

UJAMAA, A PHANTOM

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Introduction

Someone who was in Tanzania during the time of ujamaa and today reads about ideas of African Renaissance and Ubuntu cannot refrain from giving ujamaa experiences a new thought. From the end of 1974 until early 1979 I was a lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam, in the Mathematics Department. As an applied mathematician I was involved in methods of agricultural planning. I was one of the European lecturers at the university, who were inspired and challenged by the efforts of the young nation to find its own way of development. Tanzania wanted to be independent, to be neither under the umbrella of the West, nor of the East. I went there with high expectations of the views of the President, Nyerere, on human dignity and equality, the fight against exploitation and his ideas about education. In this paper the ideas of ujamaa and its implementation during the 1960s and 1970s are reviewed and I have attempted to draw some lessons. First, in a historical perspective, issues which influenced the development of ujamaa are discussed.

Tanzania became independent in 1961. During the first years of independence some successful initiatives were launched: a programme to eradicate illiteracy by adult education campaigns and free primary school education¹, the setting up of a free basic health care system and improved water supply. Tanzania had chosen for a one - party system. In the years before independence, the party TANU² had become very popular and was developed into a rural mass organization³. Its basic principles of equality, freedom and unity had a strong appeal. During the first elections, the party and its president received an overwhelming support from almost the whole population. The one-party system was justified by Nyerere as follows⁴. In the Tanzanian society consensus existed on basic principles. In such a society there would be no conflicts of interest. The democratic processes of decision making and development would be more effective in an one-party than in a multi-party system. The party was supposed to be a mass movement based on national consensus.

Industry and agriculture

As in many African countries, during a short time after independence the development of industry, even of heavy industry, was put high on Tanzania's

agenda. Many people thought that industrialization was the most important motor of development⁵. Tanzania was one of the first African developing countries to recognize that such ambitions were set much too high, and that it was a mistake to think that development starts with industry. There was a lack of technological know-how and skilled manpower. In the Arusha Declaration of 1967, in which important policy changes were introduced, a shift was made⁶. The development of Tanzania was to be based on agriculture. The country was to be self-reliant in food production and cash crop production would generate income for both farmers and the state.

For many generations, small scale farming has been the backbone of Tanzanian agriculture. Most farmers grow food crops for their own consumption and some cash crops like cotton, coffee or tea for extra income. In the colonial days⁷ the British frequently attempted to change the traditional farming system, for many reasons. They wanted farmers to participate in a market economy and supply food to the urban centre of Dar es Salaam. Moreover, they wanted to extract a surplus from the farmers to pay the colonial administration, infrastructure and welfare services. The colonial power was eager to make its colonial territories economically self-reliant. It was therefore necessary to increase agricultural production and to introduce improved modes of production. Several initiatives were taken in this regard: plantation agriculture, e.g. for groundnuts and sisal, private settlements employing African farm labourers, migration of wage labourers, and laws⁸ and rules to regulate land use and farming practices. The legal measures were strict⁹. If regulations were not respected, fines and short prison terms could be imposed. The coercion and the regulations interfering in farmers' traditional practice met a lot of resistance, which was one of the reasons why the party TANU received strong support. The plantation schemes were not very successful. The last years before independence many schemes and regulations were abandoned. The British changed their policy from the use of force to 'persistent persuasion' of farmers who showed an interest in change.

In the 1950s and 1960s a discussion developed on how a government could intervene in order to increase production by peasant smallholders. Two different approaches had their adherents. One was the settlement approach, according to which new settlements were to be created on state farms, plantations or settler-owned enterprises. The work had to be done by wage labourers. It was thought that taking farmers out of their traditional social environment would make them more open to change. The other approach, called the improvement approach, referred to improvement of practice on existing peasant farms. The main problem was how the government could reach the peasants scattered all over the country and introduce

improved methods of land use and agriculture. During the years before and after independence these two approaches were debated in evaluation reports by the World Bank and other policy documents¹⁰. For a brief time after independence the new Government seemed to sympathize with the settlement approach, later the improvement approach was chosen. It is in this context that the ideas of ujamaa developed.

