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IRRIGATING LIVES

Development intervention and dynamics of social
relationships in an irrigation project

Dumisani Magadlela

Curriculum Vitae

Dumisani Magadlela was born on the 2nd of June in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He lived and attended school in rural Matabeleland South Province (Ndebele/Zulu/Swati community) and went to the University of Zimbabwe in 1988. He graduated with a BSc in Sociology in 1991. Soon after he enrolled for a Masters in Sociology and Social Anthropology in the Sociology Department, and was appointed lecturer teaching Rural Development and Social Theory. He finished his Masters in 1993, and got a fellowship to do a PhD with Wageningen Agricultural University in same year. His PhD research as on Small-Scale Irrigation Development and Intervention, with a specific interest in social issues in development intervention, such as 'difference and identity' among 'similar' groups of farmers. He carried out his fieldwork in the Nyamaropa area in Eastern Zimbabwe between 1993 and 1997, during which period he published several papers in journals and books in the field of Rural Development, Small-scale Irrigation and Social Issues in Development Intervention. For years he had been commuting to South Africa to be with his family. He worked part-time as a consultant for a Non-Governmental Organisation on land and small-scale farmers in SA. He also became a visiting Research Fellow with the Institute for Advanced Social Research at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1998 he resigned from the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe to finally join his family in Johannesburg, South Africa. There he worked as a consultant for an engineering firm contracted by the government through the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in the Water Law Review Process. In 1997 he joined the Land and Agriculture Policy Centre (LAPC) as Programme Manager for their Rural Poverty Programme. Here he engaged with rural communities, NGOs, and government departments in helping formulate sustainable human development programmes especially in Land Reform pilot programme areas. He also worked extensively with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the North West provincial government as a team leader managing a group of consultants formulating a Programme Support Document (PSD) with selected communities in the North West Province. This was undertaken using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). This involved communities sharing their plans and programmes of action, and identifying their strengths, their assets and their capacities for improvement in their lives, not their needs or their problems. Towards the end of 1999 he joined the national office of the Working for Water Programme in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in Cape Town where he is Research Manager. Among his duties is the shifting of emphasis and focus in the programme from mainly technical issues on their own towards stronger social development initiatives and a more integrated socio-technical approach to interventions. What has driven his line of work all along is his personal experience or a rural upbringing, his specific interest in the fields of rural development, pursuing poverty reduction and sustainable human development. His passion for the improvement of poor rural communities' livelihoods has always been encouraged by his interest in, and curiosity about, water, land and environmental issues. Immediate interests include writing more about how rural people, in their diversities and differences, would like to shape their own lives.

IRRIGATING LIVES

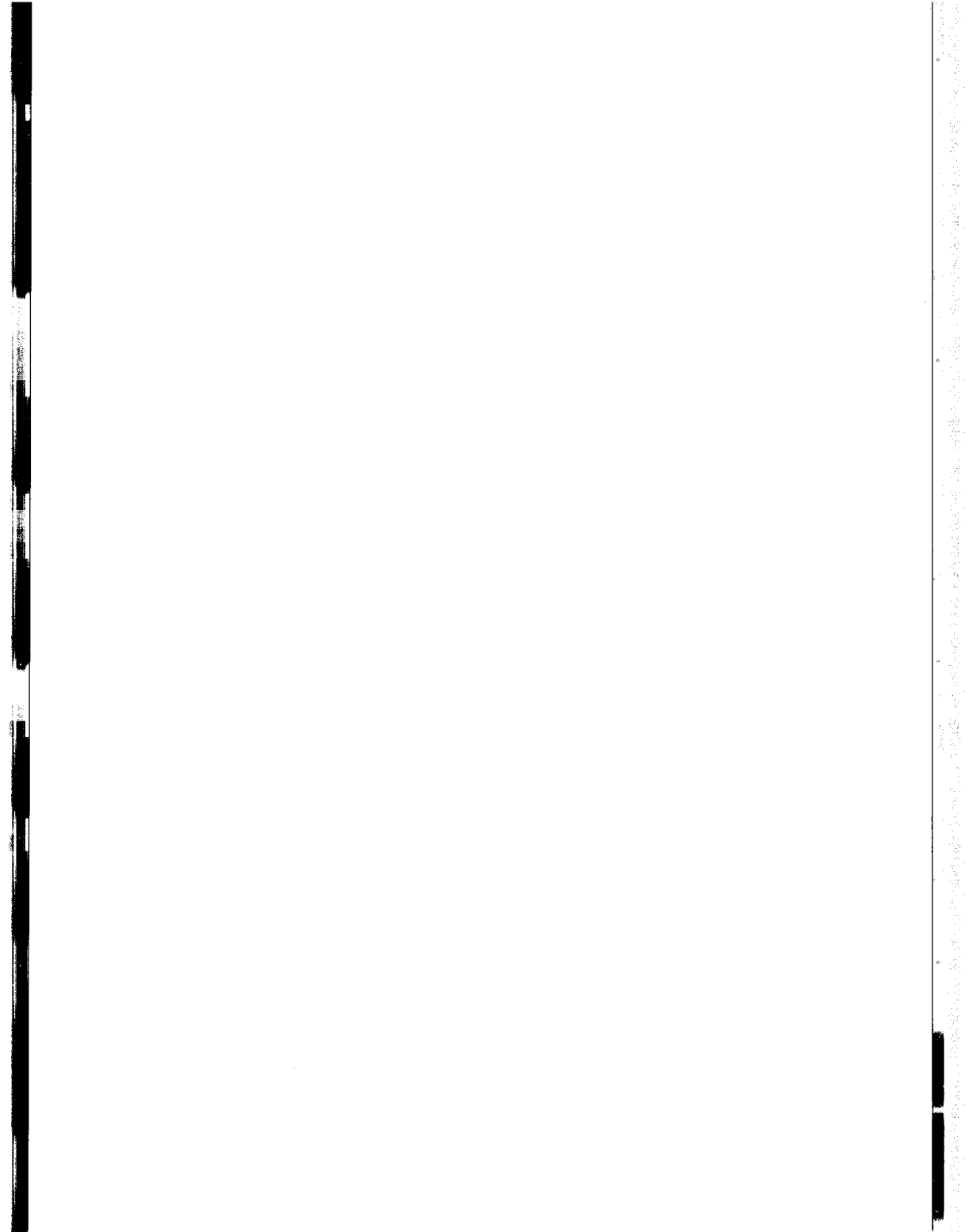
Development intervention and dynamics of social
relationships in an irrigation project



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Stellingen

1. Human social lives in development contexts are 'shaped by a multiplicity of differences, differences which may be perceived categorically, but are lived relationally' (Moore, H. *A Passion for Difference*, 1994, p.20).
2. *Strategic difference* is how social actors mobilise notions of distinctiveness from others in order to gain access to specific resources, such as land, water, leadership positions, status, or positions of influence. (This thesis)
3. Social actors manipulate their group identities and differences to distinguish themselves from competing groups in pursuit of greater access to resources such as land, water, leadership and positions of influence. (This thesis)
4. Our understanding of social actors' capacities to 'formulate decisions, act upon them, to innovate and experiment' even under severely restricting environments (Long, N. *Battlefields of Knowledge*, 1992: p.24-5), helps us appreciate the unpredictable nature of the outcomes of development.
5. 'Power is not inherent to a position, a space or a person. It is not possessed by any other actors, and it is not a zero-sum process whereby its exercise by one of the actors leaves the others lacking' (Villarreal, 1994: p. 205, *Wielding and Yielding*).
6. If anthropologists explained themselves and their purpose fully to the people whose lives, cultures, customs and other details they try to unravel, their jobs would be much easier and the product of their work more meaningful.
7. A *secret* is still a *secret* even when everyone in the village knows about it. If no one talks about it openly, it still remains a *secret* (farmer Kapadza, Nyamaropa Irrigation scheme). (This thesis)
8. Development research on human beings and their practices, and on their struggles for improvements in their lives, is inherently patronizing.
9. Irrigation development intervention leads to rival group formation. The identities and constitutions of these groups are as flexible and rigid as the benefits that accrue to them from the interventions. (This thesis)
10. One of the most awkward situations for a local researcher is to ask detailed questions on issues that you are supposed to be fully aware of. Foreign researchers can ask any silly questions and get away with it.



