

“In Business there is no Win-Win”

The Local Effects of a Sugar Cane Outgrower Scheme in Magobbo,
Southern Zambia

Master Thesis



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Abstract

Im Kontext der *land grab* Debatte schlagen Konzerne und internationale Organisationen die Inklusion von Kleinbauern in transnationale Wertschöpfungsketten durch Vertragslandwirtschaft als Alternative zu grossflächigem Landerwerb vor. Auf dieser Basis evaluiert diese anthropologische Fallstudie Veränderungen der sozialen, ökonomischen und politischen Verhältnisse durch die Schaffung eines von der Europäischen Union finanzierten Vertragsanbauprojekts in Magobbo, einem Dorf im Distrikt Mazabuka der südlichen Provinz Sambias. Zur Analyse dient der theoretische Ansatz der neu-institutionalistischen politischen Ökologie. (Haller 2019a) Die Resultate zeigen, dass simple Paradigmen von Gewinnen und Verlieren, basierend auf neoliberaler Evaluation, nicht ausreichen, um die komplexen Auswirkungen von Vertragslandwirtschaft auf den lokalen Kontext zu erfassen.

In the context of the land grab debate, corporations and international organizations propose the inclusion of smallholder farmers in transnational value chains through contract farming as an alternative to large-scale land acquisition. On this basis, this anthropological case study evaluates alterations in social, economic and power conjuncture invoked by the establishment of a sugar cane outgrower scheme funded by the European Union in Magobbo, a village in the Mazabuka District of Southern Province, Zambia. The theoretical approach of new institutionalist political ecology (Haller 2019a) serves for analysis. The findings elucidate that simple win-lose paradigms based on neoliberal evaluation do not suffice to grasp the complex implications in the local context induced by contract farming ventures.

Title: Quote by Simon Mutinta, 14.04.2021 (see page 86).

Cover Illustration: Magobbo project sign on the main road, Magobbo Central. DL, 14.04.2021.

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List of Abbreviations

ABF	Associated British Foods
ACP	African, Caribbean, Pacific
AMSP	Accompanying Measures for Sugar Protocol
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
IMS	International Monetary Fund
MCGT	Magobbo Cane Growers Trust
MSCGT	Mazabuka Sugar Cane Growers Trust

Initials

DL	David Lüthi
NM	Nchimunya Mwiinga
BC	Beli Chiwaya
DB	Danny Banda
MB	Mutinta Bbuku

1 Introduction

Due to food security and clean energy concerns in ‘developed’ and ‘transitioning’ countries, large-scale land acquisitions in Asia, Latin America and especially Africa have increased drastically in recent decades. These land deals possibly hold dramatic consequences for inhabitants: Because of insecure land rights in ‘developing’ countries around the world, large-scale land acquisitions potentially endanger the livelihoods of rural populations, who risk expulsion from land which they have been farming for generations, the restriction of access to crucial common-pool resources and the erosion of labor opportunities essential for sustenance. These issues are under investigation by critical authors who call attention to the problematic practice of large-scale land acquisition and designate it ‘land grabbing’. (Borras and Franco 2013; Hall et al. 2015; Haller 2019b; Haller et al. 2019) Companies and international organizations promote the inclusion of smallholders in corporate business chains through contract farming – or synonymously outgrower schemes – as an alternative which might mitigate negative effects, possibly constituting win-win situations. Nonetheless, critical literature questions the assertion that contract farming necessarily entails more beneficial outcomes for local populations. (Adams et al. 2018; German and Parker 2019; Li 2011; Oya 2012; Rocca 2016; Von Maltitz et al. 2018)

In the focus of this case study lies a sugar cane contract farming venture in the village of Magobbo, located in the Mazabuka District of Zambia’s Southern Province. The outgrower scheme was set up in conjunction with with Zambia Sugar (Plc.), and partly funded by the European Union (EU). The company is Zambia’s major sugar producer and a subsidiary of Illovo Sugar Africa (Pty. Ltd.), which is Africa’s largest sugar manufacturer and owned by Associated British Foods (Plc.), one of the ten largest food companies in the world. The corporation farms sugar cane on the smallholder’s land, sharing the profits. The scheme’s first crop was planted in the second half of the year 2010. The farming process is currently managed by Nanga Farms (Plc.), a subsidiary of Zambia Sugar, although a transition of production to the farmers was promised and is long overdue.

A substantial number of authors have concerned themselves with the implications of the Magobbo outgrower scheme in the local context and have come to partly contradicting results.

The applied research methods are based either on quantitative tools or mixed approaches, but no investigation was conducted with a focus concentrated mainly on qualitative data collection. (Bubala et al. 2018; German and Parker 2019; Kalinda 2014a; 2014b; Manda et al. 2018; 2020; Matenga 2017; 2020; Rocca 2014; 2016; Schüpbach 2014) Against this background, using participant observation and qualitative interviews, I seek to add an ethnographical account from the perspective of economic anthropology. This viewpoint may complement the existing literature on the Magobbo project by approximating an emic outlook on the changes in local conjuncture. In order to deepen the insight on implications produced by contract farming ventures, this case study explores possible answers to the question: How does the establishment of the Magobbo outgrower scheme impact socioeconomic relations and power constellations in the local community?

In this thesis, I provide further evidence for the argument that the analysis of processes induced by the inclusion of smallholder farmers into global value chains through contract farming must evolve from short-sighted win-lose paradigms to a more nuanced evaluation of mechanisms prompted by such endeavors. The thesis commences by outlining the theoretical context with an overview on land grabbing, situates common-pool resources in the debate and goes on to discuss narratives on contract farming and how Ferguson's (1994) *anti-politics machine* works to de-politicize development projects. To complete the presentation of the theoretical approach I suggest the application of a combination of neo-Marxist scrutiny on class conjunction with new institutionalist economics to inspect alterations occurring in the socioeconomic framework with regard to the changed circumstances for various class actors as means to achieve a sophisticated interpretation of local ramifications. In order to provide a profound contextualization, I start by shortly touching upon the global sugar industry and Zambia's history with investment. Then, I outline the historical background of the Mazabuka region and its people. The thesis continues by embedding the history and current practices of Zambia Sugar, introducing the Magobbo outgrower scheme and discussing the relatively large body of academic work previously conducted on the project. After laying out the contextual frame, I present the methodological approach and implementation of the project and proceed to the results.

The case study reveals effects on the local community which the corporation governing the outgrower scheme would presumably prefer to remain undisclosed: The increased income

enabled by the project is concentrated in the hands of a powerful class of landholders. Even though others could profit by the potentially generated cash circulation in the local economy, a decline in returns in recent years stifles benefits to reach farther into the community. The greatest achievement of the scheme is enhanced control over water flows, heightening resilience in times of progressively erratic rainfall due to climate change. However, the local economy's ensuing monetization, price escalations, emerging population growth and pressure on land expose the lower socioeconomic strata to new constraints, possibly threatening to force them out of the community in the medium to long term. I argue that women in particular are adversely affected by an emerging erosion of opportunities due to restricted access to capital.

Moreover, the top-down institutional framework meant to guide the scheme could be designated a systematic failure as the scheme's establishment severely impacted local institutions: There is unanimous agreement that the sugar cane project induced ever-lasting internal conflicts, both within households and between them. Especially devastating for the community seem to be the ongoing struggles regarding its leadership because the friction significantly decreases the collective bargaining power towards external actors. Hence, the process of transition of control over production from Nanga Farms to the Magobbo farmers which could increase the community's cash flows from sugar cane due to elimination of management costs appears to have come to a halt. Despite ambiguous outcomes for the community, symbolic value generation in the local cultural fabric remains strongly aligned with hegemonic development and modernization narratives.

2 Theory

2.1 The Land Grab Debate

In recent decades, international interest in land investment has risen steeply, particularly in Africa. A multiplicity of actors – ranging from governments and state companies to private corporations and funds – are in search of land available for investment. (Baglioni and Gibbon 2013) During the period of 2008-2009 land investment spiked globally due to nutrition insecurities in food importing countries, search for safe investment opportunities by large institutional investors and the growth of the agrofuel industry. Of the total 56 million hectares bought during the period, approximately two thirds were located in Africa. (Li 2014b, 592) Yet the continuing trend ignited a widespread debate on how to make sense of the global land rush and its implications. (Fairbairn et al. 2014)

International organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank promote foreign direct investment in developing countries' agricultural sectors. According to a 2009 FAO policy brief, “the agricultural sector in developing countries is in urgent need of capital.” Further, “decades of low investment have meant stagnating productivity and production levels.” (FAO 2009) Conclusively, a neoliberal axiom is formulated: Developing countries need development in order to reduce poverty and hunger, while development is solely achievable through allocation of investment capital. Hence, filling this “capital gap” is assumed to be imperative:

“The question is not *whether* international investments should provide a supplement to other capital inflows, but *how* their impact can be optimized.” (FAO 2009)

Whether large-scale investment is the proper pathway to inclusive development is out of question as it is the only alternative for prosperity. However, it does not surprise that from a neoliberal perspective, capital flowing into rural communities dominated by subsistence farming and the subsequent incorporation of small-scale farmers into larger markets is labelled positively. As the economic output of a region grows, the created wealth is supposed to ‘trickle down’ and everybody should profit. Nevertheless, even the FAO (2009) acknowledges that land

deals possibly hold negative consequences for local populations with insufficient land rights and proclaims that “better systems to recognize land rights are urgently needed”.¹

Concerning land rights, Nnoko-Mewanu (2016) points out that more than the property regimes regulating land ownership, it is the effective practical abilities of local populations to derive resources from the land which are essential for inclusiveness. Further, Peluso and Lund (2011, 669) assert that “there is no one grand land grab,” but rather “a series of changing contexts, emergent processes and forces, and contestations that are producing new conditions and facilitating shifts in both *de jure* and *de facto* land control.” The authors suggest favoring the term “land control” over land grabbing as it may bring attention to the political processes and institutional framework enabling power over access and restrictions.

In Marxist theory, land control plays a central role as Marx (1872, 659ff.) designates processes of land alienation and differentiation among subsistence farmers as “primitive accumulation”, arguing that they serve as the initial point of the emergence of capitalist relations by creating a proletariat in need of wage labor. Claude Meillassoux (1981) further argues that the capitalist world order depends on the domestic community (meaning subsistence farmers) as compounds of labor reserves, which are mobilized depending on temporal economic conjuncture. Through various processes, the access to paid labor becomes necessary for subsistence farmers who in turn are integrated into the capitalist system. Similarly, gendered division of labor accounts for non-monetized reproduction labor as well as work reserves consisting of potential female workers. Meillassoux (1981) holds that the exploitation of the domestic community’s production capacity is crucial for the sustainability of the capitalist system, because these processes make it possible to outsource the reproduction of the labor force.

Regarding the aspect of labor in the land grab debate, Li (2011) argues that the poverty reduction envisioned by the World Bank is unlikely to be achieved through large-scale land deals because commercial farms rely on cheap labor to maximize profits and most cash crops produce relatively few jobs. Conversely, if plantation managers would create an abundance of jobs and pay fair wages, their operations would cease to be profitable. As the World Bank anticipates a commercialization and subsequent increase in productivity in developing countries’ agriculture whereby labor requirements in these sectors will decrease, it envisages a

¹ For a more nuanced evaluation of transnational investment from an economics standpoint see Dunning (2001).

transition of the rural workforce into industry and service sectors, although this perception has proven problematic in the past. (Escobar 1995, 157f.) In this regard, Li (2011) questions whether the absorptive capacity of other economy sectors will suffice to enable a smooth passage into other sectors and underscores the potential risk of leaving rural masses without possibilities for both employment and subsistence farming. The author further argues that if the World Bank is serious in its proclaimed goal of reducing poverty, it should promote not only smallholder incorporation but also the segmentation of existing large-scale farms into smallholdings. (Li 2011, 285) Adding a historical perspective, Potts (2012, 40) reminds that the local peasantry throughout Southern Africa demonstrated “again and again” its capability of competing against large-scale farming *within* the fabric of capitalist evaluation, refuting neoliberal arguments on underutilization and the need for economies of scale to increase productivity.

Li (2014b) explains on the very materiality of land that while it does not have intrinsic value, such is generated in its social dimensions, whereas its commodification for investment is only attainable through persuasive efforts within a particular cultural framework. Ever since John Locke, within a (neo)liberal frame, the underutilization and unproductiveness of land legitimizes its privatization if it can in turn be rendered productive. (Li 2014b, 592) Li further suggests that international organizations like the World Bank and the FAO undertake ventures of creating spaces and legitimation for land investment in creative ways through employing statistics, mapping and other techniques which establish a particular perspective on land – the gaze of investment capital. However, it must be noted that land grabs are not necessarily transnational endeavors by multinational corporations; national companies as well as local elites are equally able to grab land. (Hall et al. 2015)

2.2 Situating the Commons

In *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), Hardin argues that resources held in common property inevitably become overexploited. He bases this assertion on a thought experiment in which he imagines a pasture, openly accessible to any number of cattle herders. In an attempt to maximize utility, each herder will raise as many animals as possible, in spite of overgrazing and the consequent deterioration of the soil, because the profit is individualized while the cost is shared among all herders. This process unavoidably leads to overuse and the degradation of the pasture,

according to Hardin (1986). The author concludes that privatization of the commons leads to more sustainable resource use.

Refuting Hardin’s (1968) line of argumentation, Ostrom (1990) shows that common property regimes do in many instances provide a robust institutional framework allowing for sustainable resource management. She presents a variety of case studies in which the commons are governed by rules and regulations, prohibiting the overuse of resources. Thereby Ostrom implies that Hardin’s (1968) point solely applies to open access constellations in which no institution effectively prevails, rendering the unrestricted use of the resource by an unrestrained number of actors possible. Nevertheless, Hardin’s argument is still persistently utilized by neoliberal forces to claim that the commons are unsustainable and push for the privatization of resources – especially land – governed by common property regimes. (Acheson 2019)

Goodfellow and Owen (2018, 8f) identify three phases of the history of property rights in Lagos, which are similarly observed in other contexts by Haller et al. (2019), among others: *First*, in precolonial times, land was held in common property insofar as usage rights were bestowed upon the person who farmed the land and when the user ceased to farm the land, its ownership would be vacant again. *Second*, colonial laws introduced the categorizations of private and state property. As neither these western notions of property rights were able to fully capture the complexity of African property regimes, nor was the colonial state in a position in which it could fully enforce its laws, multiple institutional settings prevailed simultaneously. This institutional plurality continued throughout the *third* phase during which the state gained independence from the colonizer and colonial land became state land. (Goodfellow and Owen 2018) In relation to this point, Haller et al. (2019) explain that the multiplicity of institutions instigates an institution shopping process, whereby actors are able to choose between different sets of rules, leaving the powerful more room to assert their agenda. (See also: Haller 2020)

Furthermore, Haller et al. (2019) situate the commons in the land grab debate by arguing that large-scale land acquisition potentially leads to “commons grabbing”. Land deals – especially regarding state owned land – pose the potential risk of restricting the access to common-pool resources for marginal groups dependent on the usage of such resources. Large-scale foreign investment in land carries the risk of reducing the availability of resources for local populations when customary common property regimes prevail on state land prior to enclosure and the land is not as under- or unused as hegemonic investment discourses would suggest. Particularly in

times of crisis, the commons are highly important to ensure livelihoods in rural contexts. The privatization of land rights through the issuing of titles in spaces formerly managed through common property regimes potentially leads to the concentration of usage and/or distribution privileges in the hands of powerful local elites and the loss of customary access rights for weaker actors. The exclusion from access to the commons or their erosion affects women and marginalized groups the most because their livelihoods often depend on these resources. (Gerber and Haller 2020) Changes in the institutional framework governing land rights may render the use of common-pool resources impossible or make the commons disappear altogether, which potentially endangers the sustenance of vulnerable community members as they lose their resilience strategies for shocks and crises. (Haller 2019b; Haller et al. 2019) Not to mention, not only land but also other resources, especially water, can be subject to grabbing processes undermining local resilience.

2.3 Contract Farming – An Alternative?

International organizations such as the FAO and the World Bank acknowledge the conceivably problematic outcomes of large-scale land acquisition and propose contract farming as a viable alternative, potentially constituting ‘win-win’ situations. (See: FAO 2009) Companies are understood to maximize profits while simultaneously increasing the economic activity in the affected area and various advantages are proclaimed to benefit the local population. (Deininger 2011; FAO 2009; Hallam 2009; Schüpbach 2014; World Bank 2007) The 2008 World Bank Development Report (World Bank 2007, 241) states for instance: “Producer organizations and contract farming are essential for [...] smallholders to take part in value chains and cater to supermarket demands”. The statement implies that inclusion in a more industrialized economy is obviously beneficial for smallholder farmers, replicating the neoliberal axiom labelling investment as necessary for a prosperous agricultural sector. Interestingly, the FAO (2009) and the World Bank (2007) seriously discuss the criticisms on large-scale land acquisitions but fail to similarly reflect on land control grabs occurring through the contractual binding of smallholders. Contract farming is suggested as a path to achieve the conjunction of capital and agricultural potential, creating an alternative ‘win-win’ scenario for both companies and farmers and avoiding the negative consequences of land grabbing. A critical evaluation of coercive and possibly harmful contract farming arrangements appears to be missing from this literature. (FAO 2009; Hallam 2009; World Bank 2007)

According to Baglioni and Gibbon (2013, 1575) the promotion of contract farming mainly arises in response to accounts criticizing land grabs as “currently support for contract farming can be read as a new substitute and surrogate for more radical opposition to large-scale/plantation farming. By linking small-scale farming (under non-specified conditions) to supposedly dynamic and affluent markets, by forging new and lucrative commodity chains and by widening access to more advanced technologies, contract farming can provide plantation farming and large-scale farming with a human face and recast a small-scale farming model of development without resorting to politically difficult land distribution.”

Hence, the question arises: What is contract farming? In substance, contract farming ventures are endeavors of vertical coordination, through which corporations aim to extend their control over certain aspects of production by contracting smallholder farmers. The term outgrower scheme is used synonymously to contract farming in this thesis. Because the contractual arrangements may differ widely from loose contracts to quasi-integration, it is hardly possible for researchers to maintain generally applicable arguments or even to present a clear-cut definition of what exactly constitutes contract farming in general. (Bellemare and Bloem 2018; Dubb 2018; Oya 2012; Rehber 2007) Hence, Bellemare and Bloem (2018) are not able to reach a conclusion on their central question “*Does contract farming improve welfare?*” as the varieties in contract farming are too manifold.

However, Adams et al. (2018) among others² analyze the serious impacts on the institutions and socioeconomic relations of local communities such land deals potentially hold. Drawing on their case study on a sugar cane outgrower scheme in Malawi (involving Illovo, the company owning Zambia Sugar), Adams et al. (2018) demonstrate that while some actors in the local context achieve gains, others suffer exclusion and economic loss. Even if smallholders are spared of dispossession, differentiation within the local context may nevertheless lead to powerless actors being squeezed out and losing access to land. (Hall et al. 2015) Subsequently, the ones disadvantaged by changing power constellations tend to be the poor and vulnerable of the community. Thus, Adams et al. (2018) hold that merely identifying the establishment of outgrower schemes as ‘win-win’ situations is at best an oversimplification.

² See: German and Parker 2018; Hall et al. 2017; Li 2011; Manda et al. 2018; Matenga 2017; Rocca 2014; Von Maltitz et al. 2018.

Adams et al. (2018) suggest in their analysis of contract farming that it may irreversibly change the way of production. Because of altered regimes of distribution, the institutions regulating social relations undergo significant changes. Enabled by their strong bargaining position, multinational businesses hold the power to pressure farmers into contracts. Even in cases where local actors are seriously included in negotiations, only the most influential people in the local context will receive a place at the table, potentially resulting in uneven resource distribution and the exclusion and marginalization of certain groups which are not able to have their interests represented in this initial power struggle. The outcome may be that land is redistributed, concentrating control in the hands of a few; in such instances the majority of the population is excluded from the deal and the disadvantaged might be left with less livelihood options than before. Moreover, in the case of the smallholders participating in the scheme, risks can be strategically transferred from the business to the farmers, endangering their sustenance when certain events leading to lower returns or higher expenses occur. (Adams et al. 2018) Certain contingencies may result in pressure on poorer farmers and cause an urgency to sell land, ultimately eroding their basis for subsistence. Such processes of dispossession are further accelerated by commons grabbing, as outlined above (2.2). (Gerber and Haller 2020; Haller 2019b; Haller et al. 2019; Haller 2020) Hence, Adams et al. (2018, 14) argue that contract farming “leads to land redistribution among farmers with few winners and many losers”. In regard to gender relations, contract farming can present both constraints and opportunities, especially in the distribution of land property and the gendered division of paid and unpaid labor, though women are prone to be adversely affected. (Adams et al. 2019; Rocca 2014; 2016; Von Maltitz et al. 2018) These results bring Adams et al. (2018, 17) to the conclusion that “contract farming is neither ‘negative’ nor ‘positive’, nor is it better than outright [large-scale land acquisition]”. They further suggest that one could therefore classify contract farming practices as ‘land grabbing’ just as well (Adams et al. 2018, 2).

Focusing on the aspect of labor, Li (2011, 288) argues that if contract arrangements are dictated by private companies, beneficial outcomes for the local population are unlikely, because “profit still depends on cheap, abundant, disciplined labor”. She suggests that smallholders prospering under an outgrower scheme will hurt the company’s profits since labor becomes scarce and expensive. Conversely, if local people languish, low-cost labor is abundant. Therefore, as the

dominant aim of capital is to maximize profit, outgrower schemes negotiated without state intervention are improbable to increase local welfare, according to Li (2011).