Ujamaa

The ideas of ujamaa were developed by Nyerere. His first paper on the issue appeared in 1962¹¹. Ujamaa became part of Tanzanian policy in 1967, when the Arusha Declaration was adopted.

Ujamaa is the Kiswahili word for family-hood and was used as a term for African Socialism. According to Nyerere, the use of the word ujamaa to describe the ideas behind the policies to be developed would reflect “a full acceptance of our African-ness and a belief that in our past there is very much which is useful for our future”¹². No socialist ideology was copied from the East or the West but an African Socialism was developed. Nyerere describes the basic principles of this socialism in various places and in slightly different wordings. He writes, for instance, about “a society in which all members have equal rights and equal opportunities; in which all can live at peace with their neighbours without suffering or imposing injustice, being exploited, or exploiting; and in which all have gradually increasing basic level of material welfare before any individual lives in luxury”¹³. It was emphasized that socialism is a belief¹⁴, a way of life. A socialist society can only be built by people who believe in it. In his writings Nyerere often emphasizes the struggle against exploitation of man by man. “Socialism means that no person uses his wealth to exploit others just as a father does not use his status to dominate or exploit his wife, children and other relatives ...”¹⁵. The Arusha Declaration states that “it is the responsibility of the state ... to prevent the exploitation of one person by another or one group by another, and so as to prevent the accumulation of wealth to an extent which is inconsistent with the existence of a classless society”¹⁶. The root of exploitation is private ownership. It was believed that private ownership of the means of production would necessarily lead to the exploitation of man by man¹⁷.

Nyerere claimed that the traditional Tanzanian society had socialist characteristics. In *Socialism and Rural Development* three are discussed: respect for each other, common property and the obligation to work. Before Africa was colonized there

were no rich people in Africa. All people were workers, there was no great difference in the amount of goods available to the different members of society¹⁸. Social security was safeguarded by the community. 'Respect' meant a mutual concern for each other. "Each member of the family recognized the place and the rights of the other members, and also the rights varied according to sex, age, ... there was a minimum below which no one could exist without disgrace to the whole family"¹⁹. Land was not the property of one single person. All basic goods were held in common. "No one could go hungry while others hoarded food and no one could be denied shelter if others had space to spare". Everyone had an obligation to work. "Every member of the family, and every guest who shared in the right to eat and have shelter, took it for granted that he had to join in whatever work had to be done".

Ujamaa policies

The socialist policies of Tanzania were implemented at various levels. Some policies had little to do with African tradition. It was, for instance, claimed²⁰ that all major means of production had to be owned and controlled by the peasants and workers through the machinery of the Government and Party, which were supposed to represent them. The government was to play a central role. Another policy was related to the fighting of exploitation: strict measures were taken to forbid all civil servants and party members to own farms, to run shops, to have more than one house etc. It was even discouraged to hire labour to work on farms. The most important paper on ujamaa, *Socialism and Rural Development*, says the following on this issue²¹: "... in the rural areas of Tanzania it is possible to produce enough crops to give an agricultural worker a decent life, with money for a good house and furniture, some reserve for old age, and so on. But the moment such a man extends his farm to the point where it is necessary to employ labourers in order to plant or harvest the full acreage, then the traditional system of ujamaa has been killed". The Government also took measures to prevent exploitation of peasants by private traders, by way of co-operative unions, marketing boards and price policies. Not only the means of production, but also the means of exchange had to be controlled by the government.

