weakness of the 'willing buyer, willing seller' approach to land redistribution: the state cannot compel a land owner to sell, even when the land is obviously unutilised or under utilized. Moyo (2000) observes that delays in implementing land redistribution due to legal or financial constraints to acquisition have tended to fuel land occupation strategies led by either community leaders politicians or pressure groups. The perceived slow rate of land redistribution was a major factor in the land invasions that occurred in Zimbabwe in 2001 and 2002. The emergence in Thyolo of a movement dedicated to the restoration of lands 'stolen' by settlers to its true owners could be the harbinger of land related confrontation between expatriate land owners and land poor Malawian households (see People Land Organization, 2014)

The Kalungu Trust and their hosts

The Kalungu Trust relocated to Chigumula village, TA Liwonde, Machinga district in November 2005. They were one of the four pioneer beneficiary groups that relocated that year. They originated from Chimalanga village TA Bvumbwe in Thyolo district, and consisted of thirty-five households, four of which were female headed. They are Ngonis, descendant of the South African Zulu ethnic group. They follow a patrilineal system of descent and succession, and are Christian. In Thyolo they owned less than 0.5 hectare of land and derived their livelihood from vegetable growing in *dimbas*¹¹⁰ and market trading. They depended on the market for their maize¹¹¹ requirements since their tiny holdings could not produce enough to meet household food requirements.

¹¹⁰ *Dimba* are steam bank gardens

¹¹¹ *Maize* is the major staple food in the country

The CBRLDP offered them an opportunity to access more land to enable them to improve their food security as well as household incomes. They bought and settled on the 79-hectare former Bilila tobacco estate, which had lain unused for a number of years following the fall of tobacco prices on international markets often attributed to the antismoking movement.

Chigumula village to which the Trust relocated consists of seven matrilineal-linked hamlets. The population is predominantly Yao and Muslim. The Yao follow a matrilineal system of descent and succession. Uxorilocal marriages are the norm. Due to the operation of the uxorilocality principle adult males in the village tend to be marital immigrants, some of whom are non-Yao and non – Muslim.

In essence members of the Kalungu Trust and their hosts were two distinct communities compelled by circumstances to coexist as neighbours. Their occupation of the estate, which was a separate location from the rest of the village, reinforced the separateness of the immigrants from the host community.

The first few years of resettlement are a period of transition during which immigrants try to adjust to a new physical and social environment while simultaneously trying to come to terms with the disruption of social networks and loss of capital occasioned by the departure from the place of origin. How well the immigrants are able to adapt to their new environment and achieve their economic and social aspirations determines the decision whether or not to make the new lands their permanent home.

Sources of conflict

It was envisaged by the project planners that host communities would receive relocated households without too much trouble in view of the potential benefits that they would bring. The immigrants would employ casual labour for their farm work and in the process contribute to the circulation of money in the local economy. The increased population would enhance the community's ability to carry out a diversity of self – help community development projects, and could also leverage population –criteria based state provided public goods such as health facilities and schools.

However, the relationship between Kalungu Trust members and their host community was characterized by resentment and antagonism. In 2006 a number of orders were issued by the group village head against the immigrants for example, they were ordered not to keep pigs or dogs; not to eat pork; and not to brew or drink beer on the grounds that these practices were incompatible with the teachings of Islam to which the majority of the host community belonged. Yet these are the very practices that define a Ngoni. The immigrants interpreted these orders as an attempt by the Yaos to impose their culture on them and suppress their 'superior' cultural heritage. The orders were generally ignored. This served to worsen the relationship with the group village head and other village leaders.

Members of the Trust reported that they were frequently harassed for cash handouts. Cases of land encroachment, crop theft and deliberate destruction of the maize crop were common. Repeated complaints to the group village head and the COC did not produce any results. The inaction by the group village head and the COC reinforced the suspicion that there was collusion between the village leadership and the perpetrators of the anti-immigrant actions.

The harassment of the immigrants were essentially manifestations of the resentment that the host community harboured against the immigrants which can be attributed to the following:

Competing claims to land

Bilila estate, which the Kalungu Trust bought and settled upon, had been created out of customary land. It was one of the many that were created in the country during the tobacco boom years of the 1970s and 1980s to allow Malawian participation in large-scale production of a high value crop. On leasing the land the estate owner had promised to create employment for the villagers. When the estate failed to create the promised employment for the villagers, and was eventually abandoned by the lessee, it had been expected that it would be restored to the community for redistribution to households which did not have enough land for their subsistence needs. The sale of the land to 'strangers' was confirmation that the land was lost forever. Since the village no longer had unallocated land, it meant that newly formed households could only access land through splitting up existing holdings. The presence of the estate was blamed for creating land scarcity. Some land poor households had, prior to the arrival of the project beneficiaries, already begun encroaching on the estate, claiming it was part of their ancestral land. In this context what the local community viewed as ancestral land was benefitting 'strangers'.

Exclusion from the cash grant

The resettlement grant, understood by the host community as 'free money', apparently because it was not worked for, was viewed as discriminatory. As the group village head observed during an interview:¹¹²

The government as a good father should not be seen to be favouring one child over another. A good father does not say to one child 'come and eat' while chasing another away.

The observation made by the group village head was widely shared within the host community. They believed that they were poor too, and therefore deserving of government financial assistance to buy fertilizer. In view of their exclusion, the host community

112 Interviewed on 12 February 2006 at Chigumula village, TA Liwonde, Machinga

perceived the immigrants as 'favoured children of the government', creating an 'us' and 'them' situation. On the basis that they were unfairly excluded from benefits some members of the host community felt justified to harass the immigrants for cash handouts.