In connection to land issues, food security obtains a crucial position concerning resource management. Economists' studies have found that contract farming possibly helps to decrease food insecurity. (Bellemere and Novak 2017; Soullier and Moustier 2018) However, these surveys include only farmers participating in contract farming ventures and do not encompass local communities in their totality. The exclusionary processes invoked by contract farming ventures and commons grabbing in particular may induce nutrition issues in disadvantaged social strata. (Gerber and Haller 2020)

2.4 Anti-Politics

Post-modernity theorists since the 1980s have criticized modernization and development ideologies for hiding processes that tend to build economic dependencies, whereby the existing power structures are constantly reinforced. (Escobar 1995; Ziai 2012) Ferguson (1994) conceptualizes with *The Anti-Politics Machine* the failures of development agendas and their unintended consequences in combination with the de-politicization processes that present development projects as neutral undertakings without any underlying political significance, hiding asymmetrical power-relations.

Büscher (2010) defines politics as social processes of decision making containing social or public outcomes. Subsequently, anti-politics aim to undermine these social decision-making processes by instead establishing merely ‘technical’ solutions, while disguising the political implications of the endeavor. Hence, Büscher (2010, 35) argues that anti-politics work particularly well in accord with neoliberal ideology since the latter inherently strives to subject everything to commodification, rendering all things quantifiable and exchangeable. The neoliberal rationale views market principles as the central organizing mechanisms for decision making. Commodification as an ordering principle plays a central role: Things, processes, relations may all be abstracted to commodities with exchangeable values. These abstractions are particularly useful as anti-politics strategy because they manage to hide inherently political processes such as, for example, the erosion of social institutions, by shifting the focus to a technocratic view in which all processes are interpreted as being quantifiable. In other words,

neoliberal quantification is a well-suited tool to discursively transform politically debatable issues into technically solvable ones. (Büscher 2010)

Whereas the initial version of the anti-politics machine as formulated by Ferguson (1994) is focused on development projects, the concept works well in analysis of corporations concealing possibly problematic practices through ambiguous narratives of development and social responsibility, as Gerber and Haller (2020) illuminate: With reference to Hardin’s (1968) theatrical title *The Tragedy of the Commons*, the authors propose that *The drama of the grabbed commons* is currently still unfolding its plot – as opposed to an already completed tragedy. The authors argue that the powerful development narrative promising prosperity for rural populations through integration in global capitalist markets hides processes potentially induced by large-scale land acquisitions of eroding common-pool resources in the local context, potentially benefitting local elites while leaving more vulnerable community members worse off. In order to analyze how the framing of (under)development as a technical problem depoliticizes and hides commons grabbing practices, Gerber and Haller (2020) employ Ferguson’s (1994) concept of *The Anti-Politics Machine*: According to the authors, although “new commons” are created by way of corporate social responsibility measures, they merely serve as anti-politics and are not sufficient to replace and substitute for the “old commons”. As a result, the powerless are deprived of important resources through the dismantlement of the common-pool resources while investors and powerful local actors may profit. (Gerber and Haller 2020)

2.5 Local Reactions – Embrace or Resistance?

Hall et al. (2015) propose that continuous land grabbing around the globe invokes differentiated and complex processes on local, state and international levels. Further, they suggest that local reactions to land deals may differ vastly depending on how the deal is perceived. Changes in land control and inclusion in value chains only rarely spark open resistance within the affected communities. There are instances in which local actors in rural communities may welcome and precipitate their incorporation and subsumption in business structure. (Borras and Franco 2013; Hall et al. 2015) Borras and Franco (2013, 1724) emphasize the heterogeneity of rural actors and the social differentiation within the local context. Local political reactions may differ vastly within the same spatial context depending on whom is concerned, whereas united local resistance towards land deals is only one possible reaction among many. In other words,

because local communities comprise a convergence of heterogeneous actors, reactions to land deals vary according to socioeconomic and political conjuncture and the concrete manifestation of the land deal itself. As Li (2014a) shows, rural communities are capable of heading towards their own enclosure resulting in internal social differentiation. The vision of prosperity for all and the aspiration of becoming ‘full citizens’, including the infrastructure that would entail, such as roads and schools, if the state cannot provide for these needs, may drive villagers to embrace private capital. Consequently, in the cases described by Li (2014a; 2014b) in Indonesia, achieving affluence occurred only to be attainable for a select few while the majority lost out in these processes.

Although classical Marxism does not view the peasantry as a relevant class in the struggle against capitalism and thus not as a crucial subject to scrutinize, (Scott 1977, 269) Gramscian class theory captures the heterogeneity of rural populations by distinguishing between a plurality of different rural classes: The landowners and the rural bourgeoisie stand as the propertied classes, the rural worker and the peasant as the propertyless, while the petty bourgeoisie obtains a position somewhat in between. However, rural class interests often appear interwoven because rural classes frequently overlap, for instance when laborers rely on family farming to secure their subsistence. (Gramsci 1971; Donaldson 2008, 9ff.) The Gramscian notion of hegemony may further rationalize the willingness of rural classes to subordinate themselves into a system enabling their exploitation. Gramsci argues that not only control over tangible means of production are central for the sovereignty of the ruling class, but rather that the symbolic means of production are equally important, as he explains through his concept of hegemony. He views the ideological domination of the oppressed as the reason why the communist revolution predicted by Marx did not materialize. As long as the capitalist mode of production prevails and rewards willing collaborators of all classes, even the ones exploited, social values and status across society remain arranged according to capitalist measures of success, solidifying the very mode of production. Thus, the state protecting the capitalist system does not have to rule by force but merely through ideological domination, whilst coercive measures are only adopted when the former performs insufficiently. (Gramsci 1971; Scott 1977; 1985)

Considering hegemony, Scott (1977, 270) argues that due to the moral economy of the village and the peasantry’s relative seclusion from societal elites it has been harder for ideological

frames to penetrate the peasantry than the proletariat. In villages, he suggests, there is strong localism, keeping political processes, the arbitration of conflicts as well as charity confined internally. Outsiders are excluded from resource use and positions of power, since villagers assume that they have a customary right to subsistence by virtue of the local resources. The peasantry has strong class interests for pre-capitalist communal rights to prevail. Hence, the author points out, the peasantry was frequently at the center of revolutions in the 20th century. (Scott 1977) However, not all peasant resistance takes violent character. In *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) Scott stresses the importance of understanding non-violent resistance as the central component of peasant class struggles. The author illuminates how in a changing environment, peasants find themselves in constant conflict over the management of resources and shows that both internal and external resistance strategies most often do not entail violent outbreaks but more subtle ways of opposition such as foot dragging, boycotts, theft or vicious gossip. Regarding the latter, Scott (1985) contends that under the pressure of change in production due to technological advancement, local institutions are constantly re-negotiated through discourse by verbally framing certain actors in specific ways, in public (on-stage) as well as in private (off-stage). By such means symbolic production of hegemonial value is constantly contested within the community.

Haller (2019a) holds that while political economy/ecology approaches are able to grasp the range of actors and the power relations ingrained within specific socioeconomic constellations, new institutionalism may strengthen the understanding of social conjuncture by analyzing how the ‘rules of the game’ work within a specific context including external factors in its explanation, which according to the author, political economy often lacks. Thus, he proposes to combine the two approaches within one theoretical frame designated new institutional political ecology in commons studies. (Haller 2019a) Even though this thesis merely coincides with the field of commons studies, I contest that the suggested approach may complement the theoretical points outlined so far by adding supplementary insight on factors changing the political economy of the village.

North (1991, 97) describes institutions as “humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction” consisting of “both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights)”. The author explains that institutions are central to systems of exchange as they

decrease transaction costs, which “are a critical determinant of economic performance”. (North 1991, 98) Within small village trade, institutions are unambiguous since “people have an intimate understanding of each other” and therefore transaction costs are low. (North 1991, 99) Ensminger (1992) proposes a model on institutional change which analyzes how institutions alter when relative prices shift due to external and internal factors.

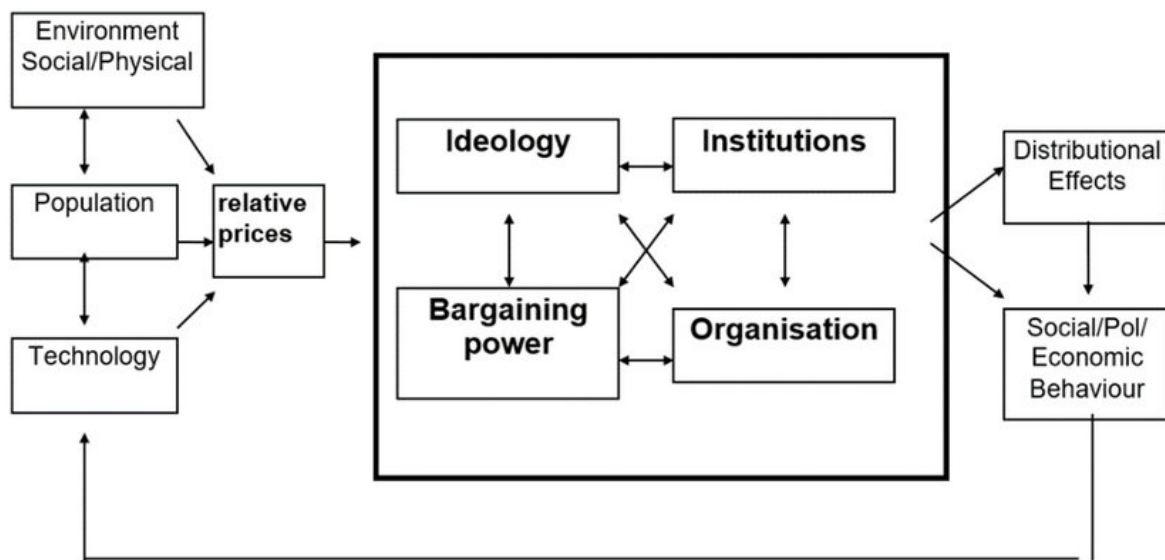


Fig. 1: Modelling institutional change. Source: Ensminger 1992, 10.

External factors may put pressure on resources in the local context, changing relative prices which result in altered bargaining power constellations among local actors. This may render changes in the institutional framework possible, inducing distributional effects and modifying social, political and economic behavior and creating feedback loops susceptible of reinforcing the process. (Ensminger 1992)

Bourdieu’s (1983) theory on capital might be helpful to scrutinize the aspect of bargaining power: The author stresses the importance of other forms of capital than the economic; social and cultural capital are of particular interest here. In short, social capital denotes a person’s ability to draw on resources through the mobilization of social networks, while cultural capital lies in education and ensuing knowledge and is institutionalized by the achievement of academic degrees. The different forms of capital can be transformed into one another.

Regarding ideology in the local context, the analysis of the symbolic domination in the hegemonic value system proposed by Gramsci (1971) and Scott (1977;1985) can be supplemented by De Vries' (2007) elucidation of the *desiring machine* – referring to Ferguson (1994) – which takes into account people's devotion to development in the global south, particularly in rural areas. De Vries (2007) argues that development interventions continually fall short of their proclaimed purposes, whereas the outlooks for progress and material gains inspired by the development narrative generate the *raison d'être* for more projects, which consecutively fail and reinforce and create more unsatisfiable promises, forging a never-ending cycle of expectations. Through its promises and subsequent failure to realize the desires induced by its persuasions, the development machinery produces a virtual gap between imaginaries and reality which in turn serves as legitimation for ever more interventions. It is that very void created by the promise of advancement that reproduces the hegemonic development ideology, according to De Vries (2007).

Theoretically based on Ensminger's model (Fig. 1), Haller's *The Contested Floodplain* (2013) provides insight on how institutions governing the commons may change through external pressures on resources. Drawing on a rich ethnographic case study in Zambia's Southern Province, Haller depicts how various common property regimes became dismantled in the region, creating open access constellations and ultimately eroding livelihoods.

3 Research Context

Zambia Sugar operates mainly in the Mazabuka District of Zambia’s Southern Province, where Magobbo is located. The District’s capital, Mazabuka is dubbed ‘the sweetest town in Zambia’ for the immense sugar production in the surrounding areas. The sugar industry is of central importance for the regional economy. (German and Parker 2019; Matenga 2017)

3.1 Big Sugar

According to a 2013 Oxfam policy brief, (Abdulla 2013) 31 million hectares of land are used for global sugar production, exceeding the total land area of Italy. A bulk majority (26 million hectares) thereof is covered by sugar cane farming. Considering environmental sustainability, cane growing and sugar refining pose a range of issues such as excessive water use, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity and chemical pollution of land and water. (German et al. 2020; Kiezebrink et al. 2015; WWF 2005) Compared to other crops, sugar cane cultivation has relatively low labor requirements, making it prone to land grabs with negative outcomes for local communities. (Li 2011; Richardson 2010)



Fig. 2: Sugar cane rows. Source: Wikimedia³, 03.11.2007.

Approximately 80% of the world’s sugar production stems from sugar cane whereas the remainder is produced from sugar beets. (Kiezebrink et al. 2015) Despite environmental and sugar-induced public health issues, global demand is increasing due to rising interest in sugar cane for biofuel. (Abdulla 2013; Richardson 2010) To add further complication, land grabbing processes pose a systemic problem for socioeconomic sustainability in the sugar cane industry,

³ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sugar_Cane_rows.jpg retrieved 02.07.2021.

especially in Africa. (Abdulla 2013; Kiezebrink et al. 2015) Moreover, Richardson (2010, 917), in an analysis of “Big Sugar” in Southern Africa, argues that the contributions to rural development by the sugar industry are disappointing and “that the potential for greater tax revenue, domestic competition, access to resources and wealth distribution from sugar/ethanol production have all been perverted”.

Zambia Sugar, the company in control of the Magobbo outgrower scheme, is a subsidiary of South African based Illovo, Africa’s largest sugar producer. Illovo, in turn, is owned by British Sugar, which is a subsidiary to Associated British Foods (ABF), one of the top ten food producers and the second largest sugar producer in the world. ABF is the only company among the world’s biggest food producers controlling the whole sugar production chain from cane to refined sugar. (Abdulla 2013) Illovo is per se a significant player in Southern Africa’s ‘Big Sugar’ business: In 2009, Illovo supplied 20 – 30% of total EU sugar imports. (Richardson 2010) However, the importance of the EU as an export market diminished over recent years because of changes in its complex regulatory regime, as will be discussed further below (3.5).

3.2 Zambia

In accord with policy advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, Zambia promotes capital investment in land through the Zambia Development Agency (ZDA). (Chu 2012; Horne 2011) Since the 1970s, ever new rounds of Structural Adjustment Programs induced by the IMF based on a neoliberal agenda led to liberalization of trade and the privatization of whole industries, especially the immensely important and highly profitable copper sector, as well as significant cuts in public spending, producing dramatic consequences for regular Zambians. (Haller 2013; Horne 2011, 9f.) During a particularly investment-friendly period, the Lands Act of 1995 passed, allocating all land under the president’s control, easing restrictions on land trade and permitting the government to hand over land to investors. (Chu 2012) Since then, customary land tenure under the traditional authorities – the chiefdoms – is slowly eroding: Chiefs are free to offer the land to investors whereafter it permanently becomes state land,⁴ whilst protection for local land users is insufficient. (Horne 2011, 11f.) According to Horne (2011), transparency on agricultural investment in Zambia is low and existing state

⁴ Though these processes may entail important implications on land grabbing in Zambia, they will not be investigated in detail because Magobbo has been on state land ever since its founding and thus these legal issues are of secondary significance in the context of thesis.

regulations on land transactions do little in practice to protect small-scale farmers and other land users from possible harmful effects of large-scale agricultural investment. As of May 2021, Zambia has signed 15 bilateral investment treaties and a small number of multilateral trade agreements with investment chapters.⁵ This gives certain investors the option of investor-state dispute settlement, that is, bringing legal claims against the state of Zambia under international arbitration mechanisms, possibly excluding the public.

Zambians rely on maize as their staple food; hence, smallholder production focuses heavily on maize cropping for subsistence and the income from selling surplus produce. The IMF (2017) criticizes market control and subsidies on maize, ignoring the fact that in the past, government subsidies on maize inputs have been highly important politically. (Bates and Collier 1995) Horne (2011, 17) argues that the augmented focus on maize in Southern Province may lead to food insecurity as other crops would be more suitable. Although Zambia has large water supplies, higher frequencies of droughts since the 1980s supposedly invoked by climate change threaten food security and livelihoods since most smallholders rely on rainfed farming. (Chu 2012; Haller 2013; Horne 2011) The emerging agrofuel industry may pose a further threat to Zambian food security as land utilization shifts from food to energy production. (Horne 2011)

3.3 Regional History

The people predominantly inhabiting the Mazabuka area identify as being part of the Tonga tribe spread throughout most of Zambia’s Southern Province and parts of Northern Zimbabwe.⁶ The Tonga can be divided in subgroups, whereas the people living in the Mazabuka area are designated ‘Plateau Tonga’ by Colson (1948; 1951; 1953) whereas others classify them as “Ila-speaking peoples of the Balundwe group” who have more similarities with the Ila than other Tonga groups. (Haller 2013, 57) Hence, the ethnography of the Ila and Balundwe in Haller’s (2013) *The Contested Floodplain* applies to the concerned group as well.⁷ In this chapter, there will not be an attempt to provide an ethnography of the group, but rather to provide brief historical background in order to grasp the underlying conditions of the formation of the

⁵ See: <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment-agreements/countries/232/zambia>

⁶ It shall be noted here that Tonga as a linguistic group circumvents a larger population than what is considered the Tonga people. (Colson 1951, 94f.) The language spoken in the Mazabuka area is Chitonga.

⁷ The term Plateau Tonga will be favored in this thesis because it is in accord with the self-identification of our informants.

Magobbo settlement, which is in the focus of this thesis. For a more complete historical account on the Southern Province, see Haller (2013).

3.3.1 The Plateau Tonga

In her classic ethnography, Colson (1951) goes to great lengths in describing “*The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia*”, located in and around the District of Mazabuka on the Tonga Plateau. She describes the Plateau Tonga as a people organized along matrilineal kinship ties and clan affiliation. Institutions of matrilineal kinship are depicted as central to Plateau Tonga society because they regulate marriage and inheritance. (Araki 2001; Colson 1951; Haller 2013)

In the 19th century, the region, rich in resources, and its people, rich in cattle, were often raided by other groups, especially the Lozis. For protection against raiders and wild animals, villages emerged as large clusters of closely set houses. (Haller 2013) Spatial organization altered in colonial times; Colson (1951) argues that the group’s only political units were rather small village entities led by headmen, while it did not form any extensive structure of political or economic coalition. During colonization, the British imposed chieftaincies as a form of regional political organization. Chiefs were installed as ‘Native Authorities’ in order to collect taxes and resolve disputes. Although their power decreased post-independence, they still form an important political group on regional levels. (Haller 2013, 60) Paradoxically, the chiefs are designated ‘traditional authorities’ in Zambia’s legal framework of today.

In the first half of the 20th century, among the Plateau Tonga, concepts of ownership differed significantly from European understandings of property rights in the ‘modern’ nation-state. Different types of resources were subdued to various regimes of exchange, whereby “no one item was traditionally clearly convertible in all other items”. (Haller 2013, 84) Land could neither be rendered private property nor traded as a commodity on a market. Instead, it was governed by a common property regime which regulated its use: Every Plateau Tonga⁸ had the right to clear any patch of unoccupied land, cultivate it and reap the produce of his crops. However, no one had exclusive rights over other resources such as honey, fruit growing in the field or weeds used for pasture. If one ceased to farm the land and abandoned the patch, that person would not maintain any usage rights. (Colson 1951, 120) These institutions enabled the

⁸ The gendered division of work among the Tonga will not be discussed in this thesis due to its scope. For further information on this issue, see Colson (1951).

Plateau Tonga to successfully employ a sustainable system of shifting cultivation for various crops as well as pasture, allowing the soil to regenerate after periods of usage. (Colson 1951, 97f.) This system, of course, only remains viable if enough arable soil is available. Next to crop rotating agriculture, cattle herding was – and still is, though to a lesser degree – essential to the culture and the livelihoods of the Plateau Tonga. Again, land in common property plays a central role in pasture. (Haller 2013)

3.3.2 British Colonial Rule

Meanwhile, formal administrative control in the region by the British South African Company started from as early as 1891; civil administration was established in 1903. (Haller 2013) The British colonial government of Northern Rhodesia was engaged in creating a political economy with the main purpose of exploiting the full economic potential of the colony for the benefit of the British Empire.⁹ (Colson 1951, 101) In the case of Northern Rhodesia, this primarily meant the extraction of minerals, particularly copper. (Frederiksen 2010) From the first decade of the 20th century onwards, the Tonga Plateau accommodated more than half of the settler farms, due to the fertility of its soil and the proximity to the railway line connecting Northern to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and became of high importance for the nutrition of laborers in the mines. (Dixon-Fyle 1977, 582; Musambachime n.d., 9)

The most fertile land closest to the railway was reserved for white settler farmers. (Potts 2012, 38; Colson 1951, 98) The success and the number of settler farmers proved important for the empire as they were determining factors for the attainment of political control. (Potts 2012) In turn, the profitability of commercial settler farms required large reserves of cheap labor in order to keep production costs low.¹⁰ (Potts 2012, 35) Aiming to compel Africans to engage in wage labor, the colonial state primarily used two tactics: Taxation and land alienation. (Potts 2012, 35; Musambachime n.d., 17) Taxation served twofold, first by financing the colonial government and second by pushing Africans to adopt wage labor in order to obtain money to pay taxes. Taxes forced people to commodify either their labor or the surplus produce from their farms for cash. However, when taxes were introduced in Northern Rhodesia, they initially failed to produce the intended outcome of creating cheap labor because of the African farmers’

⁹ As British governance began under the jurisdiction of the British South Africa Company, commercial aspects were of central importance, even after the British Crown took over control in 1924. (Haller 2013; Potts 2012, 31f.)

