

# Nyerere's rural development policies

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Critics of Julius Nyerere often say that he was a political visionary but not much of an economist. But I would argue, based on the Makaazi Mapya (Village Settlement) programme of the early 1960s, that Nyerere's economic vision was in many respects sound but that his political vision let him down.

The 16 self-governing villages that formed the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA) are seen as the laboratory for Nyerere's vision of self-reliant co-operative farming, or Ujamaa. Certainly the RDAs' achievements in the early years had a major influence on the Ujamaa policy. However, another Government-sponsored programme, the Makaazi Mapya, also played an important part in the evolution of Nyerere's thinking.

In 1962 six new village settlement schemes were set up with the aim of transforming agriculture by moving farmers away from their home areas and introducing them to productive farming techniques. Most of these settlement schemes achieved very little because the premise on which they were based was flawed. Mechanising smallholder agriculture where capital and technical skills are in short supply but skilled labour is abundant rarely makes sense. One case, however, ran counter to this trend.

Upper Kitete Village Settlement was established in 1963 on 6,500 acres of fertile soil in Mbulu District, 100 miles west of Arusha. The new government felt that the agricultural potential of the area should be more productively exploited. They designated Upper Kitete as the first of the new village settlement schemes.

One hundred landless families from Central and South Mbulu were selected in 1963 and 1964 and were allocated plots at Upper Kitete. Wheat and extensive livestock rearing were the appropriate economic enterprises for the area. The bulk of the land was managed as a single unit. Each farmer received a share in the enterprise, plus a homestead plot of three acres on which to build a house and grow food for home consumption. The members of the cooperative would receive a share of the proceeds from the collective enterprise based on the work inputs that each contributed.

The system paid rapid dividends. Within three months 600 acres had been cleared and brought under the plough. A year later the acreage had been doubled, herds of cattle and sheep established, a school, hospital, community centre, and 100 houses built, water supply

installed, and access roads improved. All this was the result of a collective effort by 100 households with minimum external assistance. Farmers earned incomes larger than they had known before, and started to reinvest surpluses in future production. They realised that they could not have achieved anything like this as individuals: a strong sense of community cohesion and self-determination was being built up.

Nyerere visited Upper Kitete frequently during this period – four times between 1963 and 1966. He was clearly excited by what he saw: a practical demonstration of how motivated farmers with good leadership and targeted support could make rapid economic advances through collective effort while maintaining egalitarian distribution of income. So long as the political environment and the frontier situation that created Kitete persisted, Kitete continued to thrive.

The demise of the Ujamaa programme, whether in heavily capitalised villages like Upper Kitete or in self-financed initiatives like the RDA, began in 1969 when the political bureaucracy of the ruling party, TANU, became frightened that organised village communities would become too powerful and would challenge external control. A reluctant Nyerere was convinced that a more coercive approach was essential, but this distorted the concept of voluntary membership on which the original programme had been based.

So, in 1970, Operation Vijiji was launched, with all peasants forced to move to villages by the end of the year. This undermined the voluntary and autonomous nature of the farmers' initiative: at Kitete an extra 500 families were imposed on the original 100 just as they were coming to enjoy the fruits of their early labour. Then the RDA was abolished by political decree. It gave the economic rationale that underpinned the programme no chance to evolve and take root. I would argue that Nyerere's inability to control the antidemocratic demands of the political elite in the late 1960s was his greatest failure, more than any perceived flaws in his economic strategy.

The award this month of the Nobel Prize for Economics to Professor Elinor Ostrom, one of the greatest proponents of collective management of common property, shows that there are strong arguments for community protection and management of community resources. This underlies the economic foundation for rural development that Nyerere laid, and upon which Tanzanians are still struggling to build. **F**