Perceived immigrant arrogance

Members of the Kalungu Trust viewed themselves as carrying a more superior cultural heritage than their hosts whom they characterized as descendants of their slaves. This is not historically correct. Although the Ngoni came into the country as military invaders they did not subdue the Yao who, through their contacts with Arab slave traders, had access to superior weapons including fire arms.

Unlike the other beneficiary groups, and contrary to project policy, members of the Kalungu Trust sought to be recognized as a distinct community under their own village head, to be called Chimbalanga 2 after their own village in Thyolo where they would practice Ngoni customs. To this end they brought along a kinsman of group village head Chimbalanga to lead 'the new village'. The quest for a separate identity was interpreted by the host community and its leadership as a clear challenge and disrespect to the existing authority structures in Chigumula village and a display of arrogance which needed to be suppressed

Development of peaceful coexistence

The Kalungu Trust has recorded the largest number of withdrawals from the project for various reasons. Chief among these reasons is the absence of basic services such as health facilities, potable water supply and primary school for school age children. These were services that were within walking distance in their village. According to Ng'ong'ola (2006:15) the Trust lost 8 households within three months of arrival. As of August 2014 only 7 of the 35 households that had relocated to the resettlement area remain. The relationship between the two groups has become more cordial, with members of the Trust participating in community work such as access road maintenance, and public celebrations such as weddings. The cessation of the resettlement grant and the availability of abandoned land which the host community can access (although it is against government policy) seems to have removed important bases of the animosity. The reduce numbers of the immigrants no longer poses a threat to the dominance of Yao culture in the village.

A comparison

While the relations between the Kalungu Trust and their hosts tended to be antagonistic they were more friendly elsewhere. The Chumachilimthaka and Khamalipindula Trusts from Mulanje which relocated to TA Chiwalo's area in Machinga in 2006, for example, report that apart from minor incidents of crop theft and boundary encroachment during the early years, their relations with the hosts have been friendly. As part of their host villages they have participated in communal festivities such as weddings and self-help work such as maintaining access roads and digging wells. Inter-marriages, mostly involving immigrant women and local men have already occurred. The first such marriages are reported to have occurred within the first year of arrival. It is suggested that the beneficiary groups from Mulanje which were made up of Yao and Lomwe households have cultural affinities and a shared history which facilitated integration with their Yao hosts in Machinga. Both ethnic groups claim Mozambique as their ancestral home. They are matrilineal and practice uxori-local marriages, and many have common clan names. They also have similar initiation rites for girls and boys. Given these cultural similarities the most important source of potential conflict is the land. However, at the time of the immigrants' arrival TA Chiwalo's area was not experiencing land shortage, and land requests from newly formed households could be accommodated within the land available to the lineages.

Conclusion

The difficult relationship that developed between the Kalungu Trust and their hosts highlights the problems that can emerge when two culturally and socially distinct groups are compelled to share geographical space, and where the resident population feels excluded from benefits enjoyed by the in-coming group. Resettlement of groups, whether sponsored or spontaneous, carries with it a potential for conflict with the resident population arising from among other things competition for resources, status, power and dominance. The Kalungu Trust was a beneficiary of government financial support from which the host community was excluded and land which the hosts believed properly belonged to them. Its quest for recognition as a separate community with its own leader outside the existing authority structure exacerbated the resentment generated by their acquisition of land and their occupation of contested land. The host community's resentment of the immigrants manifested itself in anti-immigrant behavior tacitly supported by the village leadership.

References

- Chambers R., 1969 *Settlement Schemes in Tropical Africa*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London
- Chimhowu A, and Hulme, D, 2006. Livelihood dynamics in planned and spontaneous resettlement in Zimbabwe: converging and vulnerable. *World Development* 34(4): 728 – 750.
- CLC Consultants, 1998. Financial and economic returns to land. Report submitted to the Presidential Commission on Land Policy Reform.
- Cleaver, K. and Schreiber, G. 1994. Reversing the Spiral: the Population, Agriculture and Environment Nexus in Sub – Saharan African. World Bank: Washington, DC.
- Harrison, P. 1983. *The Third World Tomorrow: A Report from the Battlefield in the war Against Poverty* Pelican: London.
- Moyo, S. 2000. The political economy of land acquisition and redistribution in Zimbabwe 1990- 1999. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26 (1): 5 – 28.
- Murombedzi J. 1999. Devolution and stewardship in Zimbabwe's campfire programme. *Journal of International Development* 11: 287 – 293
- National Statistical Office. 1998. *Integrated Household Survey 1997/98*. Lilongwe, Malawi
- Ng'ong'ola D. 2006. Socioeconomic evaluation of the Community Based Rural Development Project in Malawi: case studies of beneficiary groups in Machinga, Mangochi, Mulanje and Thyolo districts. Report to Management Unit of the CBRLDP, Ministry of Lands, Housing, Physical Planning and Surveys: Lilongwe, Malawi
- People's Land Organization (PLO), 2014. *Declaration of intifada by the People's Land Organization on the Land question in Thyolo*. Statement to the public
- Republic of Malawi and World Bank 2007. *Malawi Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Full Report*. World Bank: Washington, DC.
- Turner, M and Hulme, D. 1990. *Sociology and Development*. Harvester Wheatsheaf
- World Bank, 2012. *Malawi – Community Based Rural Land Development Project*. The World Bank: Washington, DC