¹⁰ The same applied for mines in the Copperbelt. (Frederiksen 2010)

resilience and were soon raised. (Frederiksen 2010, 105ff.) In any case, taxation led to the disruption of the traditional subsistence farming practices sustaining local livelihoods by pressuring household heads into selling either labor or produce. (Haller 2013; Musambachime n.d., 17) Further indication to the connection between taxation and the effort to create abundant cheap labor in Northern Rhodesia stems from the observation that African men who defaulted on their taxes were forced to work on settler farms. (Musambachime n.d., 19) Similar to tax collection, land alienation performed multiple functions in purpose of generating low-cost labor: The restriction of access to the most fertile strips meant that African producers had serious competitive disadvantages when producing for markets – which would have been a possible alternative to wage labor in attaining cash to pay taxes. (Dixon-Fyle 1977, 582) At the same time, pressure on land was aimed to squeeze Africans out of opportunities by which they could afford their own subsistence through other means than to engage in exploitative work provided by European settlers. (Potts 2012, 35) Correspondingly, the ‘native reserves’ created by the colonial state were intended to serve as reservoirs of cheap labor to be periodically mobilized. (Musambachime n.d., 14)

3.3.3 Dismantling the Commons

As early as 1924, the tactics outlined in the previous chapter (3.3.2) resulted in the development of farmland shortages in Northern Rhodesia’s reserves. (Musambachime n.d., 15) The British Colonial Authority formally segregated the land into native reserves for Africans and crown land for European settlers in 1928. (Sitko 2010) In the 1930s, maize monoculture started to replace the other crops in the reserves, since the favorable soil produced high yields of this grain and new technologies, particularly the ox-plow, were introduced. (Araki 2001) However, this put further pressure on land by reason of soil erosion and because the introduction of cash cropping induced a process of social differentiation among African farmers, concentrating control over land in fewer hands. (Momba 1989; Dixon-Fyle 1977, 583) At the time Colson (1951) wrote her ethnography of the Plateau Tonga, soil degradation due to the use of the plow and maize cash cropping led to arable land becoming scarce, which commenced to render the system of shifting cultivation impossible, disrupting the common property regime. (Colson 1951, 97f.) Haller (2013) further describes the disruption of not only land but also other common-pool resources, such as game and fish.

As noted above (2.2), the commons are crucial resources ensuring the resilience of rural populations. The undermining of the institutions guarding access to these resources potentially creates the necessity for small-scale farmers to resort to other paths of survival in times of crises. Particularly, smallholders may have to sell their land, resulting in the loss of the means of production while the landless are forced into wage labor. (Haller 2019; Haller et al. 2019; Gerber and Haller 2020) Pressure on land and the subsequent dismantling of the common property regime possibly lead to socioeconomic differentiation among small-scale farmers, ultimately constituting the emergence of capitalist relations by which a few manage to accumulate and prosper, while others become (truly) impoverished, as Li (2014a) strikingly illustrates in *Land's End* among the Lauje highlanders in Sulawesi, Indonesia.

The Tonga people however, demonstrated that despite fighting an uphill battle, it was not impossible to compete with settler farmers: Superior knowledge of the land's characteristics and the ability to mobilize free labor through kinship ties enabled them to pose a significant challenge to commercial farms despite the various instruments implemented by the colonial state to limit African competition. In consequence, settler farmers had serious issues in obtaining cheap labor. (Vickery 1985, 216ff.; Potts 2012, 36; Musambachime n.d., 21) The settlers' labor problems continued into the 1940s until a major nutrition shortage during the Second World War caused the colonial government to execute a program for forced migratory labor, which managed to mitigate the workforce issue at least temporarily. (Datta 1988) Remarkably, the case of the Tonga people being able to contest the superiority of commercial farms established by European settlers evidences that small to medium sized farms may very much be competitive in comparison to large business ventures even within the capitalist frame of thought.

3.3.4 Peasant Differentiation

Starting in the 1930s, the implementation of the ox-plough and maize as a cash crop produced processes of differentiation among the priorly largely egalitarian Plateau Tonga. (Araki 2001) Momba (1989, 335) holds that “by the 1940s a well established rich peasantry existed in many parts of the Southern Province”. The author explains that the development of cash crop production among African farmers in Southern Province and especially Mazabuka District resulted in peasant differentiation into poor, middle and rich farmers, as well as a class of medium-scale farmers who mostly produce for the market and periodically employ wage

workers, but at the same time primarily rely on family labor. Lending practices which favored rich farmers exacerbated the wealth gap in the peasantry even further. After independence from the British in 1964, although the Zambian government pushed anti-capitalist narratives for smallholder empowerment, it continued supporting capitalist farming in practice. During that time, rich farmers from the villages started to move on to state land. The Ministry of Agriculture was in charge of locating farmers in settlement schemes on formerly European farms which were divided into smaller plots. Usually, the more successful farmers from the villages were selected for those schemes. Thus, mostly the better-off were resettled in the schemes and given support as well as preferential access to credit, infrastructure and inputs. (Kalyalya 1988; Momba 1989) They were expected to perform to a certain level, however. These practices enhanced inequality throughout the period of the Kaunda regime. Momba (1989, 345) further suggests that “these settlement farmers are certainly transforming themselves into some kind of rural capitalist class”.

The proposition that state-organized settlements mainly incorporated privileged farmers is of particular relevance for this thesis because Magobbo was founded in 1981 as a settlement on state land. A historical account specifically focused on the settlement based on oral history will be recounted in chapter 5.1 as an introductory tale to the results.

3.4 Zambia Sugar

3.4.1 History

Nakambala Sugar Estate, the plantation complex on the outskirts of Mazabuka Town where Zambia Sugar operates until today was established in June 1964 and the Company incorporated one year later as a joint venture of the Zambian state and the British company Tate and Lyle (Ltd.). In 1965, Tate and Lyle held 80% of the shares, the state 12% and the remainder was obtained by private investors. Until December 1967, the initial irrigation system was completed and the hectareage expanded on 1'025 hectares. Since then, the estate constantly expanded both in surface area and output. In 1973 it already had 3'316 hectares under cultivation and about 9'000 hectares by 1983, whereas yields increased by a slightly higher coefficient. A mill for the production of white sugar was constructed on the estate in 1974.



Fig. 3: Zambia Sugar (Plc.) factory, Mazabuka. DL, 09.04.2021.

While both the generated produce and cultivated hectarage roughly tripled in the period from 1973 to 1983, the number of employed workers only rose from 3'878 to 6'683 and the ratio of permanent to seasonal workers diminished from almost 2:1 to just above 1:1. (Kalyalya 1988) In addition, because of the difficulties in employing cheap laborers in the region outlined above (3.3.3) prevailed after independence, Zambia Sugar started to employ migratory labor from the economically disadvantaged Western Province ever since 1968,¹¹ as the labor conditions and wages were so poor that people from other regions were hardly recruitable. Even after the Zambian state took a controlling stake in the company's shares in 1973, labor conditions did not improve. (Dietz et al. 2008; Kalyalya 1988) Datta (1988, 391) goes so far as to maintain that “the recruiting tactics of, and working conditions at, the Nakambala Sugar Estate are widely regarded as ‘colonial’”.

Furthermore, the enlargement of the sugar cane plantation put further pressure on land in the Mazabuka area, leading to competition between the estate and farmers in the area. Even though the estate did not appropriate land of peasant farmers, as Kalyalya (1988) notes, an unknown number of ‘squatters’ on the state land were displaced and livestock farmers had difficulties moving their cattle across the district. (Richardson 2010) Also, secondary displacements of commercial farmers forcing out smallholders after selling their own land to the estate cannot be precluded. Consequently, a substantial territory in Mazabuka District was transformed into sugar cane cultivation, decreasing the space available for production of maize and milk.

¹¹ Zambia Sugar's practice of hiring large numbers of Westerners as seasonal laborers continues to this day, at least for the activity of cane cutting.

Increasing water needs for irrigation posed additional challenges as they competed with interests of Zambia Electricity Supply Company (ZESCO), among others. The damming of the Kafue River in the 1970s – a major water grab –, intended primarily to generate hydropower but also to provide irrigation for the Nakambala Estate, disturbed the seasonal flooding of the river and led to the disruption of hundreds of thousands of livelihoods mainly based on common-pool resources such as fish, game and pasture supplied by the floodplain. (Haller 2013; German et al. 2020; Richardson 2010) Additionally, hazardous refuse deposited in the Kafue River by the estate became a health threat for fishermen and farmers and the irrigation system became an ideal breeding ground for mosquitos, rendering the estate’s working community at greater risk of malaria. (Kalyalya 1988)

Kalyalya (1988, 79) nonetheless argues that “it is clear that [the negative implications] have been ultimately outweighed by the positive effects” of the establishment of Nakambala Estate. Zambia Sugar established medical, educational and commercial facilities in the area and the salaries paid to the workers significantly fostered the cash economy. In regard to labor, the author contends that after 1973, key positions were given to Zambians and “although the development of a jointly-owned sugar plantation gave rise to harsh labour conditions, its activities were fully integrated into the national economy [which] sharply contrasts with the foreign-owned plantations”. (Kalyalya 1988, 69) On a national level, benefits generated by the company include self-sufficiency in sugar, tax income and the earning of foreign currency. (Kalyalya 1988)

Another “significant contribution to the nation’s development” was achieved with the Kaleya smallholder outgrower scheme because it produces a meaningful amount of sugar cane and provides perspectives of economic inclusion and prosperity to smallholders and emergent farmers, according to Kalyalya (1988, 75). In 1981, the government allocated land for the scheme and production started in 1982 although there had been initial resistance from local communities to the scheme since Mazabuka District was already facing shortages of available land for the peasantry. (Kalyalya 1988) Interestingly, Nelson-Richards (1987, 179f.) comes to a vastly different conclusion on smallholder inclusion at the Nakambala Estate as the author designates the sugar industry as a “success story” but adds: “Small-scale farmers have hardly any part in the growing of cane for the refineries” and that “there would be no room [...] for the smallholder in a market monopolized by plantation crops”. The correspondence between

Zambia Sugar and government officials shows that the erection of an outgrower scheme was on the company's agenda since the planning stages. (National Archives of Zambia, MAG 2/18/117) Supposedly, such an endeavor was central to the legitimation of the establishment of the estate as a joint venture between a British company and the newly founded Zambian state during the period of independence.

In 1994, Zambia Sugar was re-privatized by Tate and Lyle repurchasing a majority of shares in the company's stock. At this point the labor situation had not improved, the number of permanent workers in 1995 being almost the same as it was in 1975. However, the company was spared of the economic crisis that hit Zambian companies in the liberalization frenzy of the 1990s. On the contrary, Zambia Sugar remained highly profitable, achieving gross profits of 23.7 million US-Dollar in the 1992/93 season with expenditures of 24.9 million US-Dollar. South African sugar corporation Illovo bought the company in 2001, investing heavily in infrastructure and machinery. The sale was accompanied by the expansion of the sugar operation on company-owned land as well as the acquisition of the private plantation company Nanga Farms. The labor situation deteriorated both in quality and quantity. (Richardson 2010) By 2007, the estate farmed more cane on more land with fewer workers than in 1995. (Dietz et al. 2008)

The company's most recent expansion between 2007 and 2011 was probably its most ambitious, expanding the total cultivated area to over 27'000 hectares, thus elevating the Nakambala Estate to Zambia's largest agricultural entity and the second biggest sugar producing venture in Africa. (Richardson 2010; Rocca 2016) This extension of sugar cane cultivation included the establishment of the Magobbo and the Manyonyo outgrower schemes.

3.4.2 Current Events

German et al. (2020) scrutinize the environmental impacts of the recent expansion. The authors put special focus on hydrological issues since sugar cane requires high amounts of water. As mentioned in the previous chapter (3.4.1), Zambia Sugar fulfills this need by using water from the Kafue for irrigation, significantly reducing mean flow of the river. There is a high possibility that these changes in the regional hydro-scape lead to detrimental impacts – particularly during droughts – on downstream populations depending on the Kafue as a water source. Furthermore, agro-chemicals and waste products from sugar production may lead to significant deterioration in water and soil qualities and prove toxic for aquatic organisms. (German et al. 2020)



Fig. 4: The Kafue River floodplain, Nanga. DL, 26.03.2021.

With the Zambian sugar industry obtaining 4% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) and Zambia Sugar being in control of 90 - 95% of the nation's sugar production, the company is a significant actor in Zambia's economy. (Matenga 2017; Richardson 2010) Manda et al. (2018a) provide insight on how Zambia Sugar manages to exert its power shaping political frameworks and labor regimes in Zambia's sugar sector. As Zambia Sugar holds such a powerful position, it uses its influence on policy makers to reduce its taxes and prevent competition in the sugar sector from emerging, protecting its virtual monopoly. (Matenga 2017; Richardson 2010) ActionAid (2011) reports that legal tax circumvention tactics implemented by Zambia Sugar account for at least 17.7 million US dollars in lost tax revenue between 2007 and 2011. Moreover, because the company controls the Zambian sugar market, it is enabled to dictate prices, making it a profit powerhouse. According to Matenga (2017), Zambia Sugar accounts for a tenth of Illovo's production while producing a third of the corporation's profits. The company's monopoly position in the market comes at a loss for Zambian consumers as domestic sugar prices are inflated even though it is one of the lowest cost sugar producers in the world. (Richardson 2010)

3.4.3 Smallholder Inclusion as Anti-politics

Illovo has been involved in various large-scale land deals and criticized for land grabs in Malawi, Mali and Zambia (Kiezebrink et al. 2015; Pearce 2013; Richardson 2010).

Nevertheless, Illovo advertises against land grabbing, for instance in in a proclamation titled “Breaking News”, posted in its homepage:¹²

Africa has the highest proportion of agricultural land deals in the world, according to Land Matrix. This means that independent growers face significant pressure on natural resources as well as raising the value of land beyond the reach of many, especially smallholder farmers. However, these challenges are compounded in countries which have historically poor practices in land tenure rights which can lead to lots of grievances resulting from land disputes, often caused by ‘land grabs’. Ultimately, this severely impact [sic] grower’s livelihoods, especially in poor and vulnerable communities.

In addition, Illovo declares in its *Group Guidelines on Land and Land Rights*: “The Illovo Group adopts a zero tolerance approach to land grabs and requires that all its Suppliers do likewise.” And furthermore: “Historically, Illovo has not engaged in agricultural land acquisitions” (Illovo Sugar Africa Ltd., n. d.) Seemingly, the company has a different understanding of what constitutes a land grab than the authors voicing criticism. It seems evident that the company uses anti-land-grab discourse as a marketing tool highlighting the social responsibilities of its enterprise. It is doubtful whether these responsibilities are indeed taken seriously given the volume of critical literature on Illovo’s practices.¹³ Yet another question remains if the company succeeds in marketing itself among consumers and investors by using an anti-land-grab narrative.

The inclusion of small-scale farmers in the value chain appears to be essential to the promotion strategies of the company chain; corporate reports often contain a section on corporate responsibility in which they refer to poverty reduction and inclusive business practices in regard to smallholders, as exemplified in this excerpt from Zambia Sugar’s 2020 Annual Report (p. 46):

The smallholder schemes that the Company is directly involved with reflects its commitment to supporting the development of sustainable, commercially-directed farming business models and governance systems.

However, land under smallholder cultivation poses only 4.4% of the total of Zambia Sugar’s recent expansion of its sugar cane growing area. (German and Parker 2019) Not to mention, the

¹² Retrieved 10.10.2019

¹³ Such as, among others: Adams et al. 2018, Kiezebrink et al. 2015, Pearce 2013, Richardson 2010.

Kaleya scheme was funded by the Commonwealth Development Corporation and the Zambian government and infrastructure for both the Magobbo and the Manyonyo outgrower schemes were financed primarily by international donors, namely the EU in the case of Magobbo. (Manda et al. 2018a) Hence, there is good reason to presume that the outgrower schemes are of very little importance in the company’s business model and that the key reason for smallholder incorporation is for the corporate chain to market itself as socially responsible, disguising troublesome outcomes of its business practices through such narratives. (German and Parker 2019; Manda et al. 2020; Matenga 2017; 2020) Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that Illovo’s pretensions of corporate responsibility are essential in obtaining the Fairtrade label, which in all probability is of great importance within the corporation’s marketing strategy. (Fairtrade International 2019) This supposition begs the question: Why did the EU finance a ‘development project’ which is set to benefit a multinational corporation? To grasp at least the official answer to this question, one has to examine recent developments in the policy of the EU on its sugar market.

3.5 The EU Grant

In the 2000s the EU produced roughly 80% of its consumed sugar from beets and imported the remaining 20%. According to Pearce (2013), Illovo accounted for a third of these imports. The EU enforces complex regulations on sugar production and trade: Sugar beet farmers in the EU profit heavily from subsidies set by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In return, the EU determines the amounts of sugar that farmers in the EU are allowed to produce, how much can be imported at which prices. In the past, these protectory market regulations resulted in a higher EU sugar price compared to the world market price. Based on the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative, ‘least developed’ countries – such as Zambia – are able to export sugar to the EU free of tariffs and under the African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) Sugar Protocol of the EU, Zambia was allowed to export certain quotas at a fixed price.

In 2005, the EU decided to reform its sugar trade regime, removing price guarantees and terminating import and production quotas but still subsidizing EU farmers growing sugar beets. (EC 2005; 2019; Palerm et al. 2010) In the same year the European Commission (EC) presented a proposal (EC 2005) for a resolution to establish Accompanying Measures for Sugar Protocol (AMSP) countries, in order to mitigate possible negative consequences of the planned regulations because “the EU sugar reform, with its proposed price cuts, may lead to significant

impacts and adjustment needs, with broad socio-economic consequences in ACP countries that are signatories to the Sugar Protocol and have been relying on preferential sugar exports to the EU, in most cases since 1975.” (EC 2005, 2) As the EU “is committed to supporting ACP countries on their path to poverty reduction and sustainable development”, the Commission suggested to aid the sugar sectors of those countries that had previously benefitted from preferential treatment with financial and technical assistance. The Commission’s proposal was approved by the European Parliament and Council in 2006 (EU 2006) and one year later the European Commission allocated six million Euro under the AMSP to support Zambia’s National Sugar Sector Strategy which advocates production expansion through outgrower schemes. The respective Financing Agreement between Zambia and the EU defined the co-financing of small-scale expansion investments as one of its core activities. (EC 2007)

Richardson (2010, 924f.) explains that British Sugar (subsidiary to ABF) acquired Illovo due to the EU restructuring its sugar market since the corporation planned to import raw sugar duty free under the trading provisions for Least Developed Countries and process it in Spain to then sell it in the EU. Thus, by 2009 Illovo administered 20-30% of total sugar imported in the EU. However, as anticipated by the Commission, the EU sugar price decreased to the level of the global market price in recent years. (EC 2019; Kiezebrink et al. 2015; Palerm et al. 2010) Due to this price fall, the EU market lost its attractiveness for Illovo and relative revenue from exports to the EU by Zambia Sugar shrank to 4% in the 2016/17 season. The remaining 96% of the revenues stem from the domestic market (54%) and exports in the African market (42%). (Corporate Citizenship 2017)

3.6 The Magobbo Project

As early as 2005, Magobbo community members sought negotiations with Zambia Sugar in order to establish an outgrower scheme in the wake of the company’s expansion. The Magobbo Cane Growers Trust (MCGT) was formed in 2007 and financed with the aid of the Mazabuka Sugar Cane Growers Trust (MSCGT),¹⁴ which was founded in 2005 by Zambia Sugar to facilitate the funding of and oversight over contract farming ventures. Three million Euro were designated by the EU to provide infrastructure for the Magobbo outgrower scheme, which accounted for 60% of the total cost of five million Euro. The remainder was covered by a low-

¹⁴ Due to the similarity of the acronyms of the two trusts, henceforth the designations ‘Mazabuka Trust’ and ‘Magobbo Trust’ are used for clarity.

interest loan by the Mazabuka Trust (10%) and a bank loan (30%) which was later transferred to Zambia Sugar. (German and Parker 2019; Matenga 2017; 2020)

The Magobbo outgrower scheme is based on block farming, combined with the nucleus estate model, which means that small-scale farmers form larger blocks by combining their land to form an economy of scale and produce for a central processing unit. Participants of the block scheme in Magobbo created a solitary land title under the Magobbo Trust, making them shareholders. Total land under cultivation are 438 hectares, approximately a third of Magobbo's total hectareage. The plots – or shares – in the sugar cane project were supposed to be four to six hectares, as required by the EU. Through land swapping, farmers from Magobbo holding land outside the catchment area were able to obtain shares in the scheme. However, many large landholders divided their land among family members. Furthermore, some powerful outsiders might have received shares in the scheme in this process. (Matenga 2020) In order to create one solitary farm block, residents had to move to make way for the sugar cane. Yet not all were included in the scheme. 80 household heads were registered as landholders at the Mazabuka District Council and subsequently as outgrowers in the Magobbo Trust, concentrating the flow of capital to be generated by the new crop in a few hands. The production however was to be managed by a contractor because Magobbo farmers did not have any prior experience in sugar cane farming. Nanga Farms, a company recently bought by Zambia Sugar (see 3.4.1) was hired as a service provider in order to take over all tasks until sufficient knowledge in the Magobbo Trust would enable a transfer of production. (Matenga 2020)

3.7 Investigating the Outgrower Scheme

Magobbo has become a contested intersection of different academic traditions as case studies on the settlement become focus of a growing body of literature on economic, political and social effects of sugar cane farming. The results of case studies on Magobbo have been used numerous times for comparative analysis on agrarian change.¹⁵ At this point however, only the case studies immediately focused on Magobbo will be summarized and these accounts contrasting varying agricultural organization will not be discussed in detail.