UNIVERSITY OF WAGeningen

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Development intervention and dynamics of social
relationships in an irrigation project

Dumisani Magadlela

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Dedication

This book is for umndeni wakwaMagadlela Esigodini (the Magadlela family), especially for Similo and our son Sandile, who endured more than three years of my absence during fieldwork in Nyamaropa and through the writing up period in The Netherlands. It is dedicated to Mama MaKhabo, (umlimi odlula bonke!), the most enterprising small holder farmer I ever knew!

As this work comes to a close, I remember my brother, Busani, tragically killed in a car crash on December 5 1998, who wanted to see the final product. Its for you Busi.

Wageningen, October 1999

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your comments when I most needed it, and made me realise I could do much more. When you made me go back to read more on certain issues, sometimes I felt I was going backwards, only to realise that there is always a lot to learn even from topics one thinks they are very familiar with. However, I still think that there is more to the concept of *difference* than has been done already in development interface studies. Working with you was an enriching encounter from which I would like to believe I emerged wiser. Thank you.

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PART ONE: The Story behind the Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is this all about?

This study is about development intervention in the Nyamaropa Irrigation Scheme in a rural area in Eastern Zimbabwe. It looks into new social relationships that emerged from its development over a thirty-six year history, and the formation of new relationships by various actors involved in the process. The study is an analysis of how the irrigation scheme as an external innovation affected, changed and was adapted by different social actors who had encounters with the project since it started operating in 1960. Such an analysis involves looking into how and why new patterns of relationships shape themselves around, and are embedded in, crucial resources such as water and land. Another aspect of it is how the traditional institution, as the local custodian and guardian of the lives and customs of the Barwe and Manyika people living in Nyamaropa, was changed by these new developments. These developments, centred on irrigation intervention, and which included the relatively new Christian Church in the area as a direct challenge and rival to the more locally rooted traditional institution led by the Headman, saw irrigation farmers distancing themselves from the traditional authority's influence. Throughout the study I do not focus on the technical details of irrigation design and performance, but could not avoid dealing with implications of technical factors for water distribution and general irrigation management. Technical irrigation artifacts and physical structures, however, do play a role, as they are products of social interaction with social characteristics.

The various, temporary and permanent social categories, characteristics and cultural identities that were created in daily interaction in the irrigation scheme and its immediate environment, such as gender, age, widowhood, ethnic affiliation, and relationship with the irrigation scheme, presented a wealth of complex webs of social relations. An analysis of the different ways, rational and irrational, employed by various social actors in and around the irrigation scheme in pursuit of their different interests, forms part of the argument in this study. These factors call for detailed analysis both for the benefit of development practitioners in terms of knowledge and information about local level dynamics of development intervention, and for academic debate on the potency of some theories used to explain social dynamics in peoples' daily lives in development contexts.

Looked at from a different angle, the study is about social constructions of cultural identities, social interaction and change among smallholder farmers in the context of irrigation development intervention in Eastern Zimbabwe. It shows how the introduction of an irrigation scheme not only created, but also nurtured and promoted processes of cultural identity and social difference among groups of rural producers previously with limited distinguishing social characteristics such as ethnic affiliation. It is a study of how the irrigation context helps to highlight their social and cultural differences and leads to social conflicts and leadership struggles, and to different individual actors devising strategies, such as enrolling outsiders into local battles, to reach their various and often conflicting goals. The analysis portrays the irrigation scheme as a social and political 'domain' in which different groups of farmers and outsiders engage each other in negotiations over resources and meanings attached to

them. In some instances, the irrigation domain acts as an arena, a contested area where struggles take place over a diversity of livelihood resources such as water and land.

This is a story of how people try to make a living in a constantly changing social and economic environment where some of them initially rejected irrigation development, but were gradually forced by recurrent droughts to look to the irrigation project as their only means of producing food for survival. They meet the resistance of those who joined the project earlier, or face what may appear as 'exploitation of their labour' by irrigators when seeking to grow crops for food in the irrigation scheme. They actually weigh up their benefits from the transactions, and accept deals with irrigators knowing that they will not feel exploited. Within the irrigation scheme, there were various forms or 'varieties' of social difference ranging from age, through gender and religious affiliation, to ethnic origin, which often led to differential perceptions of their common irrigation situation. The irrigation scheme, land and water (for farming) are at the centre of the analysis, and this is where rural producers' social relations and constructions of social and cultural differences are embedded. The differences found among groups of farmers in one context can often be so many that the use of the term 'difference' loses meaning. To complement the element of difference as a construction in specific contexts, 'cultural identity' is used in some areas of the analysis. Here 'culture'¹ is used together with 'identity' (in 'cultural identity') to refer to the processes of negotiation and interaction that take place among the various groups. Culture is a broad term that has been written about since the early days of anthropology as a discipline and beyond. I shall not attempt to go into an in-depth discussion of its various interpretations in this study, but rather I limit the debate to treating culture not as something embodied in values, beliefs or accepted practices, but as both an issue of representation and a process which 'goes beyond the reified and static traditions to include the everyday [social] processes, practices and experiences in which people are engaged'. Like identity, culture is 'no longer conceptualised as a static entity, but as continually being made and re-made' (Yon, 1995: 485).

The study is also about the omnipresence of encounters and clashes, sometimes open collisions, of different 'world-views' at the local level in the irrigation scheme. The clashes take place at the social, technical, administrative, managerial and political domains. The study is also about how the different 'life-worlds' accommodate to each other in actors' daily interactions to give a semblance of harmony and attraction which co-exist with conflict and rejection. It is an analysis of the dynamism of social differences in irrigation intervention, and reveals the multiplexity of actors' interactions, and how their multiple relations and interlocking projects generate potentially explosive social images. The study starts from the bottom, as it were, in its analysis of how different people in a specific rural development context create, and live with, complex social relations, where daily interaction is characterised by strategic negotiation and mutual enrolment in other actors' projects. The analysis focuses more on local level dynamics and does not deal, for example, with the politics of decision-making at higher levels of administration, such as the province or central government departments under which smallholder irrigation development falls.

The main argument throughout the book is that rural smallholder farmers in and around irrigation schemes are constantly struggling among themselves and between themselves and outsiders to attain a larger share of the irrigation resource, and this includes social, political, economic and cultural aspects of relating to different resources. Smallholder irrigation schemes are characterised by multiple realities that

can be regarded as potentially conflicting social and normative interests and diverse and discontinuous configurations of knowledge (Long, 1992: 26). People use their social differences and affiliations with particular social units as weapons or as supports for their positions, or as claims to access resources, such as the need for irrigated land by surrounding dryland farmers who were displaced by irrigation development. This aspect examines issues of discourse and the meanings rural farmers in Nyamaropa Communal Area attach to their interactions and social relationships. Unlike economic differentiation (Seur, 1992, Chapter 7, discusses economic differentiation), social difference may involve normative, non-material measurements of status, which may be ascribed, or labels which, to an outsider, have no material basis at all. Linked to difference is the concept of identity, which refers to the particular characteristics that a person, group of persons, or community of people attach to themselves, or by which they distinguish themselves from others. This is part of what I call '*strategic difference*', where certain differences between social actors are either emphasised, de-emphasised, or manipulated, often, but not always, as a rational strategy to achieve certain goals.

A look at the emergent properties of the irrigation project from its inception in the late fifties provides historical bases for analysing changes in perceptions and identities over time. Some of the emergent properties that have a bearing on social difference are new farming methods, such as the use of hybrid seed and fertilisers, new economic relationships, new social networks, new social and political strategies, a new critical look at the traditional structures of leadership in the area, and a critical view of the government's role in an ongoing project. There is also a discussion of the importance of using actor-oriented perspectives and accompanying concepts in rural development and in development research.

