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Economics of Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa by Seth
La-Anyane

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efforts of the régime to radically transform production in the countryside. With all resources pouring into state farms, which failed, the basic needs of peasant producers were ignored, and destabilisation by the Rhodesians, and later by the South Africans, was able to breed upon this rural neglect. However, although Frelimo realised its mistakes and announced sensible measures designed to provide consumer goods as incentives for the peasants to produce more for the market, the extent of the warfare ranging throughout the countryside impeded the implementation of this programme. In addition, there seems little doubt that Frelimo forced changes at too fast a pace with regard to the traditional authorities, which means that these could also become the subject of manipulation for destabilisation.

The Mozambique experience after the end of the guerrilla war leads us to rethink some of the received wisdom about how that victory occurred and what it meant. If, indeed, Frelimo was so successful in mobilising and involving the peasantry so completely during the armed struggle itself, why then was it so easy to ride roughshod over the peasants after independence, with a philosophy of socialist modernisation that paid scant regard to their continuing needs? In part this was because the political leadership sincerely believed that the new systems and structures of production would deliver the goods. But why did they not hearken to those who could have told them otherwise? Perhaps their voices were not as clearly articulated as they had been amongst the peasantry of Zimbabwe because of the type of political economy developed under Portuguese colonialism. Obtaining the balance between leading and listening is never an easy task, but surely these must go together?

Decisions are made in the cities, however, far away from the sites of guerrilla warfare and peasant concerns – perhaps that is part of the explanation. In addition, the modernisation ideas of the socialist tradition – namely, heavy industry and collectivised agriculture – are not particularly appropriate for current African circumstances. But there are other, albeit less dominant strands of thinking within that same tradition which can be applied, albeit always with the rider that strong emphasis be upon adaption to local conditions. Perhaps the new era of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union will facilitate this process, as market socialism opens up the levers of power a little bit more to the producers and consumers.

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Economics of Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa by SETH LA-ANYANE

Chichester, John Wiley, 1985. Pp. xv + 153. £15.00. \$37.00.

Farm Labour by KEN SWINDELL

Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. vii + 201. £17.50. £7.95 paperback.

That much of Africa is undergoing a crisis in food production has become almost standard knowledge in recent years. That this is a crisis of long-term

consequences, not only the result of recent climatic problems on the continent, is gradually coming to be understood. Food production *per capita* is in decline; food imports are increasing and eating up a great deal of scarce foreign exchange; food prices are rising; migration has removed many of the most able workers from the rural areas; governments have for long ignored food farmers by following policies that only encouraged the production of export crops, while pandering to the pressures of urban dwellers. Research has uncovered more and more factors that help to explain the magnitude and implications of the continent's agricultural problems, and although the authors considered in this review look at these from two quite different perspectives, their comments appear to be superficially similar. Seth La-Anyane, an economist, presents a pot-pourri of constraints and solutions, while Ken Swindell, a sociologist, examines one major factor in detail. Both publications will find their primary use as university texts.

Economics of Agricultural Development in Tropical Africa attempts to portray the lessons gained by La-Anyane during more than 30 years experience in this field as a Ghanaian civil servant, university professor, and officer in the F.A.O. The result is a frustrating book because too much of the limited space is wasted in extended summaries and repetition of arguments, some of which are contradictory. A major problem lies in the author's inability to decide what *is* the key problem in African agriculture. At various points we are told that 'Poverty is indeed the basic reason behind the risky food situation' (p. 37); 'Land tenure arrangements...have exerted the greatest influence' (p. 44); 'The provision of electrical power [is]...one of the surest ways of insuring the rapid transformation of [agriculture]' (p. 71); 'Farm prices and incomes policy have been at the root of...the agricultural development problem' (p. 84); 'The prime requirement in the modernization of the African economies is the provision of adequate domestic capital and investment at the national level' (p. 38); 'Efficient management and administration are the key factors' (p. 28).

After carefully examining these and other 'basic', 'key', and 'root' causes of agricultural underdevelopment, I gathered that farmer productivity was really the main problem, for this variable appears most frequently in the prescriptions presented. We are variously told that nutrition, education, management skills, quality of workforce, and that 'in the final analysis, agricultural progress in tropical Africa will ultimately depend on the increase in the productivity of the peasant farmers' (p. 140). However, having arrived at this conclusion, I was disappointed to read that although 'Most of the issues of African development and the processes for resolving them are well-known...the lack of political will and the indifference of the civil service in the implementation of proposals for development have been responsible for the slow growth of many of the African economies' (p. 149). So, it seems that we must seek the real solution in political science, not economics!

Readers are likely to be confused by several other features of this book, including its treatment of Africa's population problem (is there one or not?), and the old debate about whether agriculture or industry is the prime mover of economic development, despite a good summary of the arguments. After clearly stating that interdependence between the two is such that 'neither sector can develop successfully without the effective growth of the other' (p.

17), the author later tells us that 'agriculture is recognized as the main base for take-off to economic development' (p. 94), and that 'Revolutionary changes in agricultural productivity are a prerequisite of successful economic take-off and national development' (p. 132). But, we also read that 'the process of economic development and modernization of agriculture is a function of industrial development' (p. 61).

La-Anyane maintains that western models and experiences are frequently ill-fitted to the African situation, that development attempts should be based more on local realities, and that his book 'concentrates on the contributions by the peasant small-scale farmers to economic development and on the indigenous institutions that need to be recognized and strengthened' (p. xi). Unfortunately, although he does successfully show some of the shortcomings of many of the imported western ideas about African agriculture, for the most part his analysis and prescriptions are derived directly from that body of thought.

Farm Labour is in this respect much more successful, because Swindell accepts that we must understand what is African about African agriculture, and work from that knowledge for development. To that end, he provides an in-depth analysis of farm labour and its benefits and detriments for African agriculture. Pre-colonial practices, the effect of new crops, labour co-operation, and wage systems in the market economy are among the topics examined. The position of women and the results of the failure of planners to understand African labour are themes of significance.

Swindell provides a valuable summary of the existing studies in this rather specialised field, through a description of various labour systems in Africa today, as well as by a discussion of the various changes that have resulted from intensive contact with Europe and, in more recent years, from the demands of national governments. His examples of how the inability of planners to understand African labour practices has led to the failure of their proposed development projects, exemplify the importance of this type of research.

Obviously, farm labour is not the only variable that must be studied thoroughly, but Swindell's book is a model of the type of intensive examination that is needed if we are really to comprehend how African agriculture operates. Real progress in development in the continent must be based on programmes that derive from an understanding of indigenous – not American or European – agricultural systems.

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