¹⁵ See for instance: Hall et al. 2017; Matenga and Hichaambwa 2017; Mdee et al. 2020; Samboko and Dlamini 2017.

Schüpbach (2014) tries to determine whether the outgrower schemes in Kaleya and Magobbo achieve their intended purpose of increasing welfare of included outgrowers. Having a background in economics, he focuses primarily on quantitative data collection by conducting household surveys and applies expert interviews and focus group discussions in order to add insight to the findings based on quantitative methods. The author concludes that the schemes mainly have positive effects:

Participants in the sugar outgrower schemes achieve significantly higher levels of wealth than comparable smallholder farmers. [...] Our results suggest that foreign direct investments in agriculture can have sizeable potential to improve the living conditions of smallholder farmers. Especially outgrower schemes seem to provide a successful strategy to overcome many of the main constraints to increasing productivity among smallholder farmers. (Schüpbach 2014, 118)

He acknowledges however, that the schemes possibly increase pressure on land for surrounding communities and notes that several farmers designated mono-cropping as problematic and expressed a preference for crop-rotation, if irrigation and inputs would be available. Yet he still claims contract farming to be a prosperous path for smallholders. He suggests that households should diversify their economic activities to off-farm business in order to prosper and that “abandoning agriculture altogether will in the long run likely become a more promising prospect for growing numbers of Zambia’s rural poor.” (Schüpbach 2014, 140)

Comparing the food security status of Magobbo’s cane and non-cane farmers with mixed methods, Bubala et al. (2018) assert that cane growers are significantly better positioned in terms of food security as well as economic well-being, with the exception of a handful of better-off non-cane farmers. They do not however, properly acknowledge that the inclusion and exclusion in the scheme is far from arbitrary. (Manda et al. 2020) My results will suggest that any application of quantitative methods straightly aligned along classifications of “outgrower”, “smallholder” and “employee” may be misleading in the case of Magobbo since livelihood strategies are increasingly diversified and most people do not neatly fit into just one of these categories but rather combine features of multiple classes (see chapter 5.3.3).

A different picture is painted by Matenga (2017; 2020). Though he agrees that there were substantial improvements to participating household’s incomes, the results of his case study in Magobbo, based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, put more weight on negative implications, compared to Schüpbach (2014) and Bubala et al. (2018). His findings

suggest that a limited number of households included in the Magobbo scheme has benefitted but that “the distribution of these gains is uneven, both between and within households.” (Matenga 2017, 565) Further consequences have been increasing pressure on land in the community whereas access to farmland has been restricted for community members, especially young people, while outsiders have managed to receive shares in the scheme. Moreover, control over the land has been grabbed by Zambia Sugar as the land rights of smallholders in Magobbo have been restricted. Within the community, a process of differentiation has been induced as well as internal conflict. Economic volatility of the community has increased because of vulnerabilities to price changes inherent to mono-cropping and the impossibility of crop rotation due to land scarcity. Resilience has especially deteriorated for households which were heavily based in livestock since areas for pasture have decreased. (Matenga 2020)

Similarly, German and Parker (2019) argue that concerning the Magobbo outgrower scheme, the social outcomes are substantially uneven, and the proclaimed gains do not present themselves as clearly if examined by alternative measures. Moreover, they claim that smallholder incorporation is only part of Zambia Sugar’s business model insofar as it justifies discourses of participatory inclusion. Manda et al. (2018; 2020) support this line of argumentation. The authors (ibid. 2020) further analyze determining factors for inclusion and exclusion in the sugar cane scheme and deduce that these are entangled in a complex web of interests by different actors who do not necessarily want to be included in the scheme.

Rocca (2014; 2016) conducted a case study on the Magobbo outgrower scheme chiefly using qualitative methods and a quantitative survey. Her findings suggest that the establishment of the scheme had overall negative distribution outcomes for women, with certain exceptions, especially regarding widows. Rocca (2014; 2016) argues that these negative effects stem from women’s reduced access to land, employment and leadership positions. In other words, women are limited in their participation in income management on different levels.

Using participatory wealth ranking exercises, Kalinda (2014b) investigates the concept of poverty in Magobbo. He suggests that poverty is linked with relative low levels of education across generations, an inability to produce enough food for the whole year, insufficient nutrition, and disease. The poor are often relying on daily labor as well as livelihood options based in common-pool resources such as fishing in local rivers and the production of charcoal by felling and burning trees. Sugar cane outgrowing on the other hand is associated with wealth.

Also, Kalinda (2014a) analyzes the risk management strategies of farmers in Magobbo facing constant livelihood-threatening shocks. He finds that the majority of households in Magobbo have faced economic downturn over the last one to two decades. Improvements in the economic situation are mainly registered among a minority of better-off households and attributed to participation in the outgrower scheme. Kalinda (2014a) shows how households pursue different risk management strategies in order to strengthen their resilience. Some of these strategies include the usage of common-pool resources such as the gathering of wild food products like mushrooms and honey. Kalinda does not inspect the impacts of the establishments of the outgrower scheme on resilience and poverty in-depth, however.

This thesis seeks to provide an insightful ethnographical account solely resting on qualitative methods, including not only interviews, but participant observation as well. This methodological approach could be favorable in terms of avoiding a top-down investigation that performs mainly to verify pre-fixed hypotheses. Although I evidently formed certain questions and assumptions prior to conducting research, keeping an open mind to incorporate the research subjects' view and elaborate on topics that came up allows me to achieve a deepened appreciation of the local social fabric. The presented case study may add to the already rich body of literature and serve to improve the understanding of conjuncture in Magobbo and implications induced by the outgrower scheme through delving towards an emic perspective. As academic interest in the Magobbo project was particularly high during the early years of the scheme and the last cited research periods were in 2016, this thesis further supplies a continuance of already completed research, both in a sense of empirical data collection and chronologic temporality.

4 Methods and Implementation

In an excursion to Zambia organized by Prof. Tobias Haller and Chrispin Chikani in June 2018, a group of students which included myself visited the Magobbo and Kaleya areas in order to conduct a short anthropological ‘field trip’. In pairs of two, we spent two days in farming households that were part of one of the outgrower schemes. During our visit and subsequent ones by some of the students, we found that in regard to Magobbo only a rather small percentage of people in the village were able to reap direct profits from the sugar cane scheme and that even the ones being paid dividends were not content with recent developments. Student reports described conflicts in the community and especially within the Magobbo Trust committee. Members of sugar cane farming households in Magobbo complained about low returns, distribution issues and alleged corruption. A lack of transparency among powerful actors of the community seemed to lie at the center of the problem. Our Group observed that the smallholders were in possession of substantial amounts of durables, such as televisions, phones or cars, most of which seemed to be aged and – especially in the case of the cars – poorly maintained and underused. In conversations with the farmers, we learned that the revenue generated by the outgrower scheme had been much higher in the first years of the project and decreasing since. Keeping in mind that the actors involved in the outgrower scheme are on the upper end of the economic spectrum in the community, these dissatisfactions seemed troubling. Given the complex and problematic situation suggested by the small dataset gathered, an in-depth case study on the community in Magobbo appeared to be required in order to unveil the social, political and economic impacts produced by the constitution of the outgrower scheme.

The research project for this thesis was born in consequence and field work was conducted from February to May 2021. The research was supported by Chrispin, who hosted me and managed the entry to the field. Nchimunya Mwiinga assisted the project and accompanied me during all visits to the village. Specifically, she aided with translation and helped with the interpretation of day-to-day events, providing crucial background. Chrispin was involved in data analysis, as well, though to a lesser degree due to time constraints. Both of them have relatives and are well connected in the village, particularly Nchimunya, who used to live in Magobbo for two years starting in 2013. Her knowledge about the local context was immensely important to the collection of data and subsequent analysis. Thus, she holds a special position as both research

assistant and key informant. Chrispin’s house in Mazabuka Town, where we resided, is distanced just above 20km from Magobbo. On one hand, this enabled to maintain a comfortable distance, allowing for critical reflection without removing oneself too far from the research location. On the other, this posed challenges in terms of transport, especially during rain season.

4.1 Methodological Approach

The main methods applied in the research were the traditional tools of ethnography which are participant observation and qualitative interviews. Hauser-Schäublin (2003) describes participant observation as the combination of two diametrically opposed activities, participation and observation. Whereas participation necessitates proximity and close engagement, observation requires critical distance. Following the author, a balance between these two poles has to be maintained. In ethnographical research, participant observation is essential to gain insight into the everyday practices of the people in the local context, mapping the power constellations and illuminating socioeconomic relations within the community. Recording the experiences in a personal diary and coding the notes during data analysis is crucial to this method. (Davies 1999; Emerson et al. 2011; Fife 2005)



Fig. 5: Oughtfied manually irrigating his private garden in Magobbo Central with the help of David. NM, 15.03.2021.

In the research endeavor for this thesis, during an initial explorative phase of approximately two weeks, recurring central topics were identified in participant observation and unrecorded and informal though interview-like talks were held. In the subsequent main phase we collected

data both by way of participant observation and conducting interviews. Qualitative interviews served as a tool to deepen the understandings from participant observation. (Schlehe 2008) At first, the initial interviews were open and focused heavily on biographies, as this approach opened a path to understand how circumstances before and after the land deal are perceived by local people. After we had identified recurring themes, we worked with semi-structured and topic-based interviews, in order to specify the direction of the interviews along the lines of topics we recognized as important.

Semi-structuring the interviews was especially helpful when in translated interviews, since the preparation of inquiries which needed answering enabled us to translate a set of questions in advance. This facilitated Nchimunya's task substantially and made the interview less prone to miscommunications due to translation. Concerning the topic-based interviews which we conducted during the later stages, we usually prepared specific queries after analysis of our data on the topic in question. These notes were then used to fall back upon whenever the interview took an unintended turn or conversation stalled. In almost all cases even towards the end of the research project we kept a certain degree of biographical questioning because it eased the entry into conversation and helped us delve into the desired discussion topics. Further, such a style of interviewing enabled us to keep conversation going and steer it in the intended direction even when the flow was interrupted, or the dialogue moved off topic. In total, 13 interviews were conducted with informants from all sections and of diverse socioeconomic and political status, gender and age.

We periodically analyzed the collected data by going through our notes, coding them, and listening to the conducted interviews. Specifically, we debriefed over the daily field trips practically every evening with few exceptions and re-evaluated the data in its totality at intervals. This continuous dialogue enabled us to routinely select subject matters for further investigation and constantly redirect our focus correspondingly, making it possible to determine gaps and complement missing information through scope adjustments in data collection.

4.2 Field Work

The entry to the field was facilitated by Chrispin, who had organized meetings with the community (settlement and section) leaders in order to explain what we would be doing over the course of the field work. They welcomed us into the community and gave us their blessing

to move freely in the community. Thereafter I managed to interact and socialize with the people quickly. The successful entry to the field is owed to my assistants who provided important information for me to navigate in the village and among its inhabitants.

Later however, we noticed that our position as a researching team was not as clear as we had initially thought. Various stories about my purpose of visiting Magobbo had been going around the community, for instance that I was there to pay the bride-price for Nchimunya. By far the most persistent tale was that I was going to introduce a development project. This misconception was to a certain degree self-imposed because in the initial days we had been explaining to the people of Magobbo that we were going to conduct “a research project” and the term ‘project’ is strongly associated with development aid. In addition, Chrispin had previously introduced people that were involved in the building of a community fishpond and henhouses. Hence, in the first days the people kept bringing up these ‘projects’ as they connected my presence to them. Creating a feedback loop, we assumed that these ventures are important to the community and continued asking about them. With time, we noticed that they are not of the central importance they appeared to be at first, eventually becoming a less significant topic in the course of the field work.

Regarding the development projects, certain actors tried to instrumentalize my position in what appeared to be a scramble for access to resources. For instance, one of the people hosting me among other students in 2018 seemed to deliberately push the narrative that I was involved with said ventures in order to claim more control over and access to resources due to that prior hospitality. Though that person was aware of my position as a researcher, she repeatedly tried to establish a connection between me and the development projects and build a narrative of our close relationship, apparently to further her status in the community, over the course of the field work. When subsequently I attempted to distance myself from her socially, we heard that she was spreading rumors in the community that I had wanted to marry her daughter, but Nchimunya had ‘stolen’ me.

Specific actions were taken to circumvent these challenges, which seemed to have the intended effects. Especially a visit to the school in which we introduced ourselves to all the pupils of grades six to nine and asked them to spread the news about our stay and its purpose. We further wrote an informative sheet in English and Chitonga which we hung at shops and the school and also handed to community leaders and teachers. The preventive actions proved very helpful in

elucidating our position. Due to these measures and the flow of information in the village, in the later stages most people we encountered had at least a basic idea of what we were doing.

As an ethnographer, learning the local language is of crucial importance, however, the timeframe of the research project enabled me only to learn greetings and basic conversations. For more complex dialogue needed to conduct interviews and obtain in-depth information on concrete topics, translation was necessary. Nevertheless, speaking basic Chitonga was very helpful in creating contact with people and ‘breaking the ice’ because a white man greeting in the local language and understanding a few sentences was considered a rarity. This supposedly further aided to clarify my position as a researcher.

Even when my role as a researcher and student became clear to the community leaders and other individuals, the question “What will you do for the community?” prevailed. It was an inquiry which asked of my legitimation to research in Magobbo – a question I did not have a proper answer to. Anticipations of what I was going to do to aid the community – as well as individual informants – lingered beneath many interactions even after I made it clear that I was merely a student there to learn about the community. Of course, these expectations were not surprising as the relationship between the people from Magobbo and I was shaped by inequalities. Even though I am – considering Swiss standards – merely a student with a modest income, the power asymmetries between my research subjects and assistants and I are immense as our economic and social capitals differ vastly. Zambia’s current inflation rate further exacerbates this imbalance. While these implications surely led to diverse actors having implicit agendas concerning their relationship with me, the significance in regard to data collection varied between informants but presumptively did not lead to ample distortions of the validity of the gathered information.

I found that even though various academics of different backgrounds have conducted research in Magobbo, its inhabitants were not particularly used to having a researcher in the village, especially not doing participant observation. Hence, the interest in interaction seemed to be mutual with many people. However, as a male ethnographer, the access to women as informants was severely restricted because the men in Magobbo habitually occupy representative roles on household, but also community levels. Only my research assistant as a locally connected woman made it possible to get substantial data on gender issues. Otherwise, a thorough examination of women’s perspectives would have been considerably more demanding if not

impossible within the timeframe. Yet, being a male researcher comfortable with moving in masculine spaces facilitated the access to the almost exclusively male local elite, whose habitus certainly favored masculine figures. Having an assistant familiar with the local context carried significant advantages in terms of access to informants as well as data analysis. Albeit the important benefits, Nchimunya’s position in the field possibly induced certain restraints among informants as some may have suspected that sensitive information might reach her relatives.

Because further concerns could have arisen due to delicate topics to be discussed with certain actors, we decided to hold interview-like talks during which we would take notes instead of conducting a recorded interview. This method seemed adequate numerous times because of findings that hinted at conflicts where informants were accusing or being accused of wrongdoing. These constraints applied particularly to issues regarding the Magobbo Trust. Moreover, we found that we were avoided by at least one member of the local elite who allegedly misused Trust money; that person stopped picking up the phone after we had asked for an interview. Be that as it may, these happenstances provide for important data on the community’s internal conflicts, which will be discussed further below (7.3).

It has to be noted that for me as a European researcher coming from one of the world’s richest countries to go to one of the poorest to conduct research for a master thesis entails serious ethical issues. In the underlying post-colonial context, it might seem troubling when a researcher like myself may rely on the local people’s help in a poor African village to enhance one’s cultural capital without being able to seriously aid in altering their trajectory, thereby reinforcing the uneven and exploitative post-colonial order of power. However, even if this research project is not able to escape the hegemonic framework of unequal relations shaping today’s world, I hope that it might add a small piece of critical analysis to a body of literature which at one point may induce a shift towards more equally balanced opportunities between and within world regions.

5 Magobbo: An Introduction

5.1 Pre-cane History

During the colonial period, commercial settlers occupied the territory which now comprises the Magobbo settlement. After the country's independence, the Zambian government displaced the settler farms. (Matenga 2020, 111) In 1981, when the Magobbo settlement was founded, the area was mostly bush. Only about six small-scale farmers had been growing crops and holding livestock on parts of the vicinity. The Mazabuka District Council called in newspapers for applicants willing to be settled in this zone, specifically looking for livestock farmers. 73 farmers were given parcels within the newly formed Magobbo settlement and moved there with their households. The plot size allocated to each farmer depended on the size of arable land it encompassed; patches on uneven terrain and with potholes were larger than the better suited flat and dry ones. The landowners and their respective parcels were registered at the District Council. Significant pieces of the settlement area were retained in common property as pasture. In addition to cattle herding, Magobbo's peasants started to uproot trees and clear fields immediately after the formation of the settlement. Maize was planted to ensure nutrition and the surplus was sold to the Food Reserve Agency at fixed prices. The second most important crop and main cash crop was cotton. During the 1980s, most farms cultivated a combination of maize, cotton and several less important crops such as groundnuts, sunflower and sweet potatoes. Apart from cattle, they kept other animals like goats and chickens. Other, more marginal economic activities like fishing in nearby streams or selling firewood were based on common-pool resources.

Our informants explained that yields were high in this period because of reliable rainfall patterns and good soil quality. Danny Banda, a car mechanic who has lived in Magobbo his whole life, describes local livelihoods in the 1980s and early 1990s:

We depended on rain. That time, there was very good rain. [...] These days whatever you planted; you were able to harvest [...] that's why we managed with many in the family. [...] The soil again, those days when you wanted to plant you didn't need fertilizer. We used animal manure. But at first, we used no animal manure, only planted, [even] then you could harvest. Then when the days went on, we started to use manure. [...] Even cattle, minus any medicine. We used to have a big number of cattle without any medicine.

Certain nostalgia resonates in the way Danny’s tale relates to this distant past and the possibilities of farming without inputs he reports. His account implies a story of erosion in opportunities, making a clear distinction between the past planting of crops without any fertilizer in stark contrast to today’s cultivation practices, which will be depicted later in this chapter. Similar to Danny, most informants agree that even though there was no sophisticated cash economy in the first decade of the settlement, owing to reliable rain, fertile soil and the large number of livestock kept, nutrition and resilience sufficed because people were able to sell cattle in times of crisis and as a reaction to shocks and contingencies.

In the 1990s, corridor disease outbreaks struck the cattle in Southern Province. (See Haller 2013, 217ff. for further information) The bulk majority of cattle held in Magobbo perished and only a few survived on account of the emergent use of medicine to treat the herds. The loss of cattle farming as one of the primary livelihood strategies locally led to an increase of significance for maize and cotton farming. During this crisis, at least some farmers left Magobbo in search of better opportunities elsewhere. For many, replacing the cattle with other pathways for sustenance proved difficult; the cane farmer Euters Chilimba explains:

In the 1990s that’s when this place of Magobbo became worse. [...] The standard of living was tough now. In the 1990s that’s when we were visited by those diseases, cattle diseases, corridor diseases. [...] The cattle, that’s when they all died. You know in these years of late 1990s, we lost many, many cattles in this area. Actually, in the whole district, people said that this area is too bad, full of diseases. They started going to other places like Central Province. People ran away from this place. [...] In the 90s, per home, per family you may find one hundred cattle, two hundred. But in the 2000s maybe three or two. Life was becoming worse and worse.

The quote shows the corridor disease as the initial point of deterioration in quality of life. The loss of livelihood and subsequent crisis forced villagers to abandon Southern Province altogether. Moreover, Euters indicates that the region was perceived as degenerating and people were drawn outwards due to looming decline. In contrast to Danny’s idyllic depiction of 1980s Magobbo, Euters’ image of the village in following decade portrays a decaying domain with an insecure future.

An informal land market emerged in the 1990s when land started to be traded in the villages even though sale is prohibited and the District Council only allows renting. Presumably, a first wave of differentiation took place among Magobbo’s peasants during the period of the corridor

disease. The remaining farmers compensated by starting to grow maize and cotton to larger extents, taking over the fields of the departed or areas previously used as pasture. The exploitation of common-pool resources, for instance the collection of firewood for sale, grew in importance as well. In spite of farmers restocking their cattle over time, livestock farming never regained the relevance it had reached prior to the outbreak of the corridor diseases.

According to Euters, another lifeline presented itself for Magobbo's people by way of employment on surrounding commercial farms which started their operations in the 1990s, as well as Zambia Sugar:

In the 2000s, [...] many people started working from that farm Hamapola Farm and others at Nanga Farms, others in Zambia Sugar. That's how we managed. [People started to] get jobs on neighboring farms. That's how we survived. If it were not for those farms, [...] I don't know how Magobbo was supposed to be... Well anyway, I can say we are very happy because of Nanga Farms. We survived because of Nanga Farms and Zambia Sugar there, and Hamapola Farms. Because Magobbo is in the middle of the farms, you know, in the middle of those commercial farmers.