The life cycle of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme as seen through the ageing of both the infrastructure, such as canals, and the social actors as users of the infrastructure, in this case the original plotters, (re)presents an analysis that has not received much attention in rural development studies in Zimbabwe. On this issue, my focus is on cultural identity and social difference based on age, and the impact of plotters' age on their changing relationship with the project and with other actors in it. This includes extension staff who expects maximum output from all farmers' plots, including those of over seventy-year old plotters. Moreover, the different groups of farmers are expected to work together and co-operate because they are in the same irrigation scheme where co-operation is regarded as a requirement for their own benefit (by some farmers themselves in meetings, and by extension staff). They share water, land, and other resources, including extension knowledge (and Extension Workers!), and they say it themselves that, as different groups, they must work harmoniously together; but harmony is a rare ingredient, if not merely a facade, in their relationships. Yet they still manage to live relatively well together and produce surpluses for sale, while calling each other and extension staff all sorts of names².

Another line of argument in the thesis is that people will accept and take advantage of a new development project when desperate for settlement land, but what they do with it is something else. Some people will reject a development project imposed from outside, but still establish relationships and networks (with those already benefiting from the project) that help them exploit that very project they rejected under different circumstances. People manipulate their relationships with others and their social networks in general. Farmers manipulate their social relationships, create new

relationships, and enrol outsiders into their 'projects' in their attempts to influence changing circumstances, or to gain leverage in their processes of negotiation.

Rural producers and development or extension agents form alliances and coalitions to pursue their interests and goals. Sometimes 'outsiders' (extension workers in this case), who are expected to be neutral in local conflicts among farmers, find themselves caught up in farmers' struggles. They are seen to shift their support from one group of farmers to another in search of neutral terrain, which in my view is more the ideal than reality. Farmers often use subtle ways of enrolling outsiders (including researchers) to win support in their conflicts, or in rejecting recommended ideas from extension agents, or in some cases in getting certain group identities 'sold' to more prospective customers, or merely promoted to gain more acceptance. Extension agents themselves also enrol individuals or local groups of farmers in their own 'projects' in attempts to achieve levels of legitimacy, especially when a particular 'project' is not popular among some farmers. Mutual enrolment is only one of several strategies used by different actors in specific situations. It opens up doors to the analysis of the multiplicity of projects at the local level, and how they interlock in actors' daily interactions, conflicts and negotiations.

There were some reflexive moments while doing this study. I asked myself several times during the course of fieldwork, what am I doing? Not because I was not convinced about the soundness of my research objectives, but because there were many ethical, methodological, empirical and other questions that kept popping up all the time. There was the question: why am I doing this research this way, collecting information on how people live, how they relate to each other, their views on different topics in their lives; their perceptions and bases for them, their views of irrigation scheme, etc? What do I intend to say with my findings? Is my ultimate goal just to find out how people in Nyamaropa struggle to survive? How they relate to each other and to outsiders? Or is it to find out why and how they have differing views of the same situation, and then test some theoretical assumptions against real life situations? Or use theoretical pathways to understand and explain empirical reality? Or is it just to get to understand happening in the lives of groups of rural smallholder irrigation dwellers in a remote corner of Eastern Zimbabwe? There were several answers to these questions during the course of fieldwork and in the analysis of research findings, some of which I discuss in the different chapters below.

This study also has a brief discussion of types of research, from exploratory, through research for adding to existing knowledge, to problem identifying research in rural development. Hopefully this will lay to rest some of the arguments that my colleagues, especially from the Agricultural Economics Department at the University of Zimbabwe, kept throwing back at me. The common question was: 'Well, you get your nice data on how people live and struggle over resources and all that, you analyze it, write their stories and your theories, *and then what?*' This question, I hope, will be answered in the pages below.

Why study irrigation transformation?

The next section presents part of the story of irrigation development in Zimbabwe; the rest is in Chapter 2 with the setting and background details. This is meant to put into perspective the following sub-section justifying this type of sociological study of irrigation intervention in Zimbabwe. Then there is a discussion of some of the work

that has exposed the pressing need in Zimbabwe for a sociology of irrigation development which starts from the views of farmers on how they perceive irrigation intervention, and how they live with it, and with each other in it.

The other reason I chose to study irrigation was because it became central to the framework of the Zimbabwe Programme on Women's Studies, Extension, Sociology and Irrigation (ZIMWESI, Phase One), during the period of preparing research proposals in Wageningen Agricultural University in the Netherlands. There was this air of the need for smallholder irrigation research within the team of researchers, and I suppose group influence had a hand in it too. This need was not just in the group alone. It was there in Zimbabwe among development practitioners and researchers alike. Evidence of this is shown through the smallholder irrigation performance workshop held in December 1993 in Juliasdale, near Nyanga, in Manicaland Province, by a team of interdisciplinary researchers who presented papers on their empirical findings (see, for example, Meinzen-Dick, 1993). These papers show that the need for more detailed irrigation studies is still to be met.

Another influence was from my own curiosity about irrigation schemes. Matabeleland South Province (see Map 1), my home area, is one of the driest parts of Zimbabwe. There is a 35 hectare irrigation scheme about 25 km from my village, called Mzinyathini Irrigation Scheme, constructed around 1960. I never had a chance to visit the place until I completed high school. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the only people I knew who had plots in it were a teacher and a Local Council employee, (prominent members of the community), and they often had fresh maize cobs from the irrigation scheme long before anyone in the rainfed area had any. Now I understand better why *they* were in that position. There was a common belief, almost a mythical one, that only the best farmers had been allowed to join the irrigation project, and one of the irrigators I knew was certainly held in high esteem by most members of our community. This was partly because of his attachment to the irrigation scheme and his general social standing, two aspects of his life that seemed to be mutually complementary³. What was impressed in my mind from this early contact with irrigation farming was that it was a step towards a better life compared to rain-fed farming.

The small-scale irrigation sub-sector in Zimbabwe

The state of the irrigation sub-sector in Zimbabwe, in the context of the agricultural industry in general, reflects the historical nature of the dual characteristic of the sector, which favoured large-scale commercial farming controlled by a small section of the farming community. These farmers were being offered incentives such as low interest rates, marketing channels and extension services which smaller farmers were denied for some time. However, there is no consensus as to how much land was under irrigation at any one point in time, and how much smallholder irrigation contributed to national, regional or local economic development. Magadzire (1995: 3), president of the Zimbabwe Farmers' Union (ZFU, the national union of smallholder farmers), says that estimates of irrigation development in Zimbabwe put the figure at 120,000 ha of land under irrigation, with 98 per cent of it in large-scale commercial farms. There is also the argument that there are more than 80 smallholder irrigation schemes with plot sizes that range from 0.1 ha to 1 ha per family (*ibid*: p.6), which makes smallholder irrigation development a necessity.

The Irrigation Policy and Strategy paper estimated that the number of smallholder schemes was 141 (1994: 3). Other commentators maintained that smallholder irrigation was still a small factor in the performance of agriculture in Zimbabwe. They contended that lack of information on this sector's development had 'affected policy, design and planning, contributing to poor understanding' of the sub-sector (Chabayanzara, 1992: 185). Chabayanzara estimated that the area under irrigation would reach 100,000 ha by 1995, and almost 8,000 families would benefit (1992: 188). Chitsiko (1995: 2), Deputy Director (Engineering Services) for the Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX, hereinafter Agritex⁴), put the figure of irrigated land developed by 1994 at 119,000 ha, with approximately 82 per cent of it on large-scale private farms and plantation estates, and only about 7 per cent in Communal Areas, with the majority of smallholder farmers, and 11 per cent on state farms. Peacock (1995) estimated that smallholder irrigation schemes contributed less than 0.1 per cent to Zimbabwe's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which he said averaged about 12 per cent of GDP contributed by the agricultural sector in general.