The most important implementation of ujamaa during the years after 1967 was the campaign of Ujamaa Vijijini, which aimed at a gradual and later complete transformation of the rural areas into socialist communities, where all political and economic activities are collectively organized²². From 1968 until 1973 the mobilization of peasants to set up such communities was a high priority for

Government and Party. Agricultural organization was that of a co-operative, living and working 'for the good of all'. The people would live and work as a community. They would work on the farm together, jointly be involved in marketing activities and local services. People were to live together in a village, so that it would be easier to send children to school, to construct a community building, to organize water supply and other facilities. It was believed that communal organization of work could make agricultural activities more efficient, a better use could be made of results of agricultural research and of extension services. Gradually, the traditional agricultural practices could be modernized. In the beginning of the campaign Ujamaa Vijijini, it was emphasized that no coercion was to be used²³. The bad experiences with coercion in the colonial times were not forgotten. Instead, it was attempted to persuade people, by mobilizing party members and government officials and stressing self-help and mutual co-operation. At a national and regional level the government co-ordinated the establishment of ujamaa villages. All credit, extension and other services went to the ujamaa villages at the expense of the individual producer. The final aim was to create a nation in which ujamaa villages would dominate the rural economy and set the social pattern for the whole country. The people's reaction to this 'socialism from above' was very mixed. It varied from initiatives by local people²⁴, who were inspired by the teachings of Nyerere, and campaigns²⁵ organized by party and government officials, to indifference, misunderstandings, hesitant introduction of communal practices, and even reluctance and hostility. The major opposition was directed against collective farming. Where it was adopted, mainly cash crops were collectively cultivated, but each family tried to keep its private fields for food production. By 1974 almost 2.5 million²⁶ people (nearly 20% of the rural population) were said to live in 5000 ujamaa villages²⁷. They were mainly in the less fertile regions of Tanzania, like Dodoma and Singida.

Compulsory villagization

In 1973 and 1974 Tanzania faced severe economic problems. The rise in oil prices was a terrible blow. It coincided with a drought which decreased food production. Food had to be imported at the expense of foreign currency reserves²⁸. Moreover, the ujamaa initiatives did not at all show the expected economic results, in spite of the concentrated efforts and inputs by the government. The President urged for a rapid villagization of the rural population. In the views of the Government, villagization was as an absolute pre-condition for development. Only in nucleated villages could the government provide all necessary facilities and inputs to increase agricultural production. There would be no time to wait for voluntary villagization

based on education of the people. In a radio message broadcast on the 6th of November 1973, Nyerere announced that all rural people were obliged to settle in a village before 1976. In 1974 'Operation Vijiji' (villagization) was started. Villages had to be registered and all people had to live in a registered village. Finances were allocated to Operation Vijiji rather than to ujamaa villages. People had to move from small villages to bigger ones, and from scattered settlements to nucleated villages. The compulsory villagization between 1973 and 1976 was one of the largest settlement efforts in Africa. It concerned millions of people. If necessary, force was to be used by the people's militia, the army, party and governmental officials. Although the State-owned press and radio did not give much publicity to incidents and to the use of force, many sources have revealed that pressure and violence by means of regulations, economic measures, threats, burning down of houses and physical violence occurred on a large scale²⁹. During the compulsory settlement the name ujamaa village was no longer emphasized, the villagization programme was aimed at the creation of mere 'villages'. The requirement that part of the farming had to be done collectively was dropped. In 1976 all villages were registered and all rural people (about 13 million people) lived there. For a great deal of them, especially in the fertile regions like Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Rungwe and West Lake, the changes were only administrative; no nucleated arrangements were made.

Comment

Nyerere developed his ideas about ujamaa in a period, when Tanzania was looking for its own identity and tried to set out its own path of development. It wanted to rely on its own strength and qualities. What were the distinguishing qualities, which could help in the process of development? It is not surprising that solidarity and mutual help came into the picture. In the rural areas it was common practice indeed that farmers helped each other, during peak times and in emergency situations. However, this type of collaboration was temporary, and based on reciprocity. One helped each other, since one could expect to be helped himself later, if necessary. This type of collaboration is quite different from the permanent collaboration envisaged in the ujamaa villages, which implied communal ownership, collective work and production, and sharing of benefits. The appeal to this way of collaboration was not successful. In spite of the enormous political and economic investments and the massive campaigns, the ujamaa policies failed³⁰. The results were disastrous: poor levels of agricultural production, frustrations, suffering, political discontents and high costs. I will try to draw some lessons from the ujamaa experiences by commenting on the following issues: 1) the relation

between ujamaa and villagization; 2) ujamaa: wish or African reality? 3) contradictions of ujamaa ; 4) reasons why ujamaa policies failed.