Inherently, the narration illustrates that a low point had been reached where the question of how to survive was a constant burden. Euters voices a certain gratitude towards the commercial farms for providing job opportunities in dire times. Unfortunately, a detailed account on the farms encompassing Magobbo cannot be provided in this thesis; the interviews nonetheless indicate however that the growing proportions of commercial farming around Magobbo might have only become possible as an aftermath of the cattle economy's downfall and the subsequent clearance of 'unused' pasture in surrounding villages. The task of disentangling the history of the area's commercial farmers remains left open to other researchers.

There is unanimous agreement among the informants that rainfall patterns became increasingly erratic due to climate change during the recent decades, thus making rainfed agriculture more and more unreliable. Correspondingly, cotton farming was mostly given up in the 2000s due to low prices and insufficient yields. Subsequently, maize remained as the single most important crop. Land pressure and the availability of chemical manure made it enticing to grow maize on the same soil multiple years in a row, although the use of fertilizer increased due to the ensuing overexploitation of the farmland. Hence, soil degradation and overuse of fertilizer became a problematic cycle in Magobbo. In consequence to the circular concatenation of these practices,

the usage of chemical fertilizers evolved into an integral part of small-scale farming, as this excerpt from the interview with Danny illuminates:

DL: Do you also think that when too much fertilizer is used, is the soil overused? Did the constant use over the years make the soil worse?

DB: Yes, because if you put the same crop on the same land every year. This year, maize; next year again maize; another year, maize. Then you need fertilizer. Also putting the same crop. There is no crop rotation, so I think that's the reason for the land to be poor, lack of crop rotation. [...] Now, if you plant maize without adding fertilizer, you don't harvest. Unless you put *too much* fertilizer. If you just put a little bit of fertilizer, you can't harvest, because the land was disturbed.

Again, Danny's expression connotes a nostalgia for the old days when things were still 'normal', as traditional practices of crop rotation continued to be possible to a degree, enabling sustainable use of the farmland. Then, the loss of cattle as a resource prompted the need to produce more maize with the help of fertilizer on an area which was decreasing in output due to inconsistent rainfall and developing soil degradation. Subsequently, the introduction of sugar cane drastically scaled down the available soil for maize cultivation, intensifying the incentive to risk soil deterioration with fertilizer overuse.

In summary, as of the 2000s, the local economy in Magobbo had changed drastically since its foundation in 1981, due to the mentioned crisis induced by cattle diseases after which the farmers had to rearrange their sustenance to survive. Maize had become immensely important as both staple and cash crop without proper alternatives. Under these circumstances, in 2005 a group of Magobbo farmers contacted Zambia Sugar searching for inclusion in the industry by growing sugar cane. This point will be continued in chapter 6.1 after providing some further background on the structure of the village.

5.2 Settlement Structure

5.2.1 Geospatial

Magobbo sits in between two larger villages, Nanga to the north and Lubombo to the south. The settlement is judicially subjugated to the Lubombo ward. It is comprised of 430 households and approximately 2'500 to 3'000 inhabitants, the majority being minors, according to an estimation by the secretary of the settlement committee. The total land area in the settlement is 1'250 hectares, distributed into farming plots for 105 farmers, smaller plots for people to inhabit

and grow crops on a small scale and communally owned grazing areas. The sugar cane fields encompass 438 hectares of the area.

Prior to the sugar cane scheme, Magobbo was divided into three ‘clusters’ or ‘sections’. When the cane fields were planted, a large number of people were relocated because the catchment area was set in the middle of the village. The geospatial structure was then extended to five sections:



Map 1: Magobbo. Source: Google Maps, retrieved 03.07.2021.

Magobbo Central or Business area¹⁶ is stationed on the northern end of the village on the east side of the main road connecting Lubombo to Nanga. Across the road lay a few more houses and the cane fields. Central is the most populated area of Magobbo. Located in Central are the

¹⁶ Referred to as Site and Service by Matenga (2020).

school with a large football field as well as shops, bars and a small marketplace. The largest shop, which also is a bar, belongs to Gasper. Gasper’s shop has been designated ‘the heart of Magobbo’ by one informant living in Central, as it can get quite busy in the afternoons and evenings. **Artizan** is situated east of Central. Further eastward one finds the largest remaining grazing area. The future of this pasture is unclear as there are plans to build a factory for biofuel this year (see 8.1). **Canaan** is located in the northwest of the village, on the opposite side of the sugar cane fields from the perspective of Central. South of Canaan there is **Woodlands**. Canaan and Woodlands are relatively smaller in population compared to the other three clusters. The southern part of Magobbo is called **Kalonga**. Being the most secluded and most spacious section, Kalonga seems to be disadvantaged in numerous ways, most notably in that this section was excluded from the outgrower scheme and only six of its farmers obtained shares in the scheme through the exchange of land ownership with landholders from other sections.

5.2.2 Political

Local politics are strongly oriented along the lines of committees, an institutional arrangement presumptively remnant from the time of the settlement’s foundation under the Kaunda regime. A committee is supposed to have ten members, of which five form the executive composed of a chairperson, her vice, a secretary, his vice and a treasurer. The chairperson is the leader of the committee, who calls and chairs meetings. The chairperson has the power to discharge other members after consulting with the rest of the committee. The vice chairperson is there to substitute the chairperson when absent and serves as the disciplinary leader. The secretary takes minutes of the meeting and is responsible for keeping records; this position is surrogated by the vice secretary. Lastly, the treasurer manages accounts and funds. The other committee members do not hold specific responsibilities. (Lubombo Settlement 2017)

The highest local authority is held by the settlement committee. Its main function is to oversee land distribution and arbitrate in conflicts; it performs political representation towards external actors as well. The settlement committee is directly subordinated to both the Mazabuka District Council and Department of Agriculture. The positions within the settlement committee are unsalaried. Land is allocated by the settlement committee under the supervision of the District Council. The people registered as landholders at the Council are designated ‘farmers’ in the local terminology. Henceforth, the term *farmer* will be used solely to describe these landowners, not as the common definition of any farming person. Of the 105 *farmers* currently recorded as

owning a plot, the majority (83) are integrated in the sugar cane scheme, but others (22) remain excluded. Even though the settlement committee technically holds a superordinate position, the Magobbo Cane Growers Trust committee managing the affairs of the outgrower scheme is de facto no less important. Since the Trust committee governs the main source of income in the community – the sugar cane scheme – and members receive a monetary compensation, positions in the Trust committee are highly competed for. Elections for settlement and Trust committees are held every five years. The election process includes only the *farmers* who are registered as landholders at the Council, both as voters and candidates; in case of the Trust, *non-cane farmers* are excluded. It follows that the Magobbo settlement has a political system of census suffrage in place, based on land ownership. (Lubombo Settlement 2017)

Though there are female *farmers* registered at the Council, there is a significant gender imbalance in local politics because women are grossly underrepresented in the political structures; currently the important committees (settlement and Trust) are filled exclusively with men and only less powerful posts in the subordinated section committees are obtained by female members. Each of the five sections elects their own sub-committee. These sub-committees are elected every three years, whereas in contrast to the settlement and Trust committees, all adults hold active and passive voting rights. Though the sub-committees are of lesser importance, any person chairing the sub-committees nevertheless occupies a powerful position as section leader, representing the section and being the highest authority within.

5.3 Local Economy

5.3.1 Background

5.3.1.1 *Agricultural Production*

The annual agricultural cycle is determined by the climatic conditions of the region. The rain season, during which sugar cane operations are paused, begins in December and lasts until March. The last cane is harvested in December and production commences in April. Rainfed maize fields are planted once a year before rains begin in November and harvested from April to June. Other crops are grown seasonally depending on rainfall and access to water. Small-scale gardens are often irrigated by drawing water from wells manually or with pumps, where available. In the hot dry months, September and October, most planting ceases due to the high temperatures.



Fig. 6: Maize harvest in Central. DL, 15.04.2021.

5.3.1.2 *The Household Unit*

Typical households in Magobbo comprise a married couple and their dependent offspring and can encompass more than one dwelling. The household head is usually male with exception to households led by widows. Polygamy is common and it is customary that in these cases each wife inhabits her own house, whereas the number of family members can easily exceed ten people. Men marrying more than two women are rare, however. Some households bring up dependents and orphans, who often are extended family members, in addition to their own children. Individually occupied households are predominantly maintained by unmarried men.

5.3.2 *Class*

In order to grasp the diverse interests in Magobbo, it seems rewarding to categorize the various classes within the village. I identify six of them, which similarly existed preceding the outgrower scheme: Peasants, *farmers*, businesspeople, *commoners*, employees, and *pieceworkers*.

First, most people in Magobbo would fall into the category of ‘peasant’ or ‘grower’. This class is composed of people obtaining parcels of land or cultivating their crops on their family’s farm. It constitutes what could be designated as the peasantry in Marxist theory. Hence, my definition of the term ‘peasant’ would be a person growing crops mainly for subsistence and possibly surplus sale when available. The peasantry could be argued to constitute the largest class in

Magobbo, because nearly all households own or rent plots and for subsistence farming. Maize is the most important grain by a large margin as it provides for the staple food. A wide range of other crops is further cultivated for home consumption, though the meaningfulness in terms of consumed amount and value for sale is low compared to the staple. In many cases, if maize yields are good enough, excess produce is sold. The scale and the success of these operations vary immensely depending on the available farmland and its quality and location. Although the settlement committee tries to maintain its oversight over plot holding to a degree, ownership, rent and usage rights of land are mostly not formalized, apart from landholdings of registered *farmers* which are defined as a separate class further below. Disputes over demarcations of informal plots arise frequently among growers.

In addition to growing crops, many peasants keep livestock, though the extent differs between households. Possessing animals is relevant not only for subsistence, but can turn out to be crucial for resilience, since they can be a source for fast cash in times of need. A rich variety of livestock is held: Most prevalent are presumably flocks of chicken, but other birds such as ducks, pigeons and turkeys are kept as well. Some households herd goats, sheep, or cows. Cattle holds cultural value for the tradition of slaughtering cows at funerals and weddings and many households obtain herds of around 20 animals. Pasture is provided by the settlement on communally shared grazing areas. Certain actors specialized in cattle have reportedly owned more than a hundred cows in the recent past, though I could not corroborate such large numbers during the field work. However, there seems to be an increasing trend towards people selling their cattle or moving it out of the village due to insufficient pasture.

As mentioned above (5.2.2), I use the term *farmer* as a specific classification distinguished from the notion of ‘peasant’, because *farmers* compose the land-owning class registered with the District Council. They can be further divided into *cane farmers* and *non-cane farmers*. These two groups of *farmers* rely on different modes of production, considering *cane farmers* do not grow anything but rather solely receive dividends according to the share they hold in the outgrower scheme. The remaining *farmers* are the household heads registered as landowners of (relatively) large plots which are mostly managed as family farms. The main crop of the *farmers* outside the scheme is maize which is used for subsistence and surplus sales. Hence, one could argue that these *non-cane farmers* are part of the peasant class operating on a comparably large scale. Yet, the categorization of *farmers* as a separate class does cohere because they are the

ones holding control over the means of production – the land – as well as a monopoly on active and passive political rights regarding the important committees (see 5.2.2). In consequence, they form part of the local elite, both politically and economically. Not all *farmers* are equally wealthy and powerful though, because some share their plots or dividends with others, particularly siblings. In effect, some only hold comparably small shares or plots.

The class is growing in size due to the institutional arrangements of the sugar cane scheme. Reasons thereof are that *cane farmers* initially were only allowed to possess four to six hectares in the scheme and consequently some of them decided to register multiple family members during the scheme’s establishment, inducing an increase in separate landholdings. Further, the hectarages in the scheme are usually divided among heirs. These divided plots in the scheme are often not formally listed, but the registered *cane farmer* transfers a fixed part of the proceeds to relatives with whom the income is shared. This practice leads to a growing group of informal *farmers*. The class mostly encompasses men, though Rocca (2014) shows that a considerable number of women have become *farmers* through inheriting shares in the scheme following their husband’s decease.

A further class comprises the merchants or businesspeople who specialize in specific goods and services they sell in local and regional markets. This class, composed of men and women alike, generally owns the means of production for – or at least controls the exclusive knowledge on – the produced commodities but is quite diverse and varies across a wide socioeconomic spectrum. Some merchants and service providers manage to live relatively well off their businesses and even employ small numbers of workers. At least three shop owners and a car mechanic in Central could surely be included here. One could argue that the *farmers* and the most successful businesspeople could both be seen as sub-classes of the petty bourgeoisie. However, the interests between them are still distinct enough to treat them as separate groups.

Supposedly the most significant group of businesspeople are fundamentally growers who specialize in certain crops or products which are in demand because not every household produces enough to sustain its own needs. These merchants usually provide relatively labor-intensive commodities which can be produced on small plots. Examples are vegetables like tomatoes, sweet potatoes or groundnuts and livestock, especially chickens and goats. There has been a recent uptake in fish-farming; it remains to be seen if this is a long-term trend. Other homemade products such as pastries are offered in the local market. People who sell goods do

so either by going door to door or selling it at the small marketplace at Central – which for some reason seems to be reserved for women. Self-employed service providers living in Magobbo obtain a role of comparatively limited importance for the local economy as they are not many and mostly work for outsiders.

I argue that *commoners*, meaning people who depend on common-pool resources to make a living, constitute a further class. This occupation consists of selling products and therefore *commoners* could be classified as a sub-segment of the class of businesspeople. The difference, however, is that the *commoners* do not control the means of production on which they rely for their livelihood since they produce commodities made up of communally owned or controlled resources. The most important commons-based livelihood strategy is charcoal production, which is prohibited by the state due to deforestation. Other examples are fishing in nearby streams, firewood collection – mostly done by women for their own households without monetary compensation – and certain niche handiwork such as the weaving of baskets and brooms from palm leaves (see Fig. 7). An important common-pool resource which does not fall neatly into the outline presented here is pasture because *commoners* typically remain on the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum and only middle to better-off households can afford to farm larger livestock, particularly cattle.



Fig. 7: Elijah preparing palm leaves for basket weaving, Central. DL, 16.03.2021.

Concerning the working class, I distinguish between employees and day laborers – or *pieceworkers*, to use the terminology dominating in the local context. I deem this distinction important because while employees range from low-paid general laborers to better-off supervisors, compared to *pieceworkers* they at least have the security of a steady income over a certain period. Employees mostly procure jobs in the companies of the sugar industry surrounding Magobbo, with few exceptions of jobs in local businesses. In terms of employment in the sugar industry, there are further divisions between seasonal and permanent jobs. Most jobs are seasonal; the working season starts from April, when harvesting is taken up and ends in December at the beginning of rain season, when production ceases (see 5.3.1). Hence, seasonal contracts last for nine months or less – depending on the task – and include all chores which are directly connected to the production process. Rocca (2014, 66), regarding labor patterns at Nanga Farms, lists casual labor as well, though its significance pales in comparison to the other categories because the income generated is modest and casual jobs in rain season are often attained by idle seasonal workers. Permanent positions are occupied all year, though are far from secure jobs since contracts are renewed every year, even for higher positions such as supervisors. Both men and women are employed in the sugar sector; nonetheless, the industry hires significantly more men than women, a trend which increases exponentially with jobs of higher quality. (Rocca 2014; 2016)

The class of *pieceworkers* lives from daily labor provided locally by other households. Commonly, a *pieceworker* would wander around the community, going from door to door, asking at the houses of their – often better-off – neighbors for tasks they may help with for a one-time compensation. Once a suitable assignment is found, the two parties negotiate a price for the piecework. Tasks may include constructing, gardening, harvesting or any other undertaking requiring physical labor. A relatively diverse group relies on occasional daily labor, as some of the peasants and even *farmers* with smaller plots may resort to piecework if household resources are in danger of running out. Daily labor is mostly a male occupation, though women may sporadically carry out piecework as well. The hard core of *pieceworkers* is a group of young to middle aged men, living from day to day, often prone to alcoholism. Many *commoners*, such as charcoal burners, frequently turn to daily labor. It should be noted moreover that *pieceworkers* and *commoners* generally dwell on the lowest socioeconomic strata and many could be described as living in precarious conditions and extreme poverty.

Class	Livelihood	Socioeconomic strata
Peasants	Subsistence farming and sale of surplus	Low to middle
<i>Commoners</i>	Production of goods based on common-pool resources	Low
<i>Pieceworkers</i>	Daily labor	Low
Employees	Fixed employment	Low to high
Businesspeople	Selling goods and services	Low to high
<i>Cane Farmers</i>	Dividends from sugar cane scheme	Middle to high
<i>Non-Cane Farmers</i>	Land Ownership, Maize Farming	Middle

Table 1: The classes summarized with livelihood strategy and tendential socioeconomic standing relative to the local context.

5.3.3 Diversification

The theoretical categorization in the previous chapter (5.3.2) might help to identify class interests and investigate particular outcomes and (dis)advantages of the sugar cane scheme for specific groups. However, for most actors in Magobbo, depending on a singular livelihood strategy does not suffice to maintain proper sustenance. For this reason, almost all households diversify their economic operations by participating in different activities across the classes outlined above.

For seasonal workers, secondary livelihood systems are essential due to the 3-month layoff during rain season. Mutinta Bbuku, a young woman who grew up in Magobbo, packs sugar at

the factory of Zambia Sugar during the production season. She lives in a room close to the factory. Her case reflects why investing in a business can be the best option to get by in the period during which she remains unemployed:

NM: Does it mean you have been saving from April to December like a hundred Kwacha each month for those three months you are not working?

MB: You can't, because there is the family. Maybe there is a funeral, you should help. There are friends that don't have a job; they ask for money. [...] It's too hard.

DL: How did you manage to survive these three months when you don't have work?

MB: I have a small business. [...] In December after I got my payments, I got a bunch of shoes and I sold them. [...] I survived.

NM: With the same money she got from the shoes.

DL: This business you only do when you're on leave?

MB: That time I was still working, but that small business helped me a lot. Now I have food. I knew that when I stop working, I would suffer. That's why I put my money in my business. So, when someone gave me a hundred Kwacha, I get maybe 10kg of food. Maybe relish, too.¹⁷

Mutinta contends that for her as an employee, there is an expectation to contribute to the family's finances. She has two children cared for by their grandmother in Magobbo, aggravating her moral obligation to provide support for the family. Multiple claims and expectancies and the ensuing financial pressure put her in a position in which saving anything from her modest salary becomes all but impossible. The investment into her shoe-vending venture mitigates these demands to a degree; after investing, she ceases to possess money likely to be demanded by various claimants while the assets acquired can be sold off and generate income during the period in which her primary occupation is suspended. The business would also reduce the stress she would endure if she lost her job, taking into account contract renewal is never certain. In any case, Mutinta frames the unpaid phase as a looming threat for her sustenance which she must circumvent through secondary occupation.

¹⁷ One US-Dollar (USD) amounts to 22.7 Zambian Kwacha (ZMW). Source: <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter> Retrieved 04.07.2021

In contrast, Trinity Makumbi, working seasonally in the cane fields as a pivot operator for Zambia Sugar, labels the intermission as favorable since he is able to put more effort in to his lucrative poultry enterprise:

I work from April to December. That itself gives me an advantage. When the contract comes to an end in December, in that three-month period January, February, March, that's when I'm very much available for the poultry project.

Even though Trinity explicitly prioritizes his employment over his other economic activities, he assesses the downtime positively because it enables him to manage his subsidiary endeavors. Apart from the poultry house he manages, he grows maize and vegetables on a small plot which he plans to expand and improve by installing an irrigation system. Growing crops next to other occupations is very common in Magobbo; all actors we encountered diversify their livelihood by way of subsistence farming, albeit to vastly differing degrees. Especially the better-off households keep diverse livestock and grow maize as well as other crops.

For marginalized households and individuals, piecework serves as a fallback option in times of need. Notably, *commoners* with insecure livelihoods are frequently entangled in daily labor. Within the peasantry depending on maize farming, planning is crucial in order to avoid shortages due to which piecework has to be taken up. Some small-scale peasants frequently sell all their produce once they harvest and consequently have to rely on piecework in later stages of the year to secure their nutrition. Other households manage to do relatively well solely through farming if they can prepare and adhere to a proper budget for the year after harvesting, provided the yield is decent. However, if the output is insufficient even for home consumption, then household members – often primarily the men – try to find seasonal employment wherever possible. The harvesting seasons between 2017 and 2019 were particularly deficient because of droughts and even relatively better-off *cane farmers* like Euters Chilimba had to find employment by any means:

You know, life in this area it is very tough, it is very difficult. If you don't have food, you cannot manage. I had managed to go to other provinces, like Central Province. I'd go there to look for employment. For my family. So maybe I can manage my family. I had to move myself from here to Central Province. That's where I was working from [...] for a year. [...]

Once more (see 5.1), Euters' story exhibits general hardship in Magobbo and better alternatives for him elsewhere. His case exemplifies how households have multiple fallback strategies

working as safety nets when sustenance becomes difficult. Further, he implies a moral duty to provide for the family falling on him as the household head. After working as a chief security supervisor in a private company throughout 2019, Euters returned to Magobbo, laying down his employment and focusing on the family farm once again.

In summary, livelihoods in Magobbo are very dynamic and based on multiple pathways for survival because often no one occupation ensures sufficient resilience in order to secure one's subsistence. Thus, it can be noted that generally the better-off households tend to be more diversified since a multiplicity of livelihood strategies helps to achieve higher resilience. Conversely, households with less diversification are more inclined to be destitute and more vulnerable to shocks and crises.