More data on the dynamics of the smallholder irrigation sub-sector are discussed in the introductory chapter of a book edited by Manzungu and van der Zaag (1996) with essays on Zimbabwe's smallholder irrigation development. The above statistics portray a picture of an almost insignificant contribution of the smallholder irrigation sub-sector to any substantial form of economic development of the respective groups of the population and the national economy at large. One reason for this may be because the indicators used to measure development or success in this case were not aligned to what people in small-scale irrigation schemes regarded as development. Rural producers may not necessarily produce surpluses for the purpose of raising their contribution to the annual GDP, and the economic value or worth of their irrigation scheme may not, to them, be based on that. Instead, as Nyamaropa farmers showed me, the ability of 'their' project to provide them with almost all the necessary conditions to produce enough food for their families, and to be able to sell enough to make money, to educate their children, were crucial criteria for them to think and feel that the project was, or was not, successful. This view alone is like a way of spoiling for a fight with some development interveners, especially government departments aiming to 'develop' rural areas. The gospel for extension staff and other interveners in Zimbabwe had been to try and teach smallholder Communal Area farmers, especially those in irrigation schemes, to farm for sale, to produce more commercial crops than subsistence or food crops, in other words to change them into small-scale commercial farmers. The Agritex Philosophy and Mission statement actually illustrates this approach clearly. It says that the department aims to: "...maintain a process of *transforming* rural farm families from subsistence into commercial agriculture, hence ensuring healthy farm families that have a sound base for economic growth" (1994).

Some studies have shown that irrigation certainly does present better chances of making a living to farmers in normally dry seasons, and irrigators consider themselves better-off than dryland farmers (Reynolds, 1969). What is of crucial importance, and has been lacking, is some detail on how farmers involved in this type of farming relate to it, and to others within and immediately outside the project, and whether they regard it as an advantage to be an irrigator and why. There are hardly any detailed studies on how smallholder irrigation farmers generally affect, change or re-negotiate the initial objectives of irrigation intervention.

On institutional reform, Magadzire (1995) says that Agritex has the mandate for the design and management of all smallholder irrigation schemes, with the responsibility for dam construction resting with the Department of Water Development. He adds that the splitting of responsibilities between the two departments addressing similar challenges causes problems of priorities that are not co-ordinated (Magadzire, 1995: 6). From the late 1980s there had been debate in Zimbabwe's irrigation circles about turning over management of smallholder schemes to farmers, but concern had been expressed on issues such as farmers' ability and preparedness to manage the projects' technical aspects such as maintenance of infrastructure, especially where water pumping is part of the irrigation system. This also raised the question of what role outside institutional assistance would play in the new set-up or even during the transition process.

Rukuni, who has contributed significantly to research and debate on smallholder irrigation development in Zimbabwe, argues that,

"After switching from rainfed to irrigated farming, it takes a long time, maybe a whole generation, for farmers to adjust to new work routines, increased risk and technical requirements. Unfortunately, little is being done to speed up this adjustment. For instance, *almost no research is being carried out on the sociological and managerial issues facing smallholder irrigation associations* (1995: 93, my emphasis).

This gap had already been identified, and will hopefully be filled by this and other related studies. However, this should not give the reader the impression that the main objective here is just to plug some gaps in irrigation management: the story goes beyond that. This reference (Rukuni, 1996) went part of the way towards answering the many practical 'whys' that had accompanied me from the start of this study.

The initial hurdle I met was to justify the selection of an irrigation scheme for the study, together with overcoming conceptual dilemmas in understanding irrigation development within the sociology of rural development. More specifically, I had to be clear on how such a study fitted into the whole field of rural development as it was conceptualised in Zimbabwe, or how I might contribute to, influence or change, some of the perceptions of what rural development entailed. The practical or implementation aspects of rural development (as a government objective) fell under the Department of Rural Development (DERUDE) which was formed soon after 1980. Irrigation development has been written about in Zimbabwe as a suitable means of overcoming or at least offsetting some of the worst effects of droughts in dry regions throughout the country (Roder, 1965; Reynolds, 1969; DERUDE, 1983; Rukuni, 1984, 1988; Meizen-Dick, 1993). Studies in smallholder irrigated agriculture in Zimbabwe have gone a long way towards identifying critical aspects of development problems. Most of them have so far either been of a socio-economic nature (Rukuni, 1984, 1985; Meizen-Dick, *et al.*, 1993), or rooted in technical disciplines (Makadho, 1990, 1993), while some have either been policy oriented (Mvududu, 1993), or simply focused on specific topics such as gender in smallholder irrigation (Chimedza, 1989; Dikito, 1988).

Such studies were helpful in sharpening my conceptualisation of irrigation development intervention. This study built upon some of the issues they raised, and there are also some attempts to fill some of the gaps they exposed. There were hardly any previous studies of irrigation development that came from a sociological or anthropological point of view. This is needed for an in-depth understanding of processes of change from the point of view of the various actors involved. Cheater's

work⁵ among small-scale farmers in Mashonaland West Province, especially the problems that some farmers faced and the differences in their farm enterprises (Cheater 1984), added to my curiosity about rural development in general, and smallholder farmers in particular.

This study, and a few others under the ZIMWESI programme, covers some distance towards filling that theoretical and knowledge gap in this field of rural development in Zimbabwe. As a sociological study, this research work focused on how people interacted, worked together, settled differences and used common community resources in their daily struggles for survival. As already noted, irrigation literature in Zimbabwe has given scant attention to the fact that irrigation development is essentially a social process (Ubels, 1989; van der Zaag; 1992). Part of the objective is to contribute to the debate about how rural actors manage their differentiated irrigating lives, discourses, struggles and negotiations, conflicts and accommodations in their constantly changing environment. In order to examine this complex social process, it was proposed to undertake a detailed analysis of one irrigation scheme and its impact on producers practising irrigated agriculture and on surrounding dryland communities. The study in particular aims to bring to the fore how and why various actors respond differently to change in their social surroundings and 'outsider'-induced development interventions (Magadlela and Hebinck, 1995: 8).

During fieldwork, I made a conscious effort to avoid being a victim of disciplinary chauvinism, or working in the comfort and warmth of the familiarity of issues and terms within one's discipline, whereby one thinks that one's discipline, in this case sociology/anthropology, has most of the missing answers to development problems among smallholder farmers. One other trap was that of sticking to one's disciplinary catchments of what issues to concentrate on. In rural development it is easy to find fault with the foci of other disciplines. For example, they do not have social issues as central in their research, or their attention to social factors may be limited to citation of some general socio-cultural issues often in obligatory fashion. This leads to the neglect of more in-depth and critical micro-social aspects, and details of the lives of different people 'targeted' by rural development programmes. Such micro-sociological issues include social identity and social difference among social actors who engage in strategic relationships in negotiations in their daily lives.

Sometimes some 'natural' or 'hard' scientists feel uncomfortable working under or near the constant gaze of a sociologist or social anthropologist, most likely in the manner that Latour (1987) writes about in *'Science in Action...'*. Doorman (1989: 252), in another example, makes reference to some biological scientists who feel unfairly treated by social scientists when they criticise the effects of the green revolution without pointing out its advantages or achievements, and who resent working with them in some projects, preferring instead to work with agricultural economists who might have had some training in sociology or social anthropology. The following section on theoretical issues brings more of these ideas into the discussion.

Rural development and development intervention, some views

Here I do not intend to go into a detailed discussion of the different approaches dealing with the broad subject of rural development, but I refer to some of the common perspectives used by either planners or development practitioners, including government departments, in pursuing rural development objectives. For a working

definition of rural development, I start with Chambers (1983: 147) who cites a World Bank Sector Paper on Rural Development, released in 1975, as saying that,

"Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people - the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small-scale farmers...(1975: 3).