1) *Ujamaa and villagization*. The ideas of ujamaa were introduced at a time when the government had already defined priorities, in particular those of primary education, basic health care and improved water supply. These basic services were considered to be prerequisites for any social and economic development. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to create such services for all people scattered all over the country, without the creation of nucleated villages. This was one of the reasons for the villagization programme. These basic facilities had to be financed. Since Tanzania was not endowed with rich mining resources and an industrial sector had not yet been developed, the financing of the services had to come from a surplus from the peasants. For the government it was therefore an important pre-occupation, as it was for the colonial governments, to increase agricultural production. Since initiatives of large scale settlements with mechanized methods of land use and modern methods of agriculture were not successful, the government opted for concentrating efforts on trying to improve farming practices of the peasant smallholders. How the farmers could be reached by the government in order to help them to improve their land use and agricultural practices was a crucial issue. Here again, the creation of nucleated villages to group the farmers to facilitate extension services, supply of inputs and marketing of agricultural produce, appeared to be a logical step for the government. It is against this background that the development of the ideas of ujamaa has to be assessed. In fact, the villagization programme was not the result of ujamaa. On the contrary, the development of ujamaa seems to have been rather the result of the wish for villagization, and of the need to justify that villagization.

2) *Ujamaa: wish or African reality?* On one hand, ujamaa was presented as an ideology aimed at building a desired society. Even as a desired way of life. In this respect ujamaa is a normative concept, and some of its basic principles like equal rights, equal opportunities and respect for each other can be found in many programmes of socialist political parties, which strive at a just society. On the other hand, it was claimed by Nyerere, that the basis of ujamaa, solidarity, already existed in the traditional Tanzanian society. He referred to 'basic goods held in common' and 'social security secured by the community' as well as many other characteristics. This claimed African-ness is the heart of the matter. Hyden³¹ quite correctly remarks, that solidarity mainly exists within one household or extended family and not between different households or families in a village. I will challenge the generalisation of Nyerere's observations for other reasons. Examples of solidarity refer to situations where groups of people live together during a certain

period of time under very specific environmental, social, political and economic conditions. If the people are isolated and no formal systems of security exist it is not surprising that people have to rely on the family or neighbours for social security. Solidarity between the people exists, not because they are African, but because they live in very specific conditions.

If conditions change, the characteristics of human behaviour may change as well. The capacity of human beings to adapt to changing conditions is well known. For this capacity much evidence exists in history, also in the history of agricultural changes in the colonial days in Tanzania. If there are “basic” unchangeable features at the root of a society, then they are not specifically African, but “human”, such as universal goals of physical well being and of social well being. This is well accepted in sociology³². All other characteristics such as solidarity are the results of these universal goals and of external conditions.

3) *Contradictions of ujamaa*. The term ‘socialism from above’, which has been often used as a translation for the ujamaa policies, reflects the main contradiction of ujamaa. Originally, the ujamaa village policy was supposed to be based on the initiatives of the farmers themselves. Self-help and mutual co-operation were the key words. The role of the government was to support such initiatives. Gradually the initiatives were taken by the government. Ujamaa became a process from above. The government wanted to ‘educate’ the advantages of communal activities. In retrospect, one may be surprised that this contradiction did not raise more discussion. This may be due to the lack of democracy. Although in the writings of Nyerere and the Arusha Declaration democracy is often mentioned (‘true socialism cannot exist without democracy’³³) no publication was clear about the issue of what democracy really meant in the Tanzanian one-party system. The participation of the people themselves in introducing ujamaa villages was never properly discussed in the public media, which were in the hands of the government. Top-down approaches replaced bottom-up approaches.