The complex economic entanglement in diversification diffuses class consciousness and may aid to explain why some actors may at first glance act against their apparent interest. Hence, an approach to class taking diversification into account may supply a more nuanced analysis of prevalent ambitions and subsequent behavior.

6 Sugar Cane: A Messiah?

6.1 The Outgrower Scheme

As outlined above (5.1), in 2005 a small group of *farmers* took the initiative to consult and request Zambia Sugar to be included in the planned expansion. After the grant from the EU and the other loans for the outgrower scheme in Magobbo were secured, the Magobbo Cane Growers Trust and an interim committee were formed in 2007. In negotiations, experts determined the catchment area best suited for sugar cane cultivation, although Kalonga was excluded due to the project's scope. According to the Kalongans we spoke to, promises were made since the beginning to expand the outgrower scheme into the section, but no related steps have occurred yet.

In order to create one single farmable block, 64 households were relocated by the settlement committee. While the resettled *farmers* managed to obtain a loan enabling them to rebuild their houses, relocated people from other classes were not compensated for the demolished buildings, according to statements of our informants. Because the EU representatives demanded for benefits across the community, a requirement was included that each share in the scheme had to be sized between four and six hectares. *Farmers* holding land within the catchment area were to exchange – ‘swap’ – equally sized portions of land with other landowners in the community. (Matenga 2020) While the swapping process did enable *farmers* across sections to gain access to the scheme, many *farmers* simply divided their land into four to six hectares each for their children and siblings, who were resultantly registered as *cane farmers*. Matenga (2020) further reports outsiders from Mazabuka town grabbing shares as well.

Initially, it was agreed that newly acquired Zambia Sugar subsidiary Nanga Farms would manage production due to the inexperience of Magobbo farmers in sugar cane until enough knowledge was acquired by the farmers to manage the cultivation processes autonomously. The freshly incorporated Magobbo Management Company was supposed to facilitate the transition of production and a board which would run the operations was intended to be formed with representation by both the Magobbo and Mazabuka Trusts. Since the first planting in 2010, neither has the Magobbo Management Company started operating nor has a board been composed; both bodies seem irrelevant at this point. Interests of Magobbo's *cane farmers* are represented solely by the Magobbo Trust. Nanga Farms still remains in charge of the entire

production and pleads for a transition soon to come but currently no steps taken to induce said process are observable. (Nanga Farms Plc. 2018) Because bank loans are to be repaid until the 2050s, Magobbo farmers are bound to the outgrower scheme for another 30 years. (Compare: German and Parker 2019; Matenga 2020; Rocca 2014)

Payments to the *farmers* are transacted in the form of monthly dividends on personal accounts. Since the plots are not demarcated, the *farmers* do not know exactly where their respective hectares are and hence, it is more sensible to think of the *farmers*' portions in the scheme as shares rather than physical plots. The amount of dividends depends on the hectareage the *farmer* in question possesses, total tonnage produced, a price for sucrose fixed yearly through negotiations between the smallholders (including Kaleya) and Zambia Sugar and the deductions made for taxes, loan repayment and service provision and management by Nanga Farms, among others. The deductions accounted for by Nanga Farms are by far the largest because they include the bulk majority of costs linked to production. For the non-productive period from January to March, the Magobbo Trust committee manages a buffer account on which it is supposed to save the necessary financials to continue paying the *farmers* a monthly amount. The buffer money covers certain further expenses, such as the upkeep of Trust-owned vehicles or services to be paid by the Trust during the fallow season.

Though it is difficult to retrospectively disentangle the happenstances during the negotiations, it is likely that most of the institutional arrangements concerning the Magobbo outgrower scheme were born out of top-down provisions – an assessment which is shared by Matenga (2020). The author moreover holds that the negotiation process was shaped by asymmetrical bargaining power between the firm and the smallholders and that possible knowledge gaps led to uninformed agreements by at least some of the *farmers*.

6.2 “The Messiah came to die for us”

Many accounts expressed by local actors, especially the *farmers*, regarded the sugar cane project as very positive, hinting at increased welfare and local development. Trinity Makumbi, the pivot operator with a poultry business (see 5.3.3), does not own shares in the scheme himself but is part of a family of *farmers*. He is the proud caretaker of three hectares of sugar cane registered in the name of a sister who lives in Lusaka, meaning he represents her in shareholder

meetings. Asked about whether the sugar cane scheme is a good thing for the community, he voices strong support for the scheme:

The sugar cane project came as, if I can put it this way, a Messiah. [...] We are all happy because the Messiah, Jesus came to die for us. So, this project, it's a good one. I will tell you why. Before the sugar cane project, many were involved in cotton and maize farming. But at the end of it all, after selling cotton, the profit was not enough. In terms of maize, maize was not grown in bulk so you can supply enough. So, even maize was not doing well.

With the metaphor of the outgrower scheme as a savior in times of great misery – a Messiah – Trinity puts his finger on the desperation permeating throughout the village in the early 2000s: Cattle diseases had stripped the peasants of a primary source of subsistence, cotton ceased to be profitable and a combination of climatic irregularities, land pressure and consequent soil degradation made exorbitant reliance on maize increasingly risky (see 5.1). In this despairing situation, the promise of development through the sugar cane scheme apparently sparked hopes for the beginning of a new era of ongoing progress and prosperity in Magobbo. Hence, it is in this light the characterization of the outgrower scheme as “the Messiah [who] came to die for us” must be viewed. The strong religious connotation further implies a notion of development which imposes itself on the local context from the outside, instead of a process happening within. Trinity continues:

But upon the start of the project, as I speak, many of the farmers that [...] own some hectares in the project, [...] if not all, [...] have built houses that are of modern structure. Not like a long time ago, when they used to live under thatched houses. Not these iron sheets, but thatched houses. Not even cemented ones but [made from] mud. Upon the arrival of the project, the accommodation of the farmers has changed. So, we are talking of the basic needs of a human being. We are talking shelter, clothing as well as food. For shelter it means that at least you're covered. And it is because of the arrival of this cane growers project that many have electricity in their homes. Many also have access to information. They have TVs and radios. They even have fridges. At least their lives improved.

Hegemonic concepts of modernity and development resonate in his account as he indicates strong symbolic value of attributes grasped as progressive. On one hand, improvements such as ‘modern’ architecture and technology elevate the status of the households in possession of such assets. The scheme is thus labelled in positive terms because it enables these changes towards a ‘modern’ living standard. On the other hand, traditional features like thatched houses made of clay are perceived to be ‘primitive’ and associated with low social standing.



Fig. 8: Households in Woodlands containing sleeping units (left) and traditionally thatched kitchen units (right). The latter have been replaced by more ‘modern’ structures since the picture was taken. DL, 05.07.2018.

With the reference to basic needs, Trinity further evokes a human rights discourse closely linked to dominant development narratives. Note however, that in the beginning of the quote, Trinity only includes *cane farmers* in his consequent predication. He proceeds by emphasizing upgrades in their income:

And when it comes to their earnings, it is known that only that person who is employed in government is the one who will receive something at the end of the month. But upon the arrival of the project, it is another story. Many of the farmers here, they are not educated, but they get something at the end of the month as if they are employed by the government. So, they’re getting something at the end of the month, better-off than they used to be longtime ago. So, the project has come as a Messiah, like I said, people are getting something at the end of the month. They are taking their children to school, smoothly, unlike longtime ago. The project is a nice one. Just like I said, in shelter, they’re using the same money to buy food, buy clothes. Many even buy cars. Transport is no longer a big issue. So, the project is a very nice one. The project is a very, very, very nice one.

In this last section of the quotation, the miracle Trinity refers to becomes visible: Despite obtaining very little cultural and social capital, the *farmers* suddenly gain salaries otherwise reserved for government workers, which was unimaginable prior to the outgrower scheme. By his reasoning, Trinity frames the sugar cane project as gracefully saving Magobbo from its precarious state. Although Trinity’s enthusiasm is not shared by all informants to the same degree, the *desiring machine* surely gained significant momentum with the establishment of the scheme, since development narratives dominate local perspectives.

Throughout the village, the accumulation of capital in form of assets conforming Trinity’s description can be observed though they are mostly restricted to *cane farmers* and their

households. He does not mention that acquirement of assets has stalled in recent years due to a decline in income, which is the topic of the next chapter (6.3). Another highly significant local trend Trinity notes is increased focus on schooling for the following generations. The tendency that can be registered is the average level of education in Magobbo decreasing drastically corresponding to higher age even for the generations going to school prior to the outgrower scheme. In coherence with notions of modernity and development, education is perceived to be important. The higher available income for *farmers* allows to invest more into their children's schooling. Ensuring possibilities for the youth to be educated enables them to generate cultural capital which in turn may be a long-term investment, since moral duties oblige successful offspring to financially support their parents.

However, gains are unequally distributed between and within households: The shift from subsistence farming and selling surplus to an economy based on a cash crop increased the cash flow substantially at the expense of food production. At the same time, it concentrated the income in the hands of the household heads and possibly mitigated the creation of self-reliant income by less powerful family members through the restriction of access to farmland. The *cane farmers* are the main beneficiaries of the changed institutional framework because they obtain exclusive control over the dividends. While *non-cane farmers* are the landowners of their respective plots, the power they hold is moderated to a degree because distribution is not as centralized since the act of harvesting makes the income visible and tangible and therefore more open to claims by others. In terms of employment creation, again the *farmers* are the ones profiting the most because there is an agreement between the Magobbo Trust and Nanga farms that each registered shareholder's household may choose one person for paid employment by Nanga Farms to work in the sugar cane fields each season. A practice has developed that *cane farmers* offer this employment opportunity to members of other households in exchange for a one-off payment between three and four thousand Kwacha, which is around a third of the total income generated by the seasonal job. In conclusion, the monetization of Magobbo's economy leads to a drastic increase in bargaining power for *farmers* as opposed to other groups as they monopolize control over the main source of income.

6.3 Decline in Returns

Albeit the praise of the outgrower scheme by the *farmers*, they complain of returns having declined significantly after the first three years. Simon Mutinta, a *cane farmer* who has served

in the executive of the Trust committee during multiple terms and is often at the forefront when it comes to local development endeavors, reports that currently no one among farmers is content with proceeds from the outgrower scheme and some even suggested that going back to rainfed farming may be a more profitable alternative. Some months, dividends had been as low as 259 Kwacha per hectare, which the *farmer* designated “a disgrace”. (Pers. comm. 14.04.2021) Euters Chilimba similarly expresses:

Things are worse, worse than worse. Conditions are worse. You know even those workers who are working in that project, they may get maybe 1’700 [Kwacha] every month, but the farmer may just get 400. [...] Sometimes 200 per hectare. [...] Yeah, we can’t see any good things. The conditions are bad, for now.

The comparison of the *farmers’* dividends to the salary of a general worker hints at class interest because the statement implies that *farmers* as owners of the means of production are supposed to gain more than the laborers. Hence, the decreasing income threatens not only financial well-being of *farmers* as individuals but also their social standing as a group. Further, the “worsening of conditions” Euters describes indicates a relative powerlessness to self-reliantly change the circumstances due to heteronomy in the contractual arrangements on one hand and happenings beyond reach on the other. A possible solution the farmers propose to relieve this state of helplessness is hiring a manager, which will be discussed below.

Multiple factors seem to be at play for the decline in proceeds; the various actors express numerous explanations to clarify the reasons for the decrease. One rationalization of the issue is environmental degradation due to the practice of ratooning: Sugar cane does not have to be replanted every year; a portion of the stalk – the stubble – can be left in the soil to enable another growing season. This process can be repeated multiple times and significantly reduces costs by circumventing the steps of ploughing and planting. Encyclopedia Britannica (Yamane 2019) notes that cane is usually replanted after three cycles because the yield decreases each season. Replanting is necessary, otherwise soil fertility declines and the crop potentially becomes more susceptible to pests and diseases. Regarding Magobbo, *farmer* Foshane Namwasy points out:

The sugar cane we planted in 2010, after five years, we started replanting. [...] From 2010 to date is a long period. Some fields are not yet replanted. The yield is going down. Some fields are replanted but some are not. [...] There is a difference leading to a challenge. No wonder payments are [going up and down] like a graph.

The planned replanting cycle in Magobbo is five years, but because the *farmers* decided not to replant all fields at once, some are still not replanted. Further, soil structure in Magobbo is not as favorable to sugar cane as initially anticipated. The combination of deteriorating harvests and increase in production costs due to replanting gives one answer to why returns were better in the initial years and have decreased and remained unstable since. In the long term, intensive sugar cane cultivation might potentially cause soil degradation and lead to continuing downturn in yields. (Wood 1985) In order to address declining soil quality, Nanga Farms plants sunhemp as a soil improvement crop before replanting. (Nanga Farms Plc. 2018)

However, other reasons for the low dividends seemed to be more prevalent among *farmers*. The main explanation was that deductions by Nanga Farms are inflated due to management costs being surcharged on top of the expenditure. If commercial farmers pay 1'500 Kwacha per month for a cane cutter, the same worker costs the Magobbo *cane farmers* 2'500 Kwacha due to Nanga Farms' operation charges. Surcharges could be added not only to labor but to costs for inputs and services as well, though *farmers* reported that there was not sufficient transparency for them to comprehend all the deductions. *Farmer* Honest Chinkuli outlined the problem of not being in command over production:

Our main problem is being ruled by other people. Nanga Farms is controlling us. If we had our own manager, our salaries could be better because what we are getting this time around is not that good. It is as if we are being swindled in some way. [...] Once we have our own manager, we will stop being controlled. [...] Then things will be OK. [...] We have been demanding for our own manager but the people from Zambia Sugar responsible for bringing one are still delaying and we do not know the reason.

Not only does the *farmer* link low proceeds to heteronomy, being exposed to external control is a problem per se in his view. The position that Nanga Farms' supervision over the scheme is not acceptable in the medium term is widely maintained among *farmers*, not least because of the initial agreement that Nanga Farms taking over production would be a temporary arrangement. Hiring a manager to handle the transition of production is widely regarded among *farmers* as the solution to their problems since over a reasonable time period, control could be at least partially reclaimed, management costs reduced to a minimum and transparency enhanced.

Yet, the above quote exemplifies prevailing mistrust towards both Nanga Farms and Zambia Sugar. Honest’s brother Boldwin, also a *farmer* and vice chairperson of the Trust committee, voices suspicion that companies are deliberately delaying the handover process because they want to keep maximizing their own profits, using COVID-19 as an excuse for the discontinuation of efforts to provide the outgrower scheme with a manager. Despite their concerns, both brothers are optimistic that the corporation will bring in a manager to facilitate the transfer of production eventually. (Pers. comm., 11.04.2021) Mistrust is high inside the community as well, especially within the class of *farmers* and the local elite. Some *farmers* allege that members on the Trust committee misusing buffer money led to a decrease in dividends and most agree that transparency in the Trust is insufficient. These internal conflicts and their consequences will be discussed in detail in chapter 7.

Though macro-economic explanations were not voiced, they might add a central piece in the elucidation of the processes leading to the decline: The EU uplifting its preferential trade regime and the subsequent price erosion as well as a decline in world market prices since a record high in 2011, presumptively had an impact on the price per tonnage paid by Zambia Sugar. (EC 2019) However, we were never presented with long-term statistics on such prices as the *farmers* do not receive the corresponding documentation. In regard to the national economy, the continuous devaluation of the Kwacha against the Dollar in the last ten years and the subsequent inflation aggravates the economic situation because the relative purchasing power further diminishes.

Whatever the reasons for the low returns may be, Magobbo is stuck with sugar cane because loans are to be repaid until the 2050s and water rights are firmly in the hands of Zambia Sugar, enabling the company to disable irrigation for the *farmers* if they were to grow other crops. (Matenga 2020, 136f.)

6.4 Water Control and Resilience

Sentiments that overly reliance on rainfed maize farming had become risky even before the establishment of the sugar cane scheme due to soil degradation and erratic rainfall because of climate change resonated widely. Answering to the question whether he regarded the sugar cane project as a positive development, Cyprine Malambo, *cane farmer* and former school manager, brings up the concern of food security, saying: “The project is very good.”, and adding: “If I

become reckless in talking; if it never would have started, some people would not be alive right now. There was hunger here.” (Pers. comm., 12.04.2021)

There seems to be unanimous agreement that a positive effect of the outgrower scheme was the increased control over water in- and outflow through the inclusion in Zambia Sugar’s irrigation system channeling water from the Kafue River. The usage of the irrigation infrastructure is strictly limited to the sugar cane fields and water rights are controlled by Zambia Sugar. Hence, benefits of irrigation and increased resilience are limited to the participants in the outgrower scheme. Simon Mutinta explains that the most important thing about the outgrower scheme is water regulation: “With irrigation, you can’t go wrong. You can even calculate profit.” Rainfed farming, on the other hand, “is like gambling”, very unreliable. (Pers. comm., 14.04.2021)

Godson Mweemba, a *non-cane farmer* from Kalonga agrees that irrigation is the central advantage of the scheme and that the section “would be able to do great things” if its people only had irrigation. (Pers. comm., 17.03.2021) Whether the access to water would entail an inclusion in the outgrower scheme is secondary, according to him:

If only we would be given our own water, even if we were not involved in the sugar cane scheme, at least we could still use that water to irrigate the gardens. We could plant bananas for instance. We could do anything, as long as we have water.

Godson further holds that if given the choice he would rather not join the scheme – even though for him as a *farmer*, his power over income would increase, as argued above (6.2). He would prefer to independently grow his own irrigated crops because returns from sugar cane have been decreasing in recent years. However, his pleading to “be given” access to water shows that the Kalongan does not consider the section to be in a position to change the situation by itself, but rather solely through outside assistance. Since an expansion of the outgrower scheme is the best – if not only – prospect for access to irrigation in Kalonga, that is what the *farmer* tries to push for.

Just as important as the guaranteed inflow of water, which is crucial during droughts, are the drainages protecting the fields from flooding. Maize is particularly prone to floods, hence the heavy reliance on the staple in Magobbo heightens exposure to deluge. The increased outflow of water in case of high precipitation favors all peasants growing crops in the vicinity of the drainages, which notably excludes Kalonga. This rain season (2020/2021), downfall was too

heavy and Kalonga was hit hard by the floods. Deluge destroyed most of the maize fields in the section, devastating the outlook for household's nutrition status throughout the year. Godson expresses in this regard:

We would love to have drainages because we need them in rain season. For instance, this year, if we had drainages, our crops would have done well.

Since lasting drainages are labor- and resource-intensive constructions, once more, Godson sees the cluster as incapable of building the necessary infrastructure without help. This year, Kalongan community leaders have gone so far as to petition a nearby commercial farm to construct a drainage in the cluster not least because the section's flood issues are exacerbated by large-scale farms to the south which channel some of their excess water to Kalonga during rain season.

To sum up, barring enhanced income for *farmers*, the most important advantage of the sugar cane scheme is the control over inflow and drainage of water. The irrigation system of the sugar cane scheme provides for steady income for the *farmers*, even during droughts, while the drainages are heightening resilience for all peasants growing crops, especially concerning maize, except in the excluded Kalonga section.

6.5 'Trickling Down'

Other than the *farmers*, the class of local businesspeople is argued to be able to profit from the monetization of the economy induced by the outgrower scheme. Their benefits are far from assured, however.

The aspiring businessman Oughtfied Kalapa currently lives in Kalonga on his father's farm with his wife and their four children. He recently received his diploma in General Agriculture and works as a security guard at Nanga Farms. The family intends to move to Central, where they have acquired a small plot on which Oughtfied cultivates various crops at the moment. At a later stage, he plans to add a henhouse and a fishpond in order to expand and diversify his income, as well as create a circle of production whereas he uses chicken manure for the vegetables and as fish feed, in turn using the nitrogen-enriched fishpond water to boost the growth of vegetables and grow some of his own feed. These methods will enable him to set up a profitable business on the relatively limited land available, he argues. Concerning the

outgrower scheme, he stresses it may result in the prosperity of the whole community, if only generated income remains on a high level:

If that project is well maintained, it can bring a lot of cash exchange. Because [...] what we get from sugar cane is what is going to be used to buy what we are producing in these other businesses that we are doing. So, I think that we need to work together, as Magobbo people, to make sure that the sugar cane is not distracted and is kept very well and after harvesting sugar cane we sell, and the money will come back to the area. The money will be used to buy these other products, like chickens or the maize we are growing here, maybe in Kalonga where they are not growing sugar cane. So, there will be a cash flow. It will be just flowing here. I think we need to protect the area. We need to protect the production, so we have more money in our pockets. [...] We are not directly in the sugar cane project but indirectly, we are getting something from it. Indirectly, you get the point, right?

The argument is that of trickle-down-economics, which according to Oughtfied, among others, does hold up in regard to Magobbo's class of businesspeople. Service providers and merchants might profit from increased cash flows because they can sell their goods and services for higher prices if there is more money in the community and demand grows. At the same time, the reduction in available farmland reduces the competition supplying agricultural products, respectively production for home consumption, adding to the market power of vendors. Thus, as long as the cane fields generate enough benefits, commercial livelihoods are viable. Moreover, the higher the dividends for the *farmers*, the more may possibly 'trickle down' to the businesspeople. Yet, on the flipside, if income from sugar cane persists on an insufficient level, the mediocre cash flow in the village does not allow businesses to prosper. Danny, the car mechanic, discloses that the bulk majority of his current customers are not from Magobbo:

I am not seeing anything good in the sugar cane because people involved in the scheme are not paid well. If there was more money in the community, my business could be doing better as well. But since the money is not enough [farmers] are discouraged to fix their vehicles. Their money goes directly to their school going children and food for the family.