Although limited, this definition casts some light onto areas and issues that need attention, with the focus on the rural poor. The trend in Zimbabwe has been to regard the state as the carrier of rural development, (especially as found in the Five Year National Development Plans, which started after 1980). This is more or less in the same way that Arce (1993: 166-167) puts it when writing about his Mexican case: the state is seen as championing the cause of rural development. Harriss says that rural development has emerged as a distinctive field of policy, practice and research. He adds that in the 1980s a strategy by the World Bank and United Nations was formulated which focused on the reduction of inequalities in income and employment, and in access to public goods and services, and the alleviation of poverty (1992: 15), as part of rural development strategies.

Neo-Marxists' interests in the mode of production, role of capitalist institutions in influencing policy in developing societies, and a concern with exploitation of the poor by the rich, was not effective in explaining the day to day life experiences of the people affected by poverty.

Modernisation approaches to development in developing countries have been seen to have a 'package' approach, with a top-down attitude where outsiders go into an area 'carrying' either technology or outside knowledge to help develop a particular target place. Modernising is seen as changing or moving, or rather 'progressing', from traditional forms of social and economic organisation and its structures, towards Western type of economic organisation with permanent links to commodity markets. In his inaugural lecture '*Creating Space for Change*', Long (1984), discusses alternative ways of dealing with external interventions in development situations. One of the salient arguments he raises is that external intervention is "mediated and transformed by internal structures" (p.2). In another source, Long (1992: 18-19) criticises the modernisation theory which sees development "in terms of a progressive movement towards technologically and institutionally more complex and integrated forms of modern society, which involves the integration of the modernising society into commodity markets". One of the persuasive criticisms levelled against this approach is that local people almost always have their own perceptions of development, hence development interventions with external sources turn out to have unexpected (negotiated) outcomes (Long, 1989, 1992; Arce and Long, 1992; Arce, 1989).

I was always of the belief that rural producers were capable of making a difference in their own lives, but also that they would need some form of assistance to achieve some of their goals. I was convinced that the odds against them in efforts to improve their conditions were beyond them (examples here are road construction, health facilities, etc). The exploitative nature of market relations in the neo-Marxist tradition, and the trickle-down approach of development benefits, give one the impression that rural populations in developing societies have to wait for development to come from somewhere else, while in the meantime trying to stay clear of greedy exploitative traders (for example).

The main weakness of the two models of modernisation and neo-Marxism is that they both see "development and social change as emanating primarily from centres of power in the form of intervention by state or international interests..." (Long, 1992: 19). Long and van der Ploeg propose an actor-oriented approach that views intervention as a 'multiple reality' made up of differing cultural perceptions and social interests, and constituted by the on-going social and political struggles that take place between the social actors involved (1989: 226). They also argue that "one has to focus not on the models of intervention as such, but more attention should be paid to intervention practices". This, they contend, allows one to take into account the "emergent forms of interaction, procedures, practical strategies, types of discourse, cultural categories and the various 'stakeholders' present in specific contexts" (1989: 226-7).

Theoretical paradigms of planned intervention of the 1960's and 1970's had linear, step-by-step, mechanical views of development intervention. They saw the development process as consisting of policy, implementation and outcomes. Long and van der Ploeg argue, instead, that local groups actively formulate and pursue their own 'development projects' that often clash with the interests of central authority (1989: 267). They go on to add that from around the 1980's "there was a growing recognition of such deficiencies among policy analysts, with new views which saw intervention as a transactional process involving negotiation over goals and means between parties with conflicting or diverging interests, and not simply as the execution of a particular policy" (Warwick, 1982, cited in Long and van der Ploeg, 1989: 227).

Arce contends that "the acceptance of change does not depend upon a force emanating from centres of power (state, powerful economic and political groups, international institutions), but upon its resonance within established local practices and the interpretation of external influences by different actors within the local community" (Arce, 1993: 6). The nature and character of intervention is thus seen as an outcome of interaction between different actors involved in the process at different stages. Van der Zaag says that "since intervention, much like research activity, involves a learning process, it can never be completely planned for from the outset" (1992: 213). A study of a community development programme in Benin by Mongbo (1995) shows how what he calls the '*field of rural development*' comprises people who see it differently and get what they want from it. Similarly, throughout this book, rural development is treated as an interactive and processual activity whereby different actors are constantly engaged in struggles and negotiations to shape the outcomes of their various activities, and to serve their individual or group interests. Through constant struggles, actors continuously shape and re-shape their identities (and identity boundaries) as situations suit their various projects.

Theoretical windows and pathways in studying development projects

Before April 1993 I had not heard much about actor-oriented perspectives in rural development. In Rural Development courses at the University of Zimbabwe, we had been taught about earlier approaches such as modernisation, dependency and neo-Marxist theories of development. I had had the chance to read something about the transactional theories of Barth, Bailey and Sahlins, and the work from the Manchester School by Mitchell on networks, and Long (1967) on social change and the individual. I had the view that the development of our Communal Areas would require massive

external inputs in capital and other resources that would lead to the setting up of rural industries for employment, the construction of roads and other infrastructure, and the generation of employment through agro-industries.

Development had to come from somewhere, and although I had had experiences from my own village where villagers had shown initiative in their own development projects from below, I still thought that projects with more externally injected support would achieve greater success. In a way, (although I cannot say that I was really aware of it!), I believed in top-down intervention, externally-induced modernisation type of development. This was the kind of development I had seen around me, and had heard people talk about. Our village's development worker, although a local resident, and *umlimisi* (extension worker), had to go to town for courses conducted by experts from different places, mostly from towns. These were towns where there were more lights, more cars, tarred roads, tall buildings, houses built close to each other, where people bought most of their food from shops and ate refined maize meal, which all signified a step towards success, towards being 'developed'!

After a three months visit to Wageningen in the summer of 1993, and my initial encounters with actor-oriented approaches, my first couple of months in the field were a constant struggle on several fronts. First, I had to adapt my own perceptions of development as a social process to what was before me. Second, I had to start seeing almost everything that was happening from other people's points of view, especially those living together in and around Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. However, I did not have to struggle much to convince myself that rural producers and other actors they interacted with influenced and shaped development processes and outcomes in their areas. Through discussions with farmers, attending meetings and participating in discussions, new windows were opened in my own perceptions of what was happening at the local level. Fieldwork turned out to be very interesting, but also full of personal internal struggles. This latter part was especially evident when I found myself often encouraging extension staff to see things from 'their' farmers' point of view.

During conflicts with farmers I would find myself in a dilemma: I was often used to bounce off ideas, and would often be seen to be taking farmers' side of things, especially where the latter were obviously breaking set rules. The fortunate part of this was that extension staff had adapted to the way things worked out on the ground, and some of them let farmers flout regulations and argued that things worked differently on paper and in practice.

I chose an actor-oriented approach as appropriate for the analysis of social relations and their role among local actors in shaping outcomes of a development project such as the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme because the approach placed actors at the centre of the development stage. It also recognised the 'multiple realities' of their interface relation. At the same time it called for effective locally based ways of understanding the life-worlds of the different actors (Long, 1992: 5). As such, the approach generally treats social actors as "active participants who process information and strategize in their dealings with some local actors as well as interveners" (*ibid.*: 21). Social organisation is linked to the notion of 'emergent social forms' that range from informal groups and networks with less structured forms to formally recognised associations of farmers such as the Irrigation Management Committee.

Such an approach implies that the study also deals with farmer organisations seen as coordinating institutions, as intermediaries and as sets of actors actively

participating in the shaping of their life-situations together with externally based groups. The approach helps in identifying different actors, their interests, objectives and organising strategies, and how they interact with other actors who find themselves in encounters with others with divergent objectives.