4) *Reasons for failure*. Aside from the contradiction of ‘socialism from above’, there are many other reasons why the ujamaa policies failed. Ideas, such as equality, respect for human dignity and the wish to prevent exploitation of man by man, are of a moral and normative nature. They are not incentives to work together, to invest more in agricultural practice or to increase agricultural production. Such changes have to be based on social or economic incentives³⁴ as well. Cliffe³⁵ and Cunningham write: if the villagization programmes are to be voluntary, then the peasants have to be convinced that real economic gains can be achieved through larger scale, collective farming and that social gains can be derived from living in communal settlements.

The assumption that ujamaa is based on ‘the principles of the extended family system with its emphasis on co-operation and mutual respect and responsibility’ does not allow one to conclude that in new conditions collective farming necessarily leads to an efficient division of labour, better organisation or harder work by the people. Not enough attention was given to the rationale of collective farming.

Ujamaa villages had to be introduced at such a speed and at such a large scale, that many people had little or no idea of what was required of them, let alone the technical and organizational problems they were going to meet.

Lack of preparation; lack of expertise in the field of collective farming, of new farming technologies and management of communal villages; lack of local leadership; too much bureaucracy by the government and party; price policies of the government etcetera are other reasons why the introduction of ujamaa villages failed.

Conclusions

The main conclusion is, that it is false to believe that ujamaa is or was an African reality. It was a way of thinking imposed by the President and Government of Tanzania, in order to reach political and economic objectives. The claim that the imposed ujamaa policies had African roots was therefore also false. In fact, these policies failed, since realities in practice and views of the local people were not sufficiently taken into account.

The basic ideas of ujamaa, such as solidarity, are normative concepts. Whether they play an important role in a local society, depends to a large extent on external political and economic conditions.

At an individual level these normative concepts can be inspiring for human behaviour. They are, however, not necessarily a motor for social or economic reforms. Such reforms can only be accomplished, if specific social or economic incentives exist and are perceived by the concerned people.

Notes

¹ The proportion of Tanzanian children in primary school was 34% in 1970 and rose to 100 % in 1979. In the eighties it went down to a level of 63% in 1990; quoted in McHenry, 1994, p.

- 85, on the basis of World Tables 1992 and 1993, published by the World Bank.
- ² Tanganyika African National Union. In 1964 Tanganyika and Zanzibar were united into Tanzania. In 1973, TANU merged with the main political party of Zanzibar and a new name was adopted: Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM).
- ³ For a description of the reasons why TANU was so successful in the years after its foundation in 1954 and became a mass organization, see Iliffe, 1972.
- ⁴ See Boesen et al., 1977, p. 14, and Nyerere's address to the Annual Conference in 1963 of the ruling party TANU (on which occasion it was decided to establish a one-party state), in Nyerere, 1963.
- ⁵ "It was widely believed during that period, that industrialization was the unique key to development and that the industrial sector, as the advanced sector, would pull with it the backward agricultural sector" wrote Thorbecke in his book on 'the role of agriculture in economic development' (1969). These views were consistent with the views on development, fashionable in the 1950s and early 60s, that "development" was synonymous with "modernization". Developed, or "advanced" economies with their high levels of consumption and advanced technology were seen as examples for less developed countries to imitate.
- ⁶ See Arusha Declaration, 1967.
- ⁷ For a discussion of agricultural policies in the colonial times (by the Germans and the British), see Hyden, 1980, p. 38 – 69. See also Cliffe, 1972a, and Coulson, 1982, p. 33 – 69.
- ⁸ The regulations in the colonial times could be very detailed, dealing with compulsory tie-riding, destruction of old cotton plants, compulsory growing of famine crops like cassava etc., see Cliffe, 1972.
- ⁹ For a revealing justification given by the British colonial administrators of the use of a 'little compulsion', see Williams, 1982, p. 106.
- ¹⁰ See Hyden, 1980, p. 71-72.
- ¹¹ See Nyerere, 1962.
- ¹² See Nyerere, 1967a, p. 316.
- ¹³ See Nyerere, 1967b, p. 340.
- ¹⁴ See Arusha Declaration, 1967, p. 234.
- ¹⁵ See Nyerere, 1966b, p. 142.
- ¹⁶ See Arusha Declaration, 1967, p. 232.
- ¹⁷ See Ngombale-Mwiru, 1973, p. 53.
- ¹⁸ See Nyerere, 1966b, p. 137.
- ¹⁹ See Nyerere, 1967b, p. 338.
- ²⁰ See Arusha Declaration, 1967, p. 233.
- ²¹ See Nyerere, 1967b, p. 342 – 343.
- ²² See Boesen et al. 1977, p. 11.
- ²³ See United Republic of Tanzania, 1969, p. 4, and Nyerere, 1967b, p. 356.
- ²⁴ Already in 1962 and 1963 some 'spontaneous settlements schemes' were started as a response to Nyerere's calls. The most well known was the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA). It was quite successful, in terms of both organization, democratic decision making and economic development. RDA villages became self-sufficient in food production, improved people's health and nutrition, built schools and water supply systems and even started village industries. In the early years RDA attracted a lot of attention. Later frictions arose with the Government. The RDA did not want the government to interfere, it wanted to be autonomous. In 1969 the Government decided to disband the RDA. Assets were confiscated and staff had to