Because only a few dozen people in Magobbo own cars, Danny's service is highly specialized in the local context. Hence, if the income of the local elite is not on a high level and primary concerns such as nutrition and education are not secured, it is unlikely that benefits will reach his business. The probability is that most money is spent on other businesses, especially food producing ventures. Yet, for the whole of the enterprise sector, the effect is not substantial unless cash is abundant. Thus, for the businesspeople as the only class besides the *farmers*

perceived to possibly profit from the scheme, gains are limited as long as returns from the outgrower scheme remain modest and insecure.



Fig. 9: Danny's car repair in Central. DL, 14.03.2021.

6.6 Relative Price Change

6.6.1 Land Pressure and Population Growth

Due to the sugar cane scheme occupying more than a third (438 ha) of the settlement territory (1250 ha), available farmland becomes increasingly scarce. Settlement committee chairman Beli Chiwaya explained that the only remaining people who receive land in formalized proceeding are the offspring of Magobbo residents:

BC: This time, we only give land to the youth of Magobbo. If someone wants to leave the parents and decides to stay alone, maybe settles down and gets married.

DL: Is there still enough free land that you can give to the youth?

BC: This time it is almost finished. We are afraid that we will have problems because we keep animals. We are afraid that we will not remain with enough grazing areas.

It is important to keep in mind that to buy and sell land is not allowed in Magobbo. Renting farmland for one or more growing periods is permitted, however. An informal land market exists at least since the 1990s, as briefly mentioned above (5.1). Even though the settlement committee in collaboration with the District Council tries to deter land sales, the commodification of personal plots is difficult to suppress. However, because of fear that the communal grazing areas – already argued to be insufficient by some livestock holders and moreover threatened by the construction of a biofuel factory (see 8.1) – will further diminish

due to informal occupation and unsanctioned sales, the priority appears to be the protection of the land reserved for pasture. In our interviews and conversations with people of Magobbo, perspectives on the issue of land sales differed immensely: Some informants were quick to point out that buying land is prohibited when the topic came up whereas others readily disclosed that they have recently bought plots in Magobbo. Especially in Central, it seems that the trading of parcels is tolerated because it is considered a ‘business area’.

In addition to land becoming scarce, a significant increase in population was recorded: An EU report on Magobbo estimates the total population in 2006 at approximately 900 people in 73 households. (Matenga 2020) During his field work between 2013 and 2015, Matenga (2020) already puts the number of households at 289. Currently, the settlement committee’s secretary considers Magobbo to comprise about 430 households and 2’500 to 3’000 people. The reasons he names for the growth are a combination of high local birth rates and an influx in migrants looking for employment in the sugar industry. The steep incline in demographics has exacerbated land scarcity. For instance, in Artizan, some people had started building houses into the grazing area. Such practice was halted by the settlement committee, according to the chairman and the secretary, and the focus on protecting the pasture heightened.



Fig. 10: Houses and foundation in Central. DL, 16.03.2021.

6.6.2 Inflation

Since the establishment of the outgrower scheme, land prices in Magobbo skyrocketed. In Central, people reported that their small residence plots could be potentially sold for up to 20’000 Kwacha; similar amounts were mentioned for one hectare of farmland in other sections.

Someone had tried to sell a hectare in the sugar cane scheme for 30'000 Kwacha but was stopped by the settlement committee. Prior to the scheme such prices were unimaginable. As I explain in the previous chapter (6.5), the decrease in available farmland leads to limitations in supply of locally consumed goods. At the same time, the demand for these products is rising due to the growth in population and accelerating cash flow. Consequently, the prices merchants and service providers exact for commodities sold locally increased over recent years leading to inflation within the village. For instance, chickens were reportedly sold for 15 to 20 Kwacha prior to the establishment of the scheme, in contrast to 50 to 80 Kwacha today. (Pers. diary, 112) It has to be noted however, that this price increase corresponds approximately to the devaluation of the Kwacha; hence, once converted in other currencies the price trend could be considered more stable.

In summary, aside from the distributional modifications induced by the outgrower scheme, central changes in factors affecting local conjuncture are increasing land pressure, population growth and ensuing inflation. In the next chapter, I will discuss the consequences of these processes in regard to bargaining power for different actors in the local context.

6.7 Enclosure of Opportunities

Land scarcity particularly affects the actors I previously classified as the peasant class (5.3.2) because the scales to which they are able to conduct their farming operations are shrinking. As most of Magobbo's inhabitants belong to this class, emerging pressures are experienced by the community as a whole. Combined with low returns from the scheme, even *farmers* like Euters Chilimba sense being squeezed out of the area:

[In the sugar cane scheme] we don't have actual benefit for now. No good benefits in that thing. What we did last year, we managed to as far as other districts to search for a piece of land. So that we can do other things [...] where there's a good belt of rain like in Central Province. [...] [In and around the Mazabuka area, land] is not available. Even in Southern Province, it's very difficult to acquire a piece of land. It's very difficult. Once you find it, maybe it's too expensive. [...] It's maybe 20'000 [Kwacha] per hectare, so you cannot manage. But once you go to other districts, just 5'000 per hectare. That's what we did, us, in our family. We went that side and we acquired about ten hectares there. We are planning to take such things as those cows, goats, even sheep. We are planning to take them that side next year.

Euters has a particularly strong outward orientation, as is observable in his quotations cited so far (see 5.1, 5.3.3, 6.3). The difficulties of finding affordable farming plots in conjunction with unsatisfactory income levels from sugar cane and insecurities in maize yields because of erratic rain urge the *farmer* to look for livelihood options elsewhere. For the better-off households the process of emigrating in search of opportunities maybe slow and only partial, as is the case for Euters, because in essence it is a strategy of further diversification. Though the decidedly extraverted gaze of Euters’ is surely not the norm, it is evident that for *farmers*, the high prices and land scarcity combined with the involuntary external control and insufficient returns concerning the sugar cane scheme can induce an anxiety of enclosure.

In further regard to *farmers* and merchants, inflation may bring about a situation where although the income of households may be higher, expenses increase as well because people pay more for the goods they do not produce themselves. Hence, although cash flow is higher than before the scheme, even for some of the better-off, welfare and nutrition status might not have increased significantly since the establishment of the scheme. For *commoners* and *pieceworkers*, however, the outcomes might be dire: Inflation disadvantages the lower classes in particular since their products and services are less inclined to rise in value, decreasing their bargaining power as a consequence of the change in relative prices. Due to the higher population, more people in Magobbo are looking for jobs and the competition for employment rises, leading to more people having to rely on piecework and common-pool resources, which in turn become exhausted more rapidly.



Fig. 11: Producing charcoal in Canaan. NM: 10.04.2021.

Moreover, land scarcity and the steep rise in land prices in the informal land market in addition to climate change induced irregularities in rainfall and soil degradation results in many actors of the lower classes feeling confined; it becomes increasingly hard to maintain decent sustenance. In order to create an acceptable livelihood, capital is needed: To find employment one must either obtain academic diplomas (cultural capital), possess connections (social capital) or sufficient finances to pay a *farmer* to register one's name as a seasonal worker for his or her household. If one would like to cultivate a crop, one needs social or economic capital to gain access to farmland. Even if farmland is available, due to erratic rainfall patterns and degraded soil, fertilizer and other inputs are needed to generate a good harvest, demanding starting capital as well. Hence, increased monetization, inflation and changed distribution in conjunction with environmental factors and land scarcity within the village have led to an inability to access any resources without an initial mobilization of economic or social capital or the possession of cultural capital.

Prior to the sugar cane scheme, the described enclosure of opportunities without capital was not ubiquitous, because enough land was available for people to grow the crop thought to be most beneficial without the necessity of high capital investment. This development puts any actor without sufficient capital in a predicament hard to escape. *Commoners* and *pieceworkers* leading a hand-to-mouth existence are evermore unlikely to break out of the insecure existence focused primarily on simple reproduction. Peasants are vulnerable to shocks and contingencies; for instance, if there is desperate need for capital after an insufficient harvest, farmland might be sold as a last resort, losing the means of production which ensure the peasant's subsistence. These processes might lead to a slowly emerging vicious cycle of low to middle income peasants being deprived of the land as a basis for livelihoods in favor of the local elite. Without ownership of the means of production, they must be able to find decent employment to secure a respectable existence. Otherwise, their possibilities are limited to resort to exploiting common-pool resources which become progressively overused, relying on daily labor – which, if the class of *pieceworkers* swells, is increasingly rarified – or departing the village in search of a better life elsewhere. Whether differentiation between households results in such ‘slow grabbing’ processes in Magobbo remains to be evaluated in a future case study since such occurrences take time to evolve.

Considering local immigration, actors moving into the settlement are not allocated any farmland. The social capital of people who recently migrated to Magobbo is often low if they are not rooted in kinship ties and cannot count on care relations. If household members do not immediately find employment and do not possess the means to buy land on the informal market or rent a plot, they are forced to live off common-pool resources and daily labor. We observed during field work that some of the most precariously living households in Magobbo are composed of newcomers finding themselves in this situation.

6.7.1 Gendered Access

In conversations about the implications of the outgrower scheme, women brought up the erosion of livelihood opportunities, particularly regarding the difficulties of finding employment, with striking frequency. Yet, when we pressed the issue of whether the arrangement of the outgrower scheme contained gender-specific disadvantages for women, this assertion was mostly negated. Nevertheless, it was evident that women’s perception of the scheme is different from men’s, as connotations were typically less positive and often a sense of nostalgia for the times prior to sugar cane was expressed.

In accord with Rocca (2014; 2016), I suggest that women as a group are adversely affected by distributional alterations induced by the Magobbo outgrower scheme. The compulsion of having to invest capital in any endeavor to create an output is especially constraining for women. Their access to different forms of capital is restricted because of the institutional arrangements of the scheme. The concentration of income has taken place not only between but also within households, as argued above (6.2). Men are favored by being considered household heads and most pre-scheme *farmers* were male. Though men oversaw earnings before sugar cane, revenue generated by harvesting maize or cotton does require labor, often provided by the family and the amounts are rendered visible in the production process. But the payment of dividends directly to the *farmer’s* account makes it more difficult for other household members to lay claims to proceeds by starkly decreasing visibility and labor requirements. The gendered division of leisure activities and labor in the village further exacerbates women’s inability to access capital because possibilities of accumulation of social capital stay tethered to male domains.

Juliet Simoonga is a community health worker and housewife. She is usually paid for her job but the program financing her salary concluded in October 2020, leaving her to do the work

voluntarily for the moment. Juliet emphasizes the issue of women being disadvantaged in the community:

Men here in Magobbo, I can say that they are selfish. I don't know whether I can use that word, selfish. (chuckling) You will find that the two of you are living in a house. The man will go to work, get money every month. Then, as a woman, I'm forced to stay at home, cook for him and do other things for him. So, at the end of the month, you will find that the man is just moving around with his money in the pocket. He can't allow the woman to sit and make a budget together. They just do things on their own. [...] I find a very big challenge. [...] Whenever I find a little amount of money, he wants to share my money, while he is refusing to share his money. That one is a very big challenge. As a result, us women, we have to find our own things to do, so we can get our own money.

The allegation of selfishness not only highlights the tight control over household revenues by men but rather implies active inhibition of access to capital. According to Juliet, men assert claims over income generated by women in order to stay in command over resources and maintain control over their wives. Juliet also suggests that although there would be many businesses opportunities open for women, they lack the necessary starting capital because men hinder access to finances for women. Accumulation of different forms of capital is not only difficult in the first place, but defending it becomes an additional challenge.

An astonishing key moment underlining Juliet's point occurred when a woman expressed her frustration that it had become extremely hard to attain any capital one needed to be employed or to buy fertilizer for maize cultivation and about an hour later her husband declared interest in buying the motorbike we used for transport, saying he had 15'000 Kwacha – a small fortune – ready in cash. Both the concerned woman's and Juliet's households are polygamous. The distributional problems all women face are exacerbated in polygamous households by the fact that the husband is supposed to treat all wives the same, meaning he cannot spend anything on one wife without the other(s) receiving something of equivalent value. Hence, the incentive for men in polygamous relationships to keep money to themselves is even greater.

Juliet further refers to the unpaid reproductive labor women are expected to fulfil. All household chores as well as the upbringing of the children are obligations to be met by the woman in the household. The gendered division of labor leads to multiple layers of workload for women including many uncompensated tasks. For business- and working women, the multiplicity of liabilities makes it difficult to succeed in the long run. Moreover, the gendering of leisure

activities seems noteworthy in regard to social capital. While men often gather at social places like bars to drink and play pool, women are expected to stay at home and are frowned upon if observed drinking. Gendered recreation restricts women from strengthening their social ties with the men who compose the group holding economic power and thus curtails their possibilities at enhancing their social capital. However, a positive effect of these restraints for women is that alcoholism apparently remains an exclusively male problem.



Fig. 12: Boys playing pool on a self-made pool table in Artizan. Chrispin Chikani, 20.02.2021.

For young women in families able to afford it, education seems to be the central trajectory for empowerment. When asked about future goals, women aiming at higher education would typically indicate plans to leave Magobbo in order to find employment. 23-year-old Lisa Mubenshi recently graduated grade twelve and sees herself living elsewhere in the future. When asked for the reasons why she wants to depart Magobbo, she explains:

To look for work. Because here, to find something to do is very hard. [...] If you want to find an opportunity to work in sugar cane, you have to pay. As for now, others say it's four thousand [Kwacha] to find yourself start working there. You have to pay something. So, opportunities here are very hard and money is also very much hard to find.

Lisa's expression reinforces the assertion of gendered access to capital, demonstrating moreover that pressures compel women to leave the village in pursuit of opportunities. In addition, women's difficulties in finding employment in the sugar industry are heightened by the perception of sugar cane as a male crop – a general tendency for cash crops. Young, educated men were less prone to the idea of emigration as their chances to succeed locally by

procuring a qualified job in the sugar industry or build a prosperous business appear to be markedly superior due to the factors outlined in this chapter.

6.7.2 Health Provision

Juliet further voices concern about declining health provision within the village because of demographic pressure. The closest health facilities are in Nanga and Lubombo, both located at a distance over six kilometers from Central, posing problems for people who are not able to obtain adequate means of transport. The community health worker reports that the access for Magobbo's people to health was poor even before the sugar cane scheme but has worsened since:

I can say it is worse now because the population is increasing. Because there are some other people that are coming here because of this cane growing. There are many people that are coming here mainly to look for some jobs. So, those people have increased the population. It's a problem again. [...] Because there are more orphans, there are more vulnerables. And [...] there is no medicine at the clinic. Maybe they give you a bottle of Panadol, within two days it is finished. Yeah.

The community health worker holds that the most vulnerable community members are disadvantaged by the demographic change because despite the increased population, health facilities and services have not been extended. While the number of people depending on free or at least affordable medicine rose, the availability of pharmaceuticals and medical services remained on an insufficient level. Though not having a clinic in Magobbo is distressing across socioeconomic classes, the better-off can at least afford to buy medicine and are not contingent on free treatment.

7 Internal Conflict

In Magobbo, there is unanimous consensus that the changes induced by the outgrower scheme had drastic implications for the institutional framework, particularly the moral order. The settlement committee secretary Denny Cheelo affirms: “Our morals and culture have been violated due to money”. (Pers. comm., 22.04.2021) His statement underscores that once the scheme was established, the rapid monetization of the local economy resulted in the breakdown of institutions, creating a conjuncture in which rules were not clear anymore. Succeeding the first harvest, internal struggles started to erupt in the community as organizational modifications elicited altered behavior. The institutional void sparked both intra- and inter-household conflict.

7.1 Intra-Household

Informants report that in the initial ‘good years’ of the outgrower scheme when *farmers’* proceeds were high, divorces surged and families broke apart. On one hand, *farmers* would spend their income on women and drinking, provoking strife with their spouses. On *farmer’s* paydays Gasper’s bar in Central would become very busy, so that there would even be prostitutes from Mazabuka Town travelling to Magobbo on these events. Understandably, such behavior put pressure on the *farmer’s* marriages. Alcoholism became rampant among *farmers* who do not have other occupations and consequently no daily structure. Though prostitutes from town have ceased to come to Magobbo, prostitution in the village continues being practiced among community members in secret. On the other hand, some women reportedly started chasing after the nouveau riche *farmers*, leaving their husbands to become mistresses or second wives.

Another form of in-fighting within family structures presents itself in disputes among siblings over resources mostly concerning asset distribution after the decease of a household head. Such discord had undoubtedly occurred already prior to the outgrower scheme’s erection. However, the arrangements of the scheme deepen these conflicts: First, intensity of in-fighting increased with the monetization of income. Second, family members who do not live in Magobbo lay claims to inheritance of shares. The reason for the emergence of these demands is the notion that in contrast to farmland which should be owned by the one cultivating it because it needs the input of labor to become productive; in regard to the sugar cane proceeds no such effort is

involved and hence no institution binds land ownership exclusively to people living in Magobbo.

As shown above (6.7.1), restricted access to capital within households brings about gendered differences. Similarly, generational power gaps may cause intra-family friction. In essence however, the intensity of animosity within households seemed to be of secondary significance in comparison to the extent of struggles between singular actors or households in the community.

7.2 Inter-Household

In the wider community, a scramble over resources is apparent. Predominantly the local elite is involved in these contentions, presumably because low-class actors do not attain the necessary bargaining power to compete. Particularly contested are community development projects or simply ‘projects’ in the local diction. The institutions supposed to guard such projects from exploitation and subsequent decay consistently fail.

Trinity Makumbi declares – in an unrecorded conversation – that community projects pose a problem because they are frequently misused and often inadequately maintained. He gives two examples underlining his assertion, both regarding water tanks powered by solar panels pumping groundwater up into a receptacle for subsequent use for irrigation and drinking. There are several such water tanks spread throughout the community. One of them ceased functioning because of a minor issue with a power cable that could easily be repaired, but no one in the community is willing to put in the effort of fixing it, according to Trinity. Even if water tanks are working, he further claims, the people in charge of maintenance or having control by living next to the tank will misuse their position, restricting access to others by using all the water or lying about the container being empty. Hence, Trinity argues, private ownership is superior because the incentive for proper upkeep is given.

He uses the narrative of inoperative community projects in order to legitimize his own endeavor at receiving financing from a government community development fund to erect a water tank with solar panels which he wants to own privately for the irrigation of his plot. Though, he assured, people may draw drinking water from his tank. Trinity’s scheme and its justification set an excellent example for the underlying institutional failure which may be elucidated by deliberations of basic game theory: Where community development projects are concerned,

everyone in Magobbo suspects the other parties involved of putting something in their own pockets. Hence, it seems reasonable to do the same. Because these ventures are not expected to work anyway, they are seen as either one-shot games or repeatably exploitable though finite reservoirs, but not as a sustainable source of long-term income. Consecutively, a predicament not unlike the famous prisoner’s dilemma emanates: If each party abides by the same ruleset and cooperates, everybody profits, and lasting benefits may be achieved. However, if any one actor defects by misappropriating resources, the others lose out completely. In case multiple or all participants defect, the rule-breaking parties all gain on short-term, though to a lesser degree than in the scenario of total compliance.



Fig. 13: Members of the local elite (left) inspecting the fishpond in Woodlands alongside fishermen (center) and women (right). DL, 18.03.2021.

It follows that whether community development projects can accomplish long-lasting success within the local context depends on local actors trusting each other to follow the rules. In other words, the strength of the institutional framework determines failure or success of commons-building endeavors. In Magobbo, ever since the outgrower scheme was introduced, institutions are weak. When we conducted the interviews, it quickly became clear that the scramble for resources, mistrust and gossip have emerged since the outgrower scheme has been set up. Settlement chairperson Beli Chiwaya makes this point clear:

DL: Does a lot of this fighting happen over these new projects that are introduced?

BC: These confusions have been there since the time we started the sugar cane project. It has continued since then. Every time there is a new project about to be introduced, such things happen.

The sudden increase in monetary income capsized prevailing institutions which left an institutional uncertainty in which the powerful dominate. Thus, especially the local elite which profits most of the monetization of the local economy partakes in the struggles, while less powerful community members avoid animosity. Positions in committee executives (see 5.2.2) are crucial to exploit access to resources. Cyprine Malambo, former school manager and *farmer*, frequently obtaining powerful positions in committees, proposes that most people “take it as politics” and “don’t know what they are going in committees for”. (Pers. comm., 12.04.2021) Hence, he argues, many people holding important positions are severely overstrained by the actual tasks they face, rendering the work of the whole committee more difficult. Friction within committees occurs frequently as Cyprine mentions that he has “never seen a committee that finished its term with full membership”. (Pers. comm., 12.04.2021) Fellow *farmer* and former section leader of Central Lawrence Mwiinga puts it even more unequivocal when he declares that “people fight for committee positions just so that they can steal”, particularly having the Trust and development project committees in mind. (Pers. comm., 01.04.2021) Corruption in the committees appears to be all but expected: In a leadership meeting of the settlement, the speaker explained on committee structures that the rule of the treasurer not being surrogated by a vice has the purpose of knowing who to blame when money is missing.



Fig. 14: Fishpond harvest with attendance of the District Commissioner, Woodlands. DL, 18.03.2021.

With respect to the henhouses and the fishponds I was associated with in the early stages of the field work (see 4.2.1), we observed that control was almost equated with possession and the projects were considered to be in the hands of a few important actors respectively one extended family in particular. Both ventures were reported to be unlikely to generate lasting profit, which possibly hints at their exploitation by the caretakers. However, I will not provide a detailed account on these enterprises because their significance in the local context pales in comparison to the sugar cane scheme.