In the form of irrigation development, intervention presents to farmers a new set of values that they may or may not internalise, or adopt and adapt to their situations automatically. They may not have had previous or related experience or a history of contact with such an innovation. Their relation to it, and the meanings that they are expected to attach to it, or to parts of it, and how they develop or attach their own meanings to it, demand that one uses an analytical framework that gets closest to doing justice to the complexity of such intervention situations. The actor-oriented perspective and its related research methods help one to interpret different responses at all levels, and better still, with a hands-on addition to it. As Long puts it,

"An actor-oriented approach requires a full analysis of the ways in which different social actors manage and interpret new elements in their life-worlds" (Long, 1989: 9).

This approach helps the researcher to become aware of, on the one hand, attempts by interveners to 'organise local dis-organisation', to improve local lives and, on the other hand, the local strategies of creating their space for manoeuvre. Rural producers may not intend their actions to be direct attempts to avoid external manipulation or influence as such, but they regard them as part of their own logical responses to daily needs in struggles for survival within the framework of their cultural and institutional constraints. As individuals, and through their groups, networks, coalitions and cliques, farmers interact with many different 'change agents'.

To analyze these encounters it was necessary to adopt a theoretical framework that helps one see all actors in the 'game of life' as capable and potentially influential in shaping the outcomes of specific bargaining processes. An actor-oriented approach was a fitting conceptual framework for understanding such processes. However, it did seem too optimistic sometimes, especially when one concentrated on micro-processes and underplayed, the role of structural influences on local level social dynamics.

Strategic action and farmers' organising capacities derive from the nature and character of local development discourse and practice. As a result of close social, residential and plot proximity in an irrigation environment, farmers over time create and develop similar or related, at least cohesive, ways of relating to their physical, social and cognitive worlds. These related identifications keep changing as different social actors constantly seek new (and hopefully better) ways of going about their business. Sometimes this may lead to conflict, but evidence in following chapters shows that regular contact and residential proximity lead to, or create, accommodating attitudes and behaviour. Farmers' groups and networks may be the 'identifiable groupings' within the diverse 'symbolic community'. Some of them may lack identifiable structures, but their presence, if recognised, should not be ignored. 'Community' here refers to the community as defined by actors themselves. In this case immigrant irrigators believe that they are a separate unit from the local dryland farmers (and represent a community of irrigators). But they now admit that local irrigators are no longer any different from them, especially after joining Churches and seemingly rejecting local forms of identity such as (public or open) spirit worship and attending rainmaking ceremonies.

On agency

Central to the debate about 'actors' and the actor-oriented approach is the notion of human agency which "attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion" (Long, 1992: 22). Local farmer coalitions and sectional cliques (not necessarily 'organisations') are active not only in the shaping of farmers' life-worlds but also in choosing what innovations they will adopt. Since 'the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life' in different situations (Long and van der Ploeg, 1989), active farmers' 'channels of action' are 'capable' because they have the capacity to help them change or improve their farming situations significantly.

This strategic bargaining character of farmers' informal networks gives them the attribute of 'group agency', because they do not sanction the acceptance, or incorporation into their (farmers') lives, of 'half-baked' or, rather, 'externally-baked' ideas about change or development. They actively and consciously organise themselves into a body that interacts with other organs in the process of transforming their lives. This particular attribute is seen clearly among producers in the Nyamaropa area who do not take extension advice as given, but negotiate with other actors about their life situations, and this they do in spite of differences among themselves since they are not a homogeneous unit.

Change takes place because farmers accept it in their and the outsiders' negotiated terms, and as Taylor points out, grassroots initiatives are 'strategic in intent' (1992: 226). The quality or attribute of agency that local groups have, qualifies their being given the 'actor' status. An important point to study here is how agency is sustained in the face of internal group dynamics, farmers' differentiations, competition, and rival coalitions and cliques.

Agency goes beyond the capacity to make effective decisions, it "is composed of social relations and entails organising capacities" whereby agents pass on messages and information through others who process and pass it on in their own terms (Long, 1992: 23). This involves a process of the emergence of networks of social actors who enrol others in their projects and become enrolled in others' projects.

The outcomes of development in specific contexts are to a large extent shaped by the manipulation of the social networks by, in this case, farmers themselves as local development agents. Preliminary findings portrayed Nyamaropa irrigation and dryland areas as a battleground of different values and views of the practice of irrigation farming, of entitlement to irrigated land, and conflicting perceptions of behaviour acceptable to the ancestors, to one's church, to the government department's staff, and to each other. Through this, one realises that an advantage with the use of an actor-oriented approach, as Long puts it, is that one starts with an "interest in explaining differential responses to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous" (1992: 21). However, it is important to be always aware of the fact that human social, cultural, and political behaviour, as seen in this case in the irrigation scheme and its immediate surroundings, is not *always* strategic, rational or calculated, but can be 'irrational' and downright subjective, hence its unpredictability. However, it could also be seen as 'rational' in another sense, a

sense that is different from 'rationality' assumed in economists' and political scientists' rational choice theories.

Concepts as tools for analysis

The following is a brief introduction of some of the concepts that are used in the thesis. They are treated as 'analytical tools' to deal with, and help clarify, some of the situations, cases, events and encounters I deal with in the process of research and during the write-up. The concept of *interface* is dealt with in the methods section below, and 'ethics', although relevant, are not discussed in great detail.

Actor: Here I will use the term 'actor' with reference to individual human beings who are actively doing something (performing an action), or groups of actors who are capable of performing actions as a cohesive unit. A relevant definition of 'actor' is given by Tilly who says that an actor is 'any set of living bodies (including a single individual) to which human observers attribute coherent consciousness and intention' (1995: 6).

Networks: 'networks' is used here to refer to either kin or non-kin associations that people establish for particular purposes with others in their locality or in another place. The networks that I analyse in this study are mainly those that can be treated as mutual benefit relationships among irrigation and dryland farmers. Some of the networks analysed were of widows, local irrigation farmers campaigning to gain access to more irrigated land and irrigators with labour problems linking up (for years) with dryland farmers or businessmen. Tilly (1995: 7) defines a network as 'a more or less homogeneous set of ties among three or more actors'. Networks, however, are not always horizontal or balanced. They can be asymmetrical, unbalanced, and sometimes more like client-patron relations.

Difference and strategic difference: this refers to 'areas of dissimilarity' that people have among themselves, which they identify and distinguish themselves with, and which they use in negotiations over resources, as strategic weapons or tools, and to legitimate claims, for example. They may be based on ethnic affiliation, religious orientation, one's origins, totems, type of relationship with the irrigation scheme, gender issues, or relationship with Agritex or businessmen, attitude towards dryland/irrigation farmers, or outsiders in general, etc. Social difference assumes many forms and is almost characteristic of all the different types of farmers in Nyamaropa, who are always quick to throw off a word or two that describes the other or simply sticks a label on them. Difference is quite closely related to the concept of identity. What I find particularly intriguing in the concept of 'different' is the way social actors manipulate their or each other's differences in negotiations and struggles over access to crucial resources in their lives. This purposive use of one's or the other's difference I call '*strategic difference*', and this runs through this study as I try to explore how development intervention highlights people's social and other differences, and how they then use that as one of their many 'strategies for negotiation'. This last point, however, does not imply that all behaviour is strategic. The crucial aspect of looking at it is from the view that difference is useful as a tool when analysed as a contextual relational concept. The removal or changing of a particular context is likely to change

the meaning of difference. Moore says that "difference is ... a relational concept, and it is always experienced relationally in terms of political discrimination, inequalities of power and forms of domination" (1994: 26).

Identity: this concept is used here to analyse the different ways that actors in Nyamaropa differentiate one person or group from the other. The distinctions that they make have a basis in one or another of the range of characterisations or identities that they create, inherit, or accept from others, including from outsiders, and those that they impose on each other. It gives one more insight into the nature of relationships among people when one understands what they call themselves and why. This also relates to the implications of what they would like to be called. I find identity central in analysing social differences in a social transformation situation where new social interfaces emerge. An important point in dealing with identity for such a study is that it should be dealt with as "a highly contextual, relational, contingent and dynamic process" that continuously transforms social and cultural relations while being transformed itself in the process (Yon, 1995: 483).