- leave. See Coulson, 1982, p. 263 – 271.
- ²⁵ In 1968 the Government started an ujamaa village campaign in Rufiji District, in order to move the population of the flood plains of the Rufiji River to higher flood plain banks. The villagization was also an emergency campaign, since a large flood caused a destruction of crops and houses, as it had happened frequently in the past. It was very difficult to convince the peasants to move from the flood plain land of their ancestors to the higher, less fertile escarpments. Although the farmers recognized the dangers of floods, they only very reluctantly took part in the move of the villages. In 1973, 75% of the population had moved. Resistant villages faced a lot of problems, no trading licences, no maintenance of roads etc. For a description of ‘Operation Rufiji’, see e.g. Havnevik, 1993, p. 218 – 226. Another large ujamaa campaign launched by the Government was ‘Operation Dodoma’, in which Nyerere personally actively participated, see e.g. Hyden, 1980, p. 102
- ²⁶ See Kitching, G., 1982, p. 106 and Coulson, 1982, p. 241.
- ²⁷ Criteria to be registered as an ujamaa village were not always clear. For instance, in the South of Tanzania, towards the border with Mozambique, people were brought together in ujamaa villages for national defence purposes. These villages were created and armed to prevent Portuguese infiltration in Tanzania in search of guerilla fighters. Ujamaa communal farming activities were only applied to a limited extent. See Hyden, 1980, p. 101.
- ²⁸ See Boesen et al., 1977, p. 170.
- ²⁹ See e.g. Coulson 1982, p. 250 – 252 and Williams, 1982, p. 114 – 118, in which reference is made to many reports in daily papers and other reports. See also Shivji et al. 1985, p. 18.
- ³⁰ This does not imply that the Tanzanian development in those days failed. The provision of basic services set up within old and new villages were important assets, and even the economic development in these years showed some growth. See e.g. Kitching, 1982, p. 124.
- ³¹ See Hyden, 1980, p. 99.
- ³² For instance, affection, behavioural confirmation and status, see e.g. Lindenberg (1996) and Ormel et al., 1999, p. 61 – 90.
- ³³ See *Arusha Declaration*, 1967, p.234, in Nyerere, 1968.
- ³⁴ See also Ngotyana, B., 1973, *The Strategy of Rural Development*, in Cliffe et al., 1973.
- ³⁵ See Cliffe, L., Cunningham, G.L., 1973, *Ideology, Organisation and the Settlement Experience in Tanzania*, p.131, in: Cliffe et al., 1973.

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