In regard to the local elite, actors raise numerous allegations against each other whereas partially conflicting narratives transpire. In particular, happenstances within the Magobbo Cane Growers Trust committee stand under high discursive contestation. In the next chapter, I attempt to summarize the main narratives on recent events within the Trust with the purpose of emphasizing the argument made in this chapter, illuminating the complex modalities of arising conflicts and their implications for the functionality of the institutional arrangements. I will further depict how internal frictions affect the *farmers'* capability to uphold their shared interests.

7.3 Magobbo Cane Growers Trust

When the Magobbo Cane Growers Trust was established in 2007, an interim committee oversaw preparations until the first elections and the first official Trust committee took office in 2011. Samuel¹⁸, who had been the chairperson for the interim but did not assume any position in the elected committee, became suspicious about two billion Kwacha¹⁹ which were not accounted correctly – according to his own statements. Samuel holds that he, among others, suspected that the committee executive might have embezzled these funds and involved lawyers. He asserts that it was an honest mistake because as it turned out, the – seemingly exorbitant – amount was owed to Nanga Farms as retention. Since Samuel had been at the forefront in the struggle against the committee, the incriminated chairperson sued him for defamation – though without success. The former vice chairperson serving on the accused committee held that Samuel had fabricated the story only so that he could reclaim the position

¹⁸ Name altered.

¹⁹ Converted, the amount adds up to approximately 100 million US-Dollar. That such a large number would show up anywhere in the outgrower scheme's accountancy is highly unlikely: A projection shows that it would take more than a century to produce the amount in proceeds for the *farmers*, assuming an average 2'500 Kwacha per hectare per month.

of chairman. If that would have been the intention all along, then it was successful because Samuel was elected as chair on the second committee in 2016. Merely after a few months however, he had to resign: He had used the Trust’s buffer money to cover lawyer’s fees and transport costs from the prior legal battles, sparking outrage among the *farmers*. Samuel departed under rising pressure, leaving the committee with only nine members instead of the usual ten (see 5.2.2).

In 2019, when the Trust collectively decided to use buffer money to fix a broken vehicle, it was detected that 185’000 Kwacha were missing and only 80 Kwacha remained on the account – as reported by the current vice chairperson of the committee. The executive, which oversees and has access to the buffer money, could not account for the disappearance, as various informants stressed. All four people who held executive positions at that point were collectively dismissed. The five remaining members assembled the new executive, leaving no ordinary members on the committee. At that point, some argued, elections should have taken place since decisions are only valid when a two thirds majority is reached, requiring the vote of at least seven committee members.

In conversations with some of the discharged executive members alleged of misusing the buffer money, they propose a different narrative. They argue that no money was stolen but rather legitimately used for certain expenses. The problem, according to them, is that the vast majority of *farmers* is uneducated and cannot comprehend the reports they receive from Nanga Farms. Thus, the discourse goes, since *farmers* are “in the dark”, they mistrust the committee members that do understand the processes and documents and claim that the latter are stealing. (Pers. diary, 105) Consequently, anytime the Trust committee is filled educated actors, conflicts emerge as they will be mistrusted and targeted with accusations. Hence, the educated refrain from participating in the Trust committee and current members are lacking knowledge for proper communication with Nanga Farms and Zambia Sugar. This powerful narrative simultaneously exonerates the charged and denounces the opposition. However, the only person apart from the accused to reproduce the narrative is the brother of the laid-off secretary. Phaniel Hankede, a trustee from the Mazabuka Trust confirms the story that the dismissed executive had failed to account for missing funds. He further informs that Zambia Sugar has instigated an audit on the events whose results are still awaited.

Because of the recurring discord, a constitution revision committee was set up in 2020 and the constitution was revised. In the new constitution, a clause was added that excludes people who do not hold at the minimum a ninth-grade certificate from enacting functions in the executive. The provision seemed to be included under external pressure from stakeholders such as the Mazabuka Trust and Zambia Sugar. The concerned article is highly controversial among *farmers*, and the constitution is contested because not many meet the requirement of having completed grade nine. If this constitution were to be accepted, only a handful of actors could run in elections for the executive. Subsequently, no valid constitution is in place at present. The current Trust committee, whose term ended several months ago, reportedly advocates the stance that the dispute on the constitution should be resolved before new elections can be held and thus surpasses its scheduled term of five years. The chairperson of the constitution revision committee claimed however that because his committee has been dissolved, it would be a time-consuming process to review the constitution once again. There were further allegations that the five remaining members of the Trust committee overstay on purpose and do not call for elections out of fear of being voted out of office. This ostensibly poses the problem that the committee cannot be removed because the chair is the only one eligible to call for a meeting during which a vote could be conducted.

The conflicts outlined in this chapter accentuate the importance of functioning institutions in contract farming arrangements. The composition of the Trust committee, which should ensure the smooth functioning in the outgrower scheme, seems to have impeded rather than supported operations during most of its existence. One of the initiators of the scheme disclosed that the first constitution in 2007 simply followed the one from the Kaleya outgrower scheme and was merely created as means to receive the grant from the EU. (Pers. diary, 137) It seems unsurprising that institutions never stabilized, and the resultant institutional uncertainties leave room for struggle between powerful actors seeking to exert their agenda.

The local elite was open to critically discuss these circumstances with me. Most *farmers* call for more transparency through better communication and better leadership, whatever the latter may comprise in detail. However, in the same conversations, they often claim that the periods during which they were in positions of power were the most prosperous and blame others for not being competent. Evidently, the mistrust among *farmers* reinforces the will to occupy committee posts, so that “everybody wants to be a leader”, as Lawrence Mwiinga expresses.

The contestation over assignments in an insecure institutional framework further aggravates internal conflict, reinforcing the outlined processes.

7.4 External Representation

The ongoing struggle among Magobbo’s *farmers* renders taking a unified stance towards external actors impossible. The existing asymmetries in power relation between the corporation and the Magobbo community are seriously deepened by local disputes. Even though *farmers* share strong common interest opposed to Nanga Farms and Zambia Sugar, their bargaining power is diminished because the divided group is not able to collectively organize and represent itself towards outside actors. Again, the predicament resembling the prisoner’s dilemma (see 7.2) presents itself: If only the internal disunion could be resolved and everybody would cooperate, the community would be in a superior position to defend common purposes.

As long as the *farmers* appear divided, potent discourses undermine their bargaining power immensely. Phanel Hankede, who represents the Mazabuka Trust as a stakeholder in the Magobbo outgrower scheme proclaimed in regard to the Magobbo Trust committee: “These people have issues”; and “they don’t respect their constitution.” (Pers. comm., 14.04.2021) Whether deliberate or not, his discourse implies strongly that the internal discord is the sole responsibility of the *farmers* and excludes outside influences from the equation. The statement that the committee members fail to respect *their* constitution implicitly neglects the top-down regime-building processes which resulted in the institutional breakdown and subsequent conflict – the “issues” – and imposes all accountability on the *farmers*. Such accounts blaming the Magobbo Trust for its inefficiency while disregarding the roots of the internal friction enact powerful persuasive discourses delegitimizing the autonomy of the Magobbo community. Correspondingly, Zambia Sugar reportedly halted efforts to find a manager for the Magobbo scheme reasoning that prior to filling this post, the controversy around the constitution should be resolved and a full committee should be elected. A number of *farmers* voiced suspicion whether Zambia Sugar was deliberately stalling in the search for a manager in order to keep their own profits up (see 6.3). In the COVID-19 pandemic, quarterly meetings with the *farmers* were suspended by the company, even when case numbers in Zambia were low. In consequence, transparency deteriorated even further. Zambia Sugar officials presumably are aware that decreased transparency fuels mistrust and conflict among *farmers*, but the discord serves the company’s interest in profit by eroding the Trust’s agency. The firm seems to be in

a comfortable position where revenue predominantly remains in its hands and it is simultaneously able to market itself as socially responsible through smallholder incorporation. Low benefits can be explained by the fact that the scheme is still in the phase of transferring production, which stalls because of local incompetence. However, Phaniel Hankedede revealed that Zambia Sugar is restructuring internally and seeks to establish a new position of outgrower manager, who would then oversee all smallholders. That person would further be responsible for the appointment of a manager for the Magobbo scheme.

Despite their differences, *farmers* are aware of the power deficiency caused by their in-fighting. Simon Mutinta fittingly declared: “In business there is no win-win.” (Pers. comm., 14.04.2021) He underscores that the Magobbo Trust needs to engage in constant negotiations with other stakeholders, especially Nanga Farms to secure a decent share of generated profits. He notes however, that this is not possible at the moment, because there is no good leadership or transparency in the Trust and illiteracy among farmers is a serious obstacle for communication. One suggested mitigation strategy against the lack of transparency was the translation of reports to Chitonga, which might significantly enhance the understandability of the documents. The most commonly voiced solution for the Trust’s issues is the employment of a manager. Filling this position is perceived as a crucial step in the direction of self-reliance in production for multiple reasons: First, the post is thought to provide proper representation vis a vis external actors, second, the manager could spearhead the transfer of production and third, unite Magobbo *farmers* because of the status as an outsider who is not prejudiced by existing mistrust. Generally, *farmers* are optimistic about the outlook of Zambia Sugar or other outside actors appointing a manager for them at some point. Honest Chinkuli locates the potential hiring with an outlook on lasting progress:

Sugar cane is good, but we need a manager. Step number one was maize; step number two was sugar cane. Step number three will be getting our own manager.

His tale entails an imagination of development processes which were induced by the sugar cane scheme. Honest pictures an evolution which does not move back but only goes forward, ever improving, step by step whereas the employment of the manager is the next stair on an ascension to prosperity. In Honest’s depiction, the notion of the *desiring machine* becomes visible: The development narrative reproduces itself through legitimizing new interventions based on the failure of previous projects.

8 Discussion

8.1 The Desiring Machine goes on?

Regardless of the negative consequences the outgrower scheme has brought for parts of the community, most Magobbo residents expressed a welcoming stance towards the sugar industry. Modernization was denoted positively by all our informants. Throughout Magobbo, the *desiring machine*'s creation of aspirations for development seems to be prevailing.

Isaac Mweemba's tale of how he left Magobbo in 1992 presents an instance exemplifying the *desiring machine*'s operations: Because of dire prospects, the maize grower went to Ndola, the capital of Copperbelt Province, in search of employment. His low level of education made it very difficult to find a job in the city. Because urban life without employment was troublesome, Isaac ultimately returned to Magobbo to go back to farming after twelve years in the Copperbelt. He expresses about his homecoming: “We [parents] have failed, at least now we send our children to school, so they can do better.” (Pers. comm., 02.04.2021) His choice of words indicates that he sees his very presence in Magobbo as a failure, framing the village as backward and a place where people do not remain by choice. He does hope however, that education enables his children to achieve an improved, more ‘modern’ life.

Another intriguing example poses a currently commencing endeavor by a private company erecting a biofuel factory which will ostensibly take up 200 to 250 hectares on the largest remaining grazing area, which encompasses around 300 hectares. The construction began in May 2021 and is currently in progress. According to predominant narratives, the previous settlement committee was consulted on the project and approved it, though government actors had already decided on the matter. Reportedly, the community did not have much of a chance to stop the construction, even if it had aimed to, because Magobbo is on state land. Yet, this narrative might be a tactic by the endorsing leadership to mitigate opposition. Most informants show an ambivalent position towards the endeavor: On one hand, they fear the loss of income and resilience provided by large livestock and on the other they recite the promise that the factory would produce employment opportunities for Magobbo's youth. Honest Chinkuli critically discusses the dilemma the new project presents:

There will be problems with the cattle. But again, there will be something good in the community because the children will have employment. [...] You know, us Tongas are very much into livestock

farming. We want to keep animals, we want sugar cane, and the project that is about to be introduced. But the main problem is where our animals will be feeding from. We cannot sell our animals because they help us in so many ways.

Despite the distressing forecast on cattle farming, Honest perceives the potential for local employment in the factory as a promising outlook for the next generation. Honest points out not only the economic value of cattle, but also its cultural significance in the context of ethnicity. The practice of herding and the traditional slaughtering of cows at special events is constitutive for Tonga identity, he argues. Honest problematizes the challenges the erection of the biofuel factory brings for cattle herding in terms of pasture scarcity, but accepts them with reference to aspirations for local job creation. In other words, the contestation exposes a contradiction between an effort for modernization and one to preserve a long-lasting traditional practice; the promise of future progress is reluctantly favored at the expense of a well-established common-pool resource with high cultural value.

It should be noted however, that local perceptions of myself as an academic from a ‘developed’ country might have exacerbated my informants’ positive attitude towards development. Nchimunya reports that as of July 2021, local opposition to the biofuel project reaches a point where the majority is against it, but the settlement committee holds a minority position in favor of the construction. Allegations of corruption towards the committee are being raised and apparently some actors confer on going to court over the issue. It seems that for many, despite the positive connotation of development, the *desiring machine*’s effects are not strong enough after all to legitimize the cession of the pasture, which has ensured the livelihoods of the previous generation(s) and still enhances resilience today, in exchange for the promise of employing a few youths. Nevertheless, in my opinion, chances of halting the building of the factory are slim because the construction already commenced.

Lastly, concerning development narratives, I argue that the ethical ramifications of someone in my position problematizing locally prevalent desires should not be ignored: Considering that I inherently enjoy the very status and power aspired to by my informants, am I not obstructing their pathway by projecting an improbability of their hopes’ realization in my academic work? In consequence to ensuing ethical deliberations, in accord with De Vries (2007) I would argue that communities labelled as ‘underdeveloped’ obtain a moral right to uphold their claims to the prosperity which development and modernization narratives promise to bring.

8.2 Weapons of the Weak

Due to the hegemony of development ideology and the complex web of diversification investigated in chapter 5.3.3, no clear tendencies of class struggle were discernable. Likewise, the conflicts described in chapter 7 should not be portrayed as a form of ideological resistance based on class interest because the contests are almost exclusively staged within the local elite. Though not strictly aligned along class lines, ideologically motivated gossip and the clash of narratives is observable at times. This is especially the case concerning actors of Kalonga who adopt discourses of moral claims pointed at the local elite specifically in Central. Narratives on the *farmers* being stingy and unwilling to use their economic power for the good of the whole community are expressed by numerous informants in Kalonga. It seems that Kalongans are employing *weapons of the weak* in the sense of Scott (1985), as they use ethical contestations within the moral arena in order to gain more inclusion in a community where scarce resources are becoming increasingly concentrated. The narratives do influence actors in Central; they regularly bring up the exclusion of Kalonga and the difficulties the section faces. Undoubtedly, the anticipated exposure to food insecurity faced in Kalonga due to the bad harvest this year momentarily amplifies these discourses.

Theft as a more visible form of *everyday peasant resistance* (Scott 1985) occurs regularly in Magobbo. Both goods owned in communal property in development projects and by private actors are targeted by thieves. In the three months of the field work, we heard of two notable heists: In the first week of field work, approximately 30 chickens were stolen from one of the two communal henhouses at a moment when most of the community attended a funeral. The second incident occurred several weeks later and involved the theft of two solar panels from one of the water tanks (see 7.2). Due to the sensitivity of the topic, data collection on the issue proved difficult. However, it is commonly claimed that stealing is mostly perpetrated by male youth from within the community. According to all consulted informants, theft had been just as frequent before the outgrower scheme was established. The same applies to poaching on the territory of neighboring commercial farms. Hence, theft cannot be interpreted as specific resistance within the context of the outgrower scheme. However, I suggest that financially motivated crime in Magobbo should be understood as a *weapon of the weak* in the context of the system of concentrated landholding which prevails since its founding: The political structure of the settlement favors men of middle to old age by giving *farmers* effective control

over land as the means of production in addition to exclusive political rights. Thus, youth are excluded from economic power and political representation, which might induce theft and poaching as a form of resistance. Interestingly, stealing sugar cane from the fields for consumption is perceived a trivial offense and sporadically committed by many relatively openly – barring healthy respect for the Nanga Farms security guards who may potentially impose fines or involve the authorities. Reasons for the modest social control against cane theft might include that there is no clear victim of the crime and chances to be caught are low. One could further argue that the practice presents an act of *everyday peasant resistance*.



Fig. 15: Evelyn preparing and David eating sugar cane, Woodlands. Natascha Flückiger, 05.07.2018.

8.3 Anti-Political Marketing

I assert that my findings accentuate the argument made by Büscher (2010) that neoliberal evaluation synthesizes particularly well with anti-politics because it renders all value quantifiable and exchangeable. If one ignores the complex web of socioeconomic consequences to the Magobbo outgrower scheme outlined in this work, and adopts a viewpoint strictly focused on the economic capital of the included households, the project could easily be labelled a success story: In contrast to the situation before Magobbo’s *cane farmers* started receive dividends from sugar cane, their mean income surely multiplied – even when considering the decline in returns – and the total value of assets they possess increased vastly.

Correspondingly, companies are able to selectively in- and exclude specific narratives in public self-evaluation of their endeavors to diffuse the gaze which may unveil practices prone to pose

severe image problems for the firm. Therefore, if terms like ‘inclusive business’ or ‘corporate social responsibility’ and purposes such as poverty reduction and food sustainability are taken seriously, it is highly important for donors, consumers, media and academia to remain critically aware of such issues. In regard to contract farming, it is essential to consider that these arrangements are not automatically fair, equitable and sustainable, but that each case entails complex entanglements and powers structures which contain a potential for exploitation.

The attention towards anti-politics and the desiring machine in ‘aidnography’, as Büscher (2010, 30) titles the field of research concerned with development aid, mainly focuses on the shortcomings of development interventions established by donors. The literature on how corporate players can utilize and influence development discourse for their own purposes, stays rather thin. Nonetheless, it seems that because of their potential to enable companies to simultaneously disguise unfavorable outcomes of certain projects and self-advertise, depolitization strategies might be of considerable interest for multinational corporations operating in ‘developing’ countries. Hence, it appears necessary that social scientists critically engage the topic and produce more in-depth analyses of the processes enabling powerful corporations to adopt what one might term *anti-political marketing* strategies.

With the emergence of evermore complex value chains and corporate structures, hiding unsustainable and unequitable practices requires ever less effort for multinational corporations, hence increasing the temptation to make use of such strategies. This is why the task to keep a close eye on these marketing practices becomes even more crucial.

9 Conclusion

The model on institutional change proposed by Ensminger (1992) in chapter 2.5 (Fig. 1) presents a suitable basis for an analytical summary of the outgrower scheme's effects in the local context: External pressures on resources, namely cattle diseases, climate change and soil erosion, resulted in a situation where due to growing subsistence insecurities, the ideological frame shifted towards a perspective labelling development and modernization as imperative. Consequently, local actors successfully sought inclusion in the sugar industry. The subsequent establishment of the outgrower scheme induced rapid change in production and simultaneously led to an altered environment influencing the relative prices. The enhanced control over water represents a technological advancement which heightened resilience but did not significantly affect bargaining power. I view the shift in distribution through outsourcing production merely as a modification of organizational arrangements within the local context instead of a factor of technological change. The monetization of the economy, increasing land scarcity and the population increase were the main external factors for the change in relative prices. The emerging pressures induced price escalations especially for farmland but also for goods and services. The local inflation prompted a considerable shift in bargaining power; tendentially, the relative position of the better-off is strengthened because their income rose in the process, while the socioeconomically disadvantaged lose bargaining power since access to land becomes limited and the commodities their livelihoods are based on gain value more slowly – if at all.

The change in organization and bargaining power in conjunction with the altered ideology induced a breakdown in institutions because the transformations occurred too rapidly, particularly the modification of distributional arrangements. Instead of terming the consecutively fractured institutional frame ‘institutional pluralism’, I would argue that the analogy of an *institutional vacuum* is more fitting, since it illustrates the nascent uncertainties and mistrust. Subsequently, the arising behavioral effects of powerful local actors scrambling for resources portray the inevitable implosion. In the aftermath of this shock, internal struggles undermine collective agency because the disunion diminishes the community's bargaining power in negotiations, aggravating the existing power asymmetry in favor of Zambia Sugar and other external actors. Considering the complex ramifications invoked by the Magobbo project,

merely declaring the outgrower scheme a win-win situation would not only be a simplification, but rather a deception.

From a public policy – or social justice – standpoint, it seems at least enigmatic, if not preposterous, that the EU provided a three million Euro grant in the name of inclusive business and poverty reduction for an infrastructure project which mainly benefits a highly profitable subsidiary of a British multinational corporation. In addition, such donor-funded development endeavors seem essential for the company chain’s marketing strategy by enabling the pronouncement of corporate social responsibility. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU only intensifies the obscurity. An investigation of the EU’s involvement in the funding of the Magobbo outgrower scheme would be intriguing, though it would entail an additional research project in the form of an anthropology of public policy, (Wedel et al. 2013) not attainable to a satisfactory degree within the scope of this case study. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the work presented here may complement an ethnographical account on EU development and donation policy.

My findings underscore the argument made by Li (2011) that the frame of capital-logic is unlikely to create situations which meet purposes of social justice, even if such is claimed, without state intervention. Yet, the question remains: If one accepts the point that interests of capital investment lay inherently diametrical to producing socially responsible outcomes, how might it be possible to inhibit its pernicious potential?

In any case, if serious devotion for aims of social justice such as poverty reduction and food sustainability is prevalent among policy makers, they are required to reject oversimplified win-lose paradigms and acknowledge the complexity of diverse impacts. Further, as top-down institutional requirements regularly fail, sincere attempts at bottom-up institution building are necessary. Social scientists must provide the groundwork to disentangle the intricate web of effects capital investment may produce in vulnerable populations.

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