Power: Here power, like identity and social difference, is treated as a relational concept, shaped by the different types of relationships that actors engage in and negotiate around each other. It is also seen as a resource that can easily change hands, or be influenced by different actors at the same time. No one particular actor *has* it at a particular time to the extent that others with whom s/he relates are lacking in it; in other words, in power relations, a 'powerful' actor depends on other actors yielding power to him/her, the one who wields it (Villarreal, 1994: 205, 220). Power can also be seen as related to issues of identity, especially in cases where a particular identity, such as being an 'immigrant irrigation plotholder', seemingly attributes to one a higher status and thus a more powerful position relative to a local dryland farmer in terms of ability to access irrigation water. This however, does not mean that the dryland farmer is without any means of accessing the same source of water. Villarreal says that:

"Power relations are recreated in the interaction and not totally imposed from one side. Power is not inherent to a position, a space or a person; it is not possessed by any other actors, and it is not a zero-sum process whereby its exercise by one of the actors leaves the others lacking" (1994: 205).

In this light, power is a useful analytical tool for understanding leadership and other wrangles among irrigation farmers, between local and immigrant irrigators, between irrigators and dryland farmers, between churches and the traditional institution led by the Headman, and between farmers and outsiders (including Agritex).

Belief: I find this concept fitting for analysing some of the bases of actor's actions in, and perceptions of, their social relationships in Nyamaropa. It refers to what actors find as sources of their strength, their identity, their power, their authority, and their well-being. It also refers to what has been termed 'a higher ordered discourse' (Long) whereby actors appeal to a higher authority to explain misfortune and/or fortune, or events that are not explicable through normal discourse in their lives.

Life-world: this has been defined as a "lived-in and largely taken-for-granted world" (Schultz and Luckmann, 1973, cited in Arce and Long, 1992: 212). This also refers to the

way actors view their situation in a particular place, together with the constraining and enabling factors around them, in their world. It has a lot to do with their view of themselves and their situation, their everyday lives, and encompasses how they see the outside world and interpret new innovations using their conceptual tools acquired in their world view. Actors in the same geographical area, such as irrigators and dryland farmers in Nyamaropa, may have different life-worlds.

Multiple realities: the co-existence of different social actors and their diverse world-views, their varying perceptions of their common situation, based on their background, their networks, knowledge, and social status. Long says that multiple realities are "potentially conflicting social and normative interests, diverse and discontinuous configurations of knowledge" (1992: 26).

On research methods

Setting out

The study was done between the latter part of 1993 and March 1996, under the Zimbabwe Programme on Women's Studies, Extension, Sociology and Irrigation (ZIMWESTI), funded by NUFFIC and the Dutch government. A large part of the work was done within an interdisciplinary research framework in rural development among smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe. Most of the studies by the other six members of the research team, were carried out in one administrative Province of Manicaland, in the Eastern part of Zimbabwe, bordering Mozambique. The day I first got to the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, in a hired car driven by the co-ordinator of our research project (Pieter van der Zaag), was one I was going to remember for some time. Our first impression was that the valley of Nyamaropa was like a saucepan, not simply because of its heat (above 30 degrees that day!), but because of the pan-like position of the irrigation project and its settlements surrounded by rolling hills. Our first stop was the Agritex office, the centre of the irrigation scheme's management, and that was to be one of my regular stops during my stay there.

Agritex staff and some irrigators who had heard about or had actually had contact with previous researchers, kept asking me what had happened to the tall white man whom I had first arrived with. When I asked them why they wanted so much to know about him, they said that they remembered another white man called Norman⁶ who lived in Nyamaropa in the sixties and studied the farming lives of irrigators, and they had expected my colleague to stay and do the same (after I had explained my purpose).

What this view of researchers meant was that there were different perceptions among irrigators about what a researcher had to be like, about who could set out to study other people and their lives, their cultures. The idea that I, as a young African man, was going to live among them for that extended period, studying their lives to write a book about them, was inconceivable to some of them, and they expressed this sentiment clearly:

"I don't see what the point is, I think you have nothing to do in Harare, that is why you came out here to study in Nyamaropa. You really mean you left your family and your job at the University to come and see how we live, and then write about it?"

When I pointed out that I could contribute to what is known about lives of irrigation farmers, and maybe get a promotion at work, she responded by laughing, mockingly but jokingly too, and said,

"Haa, if it is that easy then I want to come to University too..." (Mai⁷ Hakutangwi, 19 February 1994).

Of course much of how they perceived my work depended on my explaining to them the full purpose of my research, but their interpretations were based on their own perceptions of what constitutes 'work', and this is something intrinsic to local discourse on productive tasks worth pursuing full-time. Later, I did engage in discussions with some irrigators about some virtues of ethnography.

The first tasks I started off with included familiarising myself with the extension department, which 'unfortunately' turned out to be the only suitable entry point at the time. I use 'unfortunately' not because I did not like to work with Agritex staff (we actually got on very well), but because some farmers initially thought that I was a new Extension Worker⁸. I had to clarify my position quickly, and extension staff helped me do this in subsequent meetings with farmers. From then on extension staff, who were familiar with the way things were done and what should not be done by outsiders in the area, introduced me to farmers in their general meetings. I paid several visits to the Headman, the Councillor and the Irrigation Management Committee chairman. The Headman is a leader in the traditional structure which starts with the Chief at the top, then sometimes sub-Chiefs, followed by Headmen, then Village Heads at the bottom, sometimes referred to as 'kraalheads'. A Headman can try civil cases in his court, and take more serious cases to the police. In Nyamaropa, the Headman is sometimes referred to as the Chief by some of the people who have never seen the Chief because he stays too far (about 80 km away), and he cannot take cases to him. The Councillor is sometimes seen as a civil servant, but he is an elected political representative of a local government ward which has six villages. He leads the ward through the Ward Development Committee (WADCO) and its six Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) at the bottom of the local government structure. He represents the ward in Council meetings at District level in the District Development Committee (DIDCO). Like traditional leaders, Councillors and VIDCO members are involved in local level social organisation; but the latter are sometimes regarded as usurpers of the traditional powers of the former who in fact lost some of their powers to them soon after independence (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1991; Helmsing, 1991). Snow-balling was not easy at first, when chasing up specific issues concerning particular actors, but later, with more confidence in each other, people were freer to volunteer their views.

Ethnographic endeavour and qualitative research

Quantitative research in general, and use of statistical measurements and surveys in particular, have some advantages in doing social research, especially when it comes to sampling and case representation, and sometimes generalisability of research results. Those who use such methods believe that they have a more legitimate claim to scientificity. Positivist methods generally derive from natural law theory. Social anthropologists and development sociologists who employ positivist methods, although fewer and fewer in recent years than there were before, believe that

scientifically replicable methods should be used in social inquiry if the particular disciplines involved are to remain credible 'sciences'.

There seems to be an implicit inference here that ethnography and qualitative research methods generally do not produce scientific material. But what is ethnography? A loose, or working, definition of ethnography could be that it is the practice of social research whereby the researcher lives among a group or groups of people, closely observing and recording what happens or what they do in their lives, their customs and cultural repertoires, for an extended period of time. This is certainly relevant for understanding development or intervention situations, but how does one do it? And who is, or can be, better placed to do it?

Conducting social research in a development project, on social dynamics of different actors involved in it, requires that one uses methods that will bring out the dynamism and not be blind to the numerous intricate processes of social interaction that take place and shape their life-worlds. Qualitative methods are more suitable for such situations and, as Hammersley puts it, they involve a devotion to "the study of local and small scale social situations in preference to analysis at the societal or psychological levels. They stress the diversity and variability of social life, and have a concern with capturing the myriad perspectives of participants in the social world" (1989: 2). Case studies, situational analyses, network analyses, participant observation, dialogue, and other tools, played crucial roles in the process of ethnographic data collection, and helped me pick out and record what first appeared as 'trivia', but turned out to be important points, factors or events in the analysis, linking up with other aspects of the study.

During the initial stages of fieldwork, there were instances when I felt insecure with the methods I was going to use in trying to understand the intricate detail of the life of rural producers in this remote valley⁹. I had read about participant observation and done three months research before on a related subject, but studying people while living amongst them was something new. I had decided during the proposal stages of the research that this was going to be an ethnographic piece of work. Surveys miss the detail of the processual nature and dynamism of human social life. For my research to have relevance as a detailed sociological account of social differentiation in Nyamaropa, I had to enrol myself (and I found myself enrolled) into Nyamaropa people's lives and projects¹⁰, their work, and organisations, and had to try to see things from their points of view as much as I could, without consciously and directly influencing the course of events.

It became evident from the start that studying a development project like this particular irrigation scheme would require more than just acknowledging the capacity of the different actors to influence what goes on in their surroundings. I had to get involved in their lives, but to a comfortable and acceptable extent, which I now believe is mainly achievable through the actual experience, and can be decided upon during the course of research. While in Nyamaropa, I was neither going to conduct myself as if I was completely removed from the community I was studying, nor as if I was not an actor in their social lives. But I was not going to act as if I was one of the senior members of the irrigation community either. I knew that my very presence, not least because I was doing work that some of them identified with a previous researcher, was going to have an influence on how they related to me, to each other and to outsiders, especially in my presence. As research continued, I took part in discussions, in rituals and ceremonies, in meetings, and could not avoid being part of an array of

social interfaces in everyday interactions' (Long, 1984, cited in van der Zaag, 1992: 11). The different reactions to the same things among farmers, and the social differences that emerged from contact with irrigation and dryland, marked the central development of arguments and debate about relationships in my work.

I had to immerse myself in their lives, but this was initially not easy because of ethnic differences¹¹. But to my surprise, and relief, I was quickly¹² accepted without any incident at all, and gradually cultivated friendly relations with most of the people I worked with. But the question of where exactly I came from kept coming up almost all the time¹³. The main reason this was so was because they did not expect me, as a Black Zimbabwean, to seek to know about their lives in the kind of detail I sought. I was expected to know it already from my own cultural background. They said that, in spite of my Ndebele background, the fact that I was a Zimbabwean meant that I would probably know how they lived. My defence was that that was the main reason I was going to stay there and find out for myself!

Sometimes I became too conscious of our differences, especially when an issue in the papers, or in the news on radio, mentioned tribal resentment or conflict, but this would be dismissed by some of them as 'silly'. One might say that they expected us to share cultural boundaries (in the sense of Cohen, 1984), or that our ethnic horizons were already merged (Markus, 1986: 29, cited in van der Zaag, 1992: 11). After a few months my key informants and some families I had made friends with, started calling me *mukorori* (son), *mukwasha* (son-in-law), *tsano* (brother-in-law) or *sahwira* (close friend)¹⁴. This was a source of relief to me, but it had its problems too: I had to live up to some of the expectations linked to my new titles, especially when it came to work in the fields. Although numerous times I got back to my 'home' tired after 'field work' (as in ploughing, weeding, etc), there was the consolation that they did not ask for a price from me to study their lives, an ethical question I have yet to find convincing answers to. I kept the arguments within me alive about the methodological correctness of my work, and I am still struggling with some of them.

The positivist requirement that in order to solve social research problems, or to understand the social world, we have to standardize research procedures, or, merely 'ape the natural sciences' (Hammersley, 1989: 1), would come to mind now and then, especially on the issue of representation of selected cases. I selected cases based on their potential to address my research questions, although some of them changed as a result of new issues emerging from interaction with some of the cases.

This idea of selecting critical cases is encouraged in actor-oriented perspectives, and by some proponents of detailed ethnography. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 44) say that "selecting critical case studies and studying them in detail may be more fruitful [than having a lot of varied cases]" (de Vries, 1992, refers to the importance of selecting critical case studies for analysis). However, the naturalist side of the argument would still come to my rescue. On a note supportive of my methods of inquiry, Hammersley says that,

"Understanding a human activity means that we look at its development over time and at its environment, at the configuration of social factors that make up the situation in which it occurs, and the way in which these factors interact' (1989: 93).

While going beyond just 'looking at' human activity, and actually 'participating in' it, may interfere with the quality of responses we get from what we are studying, it remains critical for the outcome of the final product of research to realise that we are

better off participating in the lives of those we are doing research on, or rather 'with', than standing aloof and pretending not to have any effect on what is taking place. Crucial decisions may be made based on our expected reactions or comments, while we live in the illusion that we are removed from the particular area.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), in support of naturalism, contend that "we have to directly experience the social world" (p.14). They add that "in its extreme form, naturalism says that the requirement is that ethnographers 'surrender' themselves to the cultures they wish to study" (*ibid*). They go on to point out that we have to remain aware of the reflexivity of social research, that is, "we have to recognise that we are part of the social world we study" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 14).

Sometimes this may be regarded as a weakness. Van der Zaag (1992: 11), says that this subjectivity of the researcher should not be seen as a weakness, as all research uses subjective observations anyway, and this helps to keep researchers checking their methods. However, although one cannot avoid being enrolled into the lives of other actors in the course of doing fieldwork, it would seem that it is an advantage to try and remain an outsider, aware that one is an actor too, and marginally involved in aspects of people's lives.

The scientific quality of one's findings when they finally meet the scrutiny of readers is a factor that influences the researcher to remain focused on methods. This issue of subjectivity of social research was discussed briefly by Hammersley remarking that Blummer (1939), sometimes seen as the leading proponent of qualitative research methods, had a dilemma about it: "on the one hand, social phenomena cannot be understood without taking account of subjective as well as objective factors; yet... we have no way of capturing subjective factors that meet the requirements of science" (1989: 4). A solution to this dilemma is certainly not in changing the meaning of science to accommodate ethnographic data collected using qualitative methods, but to realise that apart from influencing our findings by our mere presence, all science has an element of subjectivity.

Using case studies

To produce detailed analyses of social differentiation and actors' strategies in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, selection of case studies was a necessary step. Case selection took place almost throughout the fieldwork. Initial selection took place after a few weeks when 'interesting' interviews with individuals whose farming methods, type of household, ethnic affiliation, origin, and other criteria in the research questions were found suitable for further investigation. Through cases one could observe how the individual or other actors arrived at certain decisions, how they manipulated resources of different kinds, including knowledge, to serve their various individual or group interests. But before we go any further with this discussion, we have to confront the crucial question here: what is a case? Ragin argues that,

"at a minimum, every study is a case study because it is an analysis of social phenomena specific to time and place" (1994a: 2).

This line of argument suggests that the study of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and its surrounding dryland farming area is in itself a case study. There are several ways to look at what a case study is. To Ragin (1994b: 225), "[a] case is not inherently one thing

or another, but a way station in the process of producing empirical social science". Mitchell, however, maintains that,

"a case study can be characterised as a detailed examination of an event (or a series of related events) which the analyst believes exhibits some general theoretical principle" (1983: 192).

He adds that some people see it as generally referring to the descriptive material an observer has collected over time about a set of events, and believes that "the focus of a case study may be a single individual as in the life-history approach, or it may be a set of actors engaged in a sequence of activities" (*ibid*). I have treated case studies in my research in a way that agrees with the way Mitchell defines them. This is also in the context of the outsider acknowledging from the outset that the researcher is also an actor. De Vries, for example, shows how he "established a research network through a process of mutual enrolment in which researcher and researched become active social agents" (1992: 47). This is an important part of the research, but there is always the danger of the researcher seeing only what s/he wants to see, or worse, becoming overly influential in what is happening in the particular area, most likely doing so indirectly or unawares.

On the same issue of cases, Seur points out that the "cases selected should provide a good picture of the diversity and differentiation existing within [an] area" (1992: 121). This is related and relevant to an actor-oriented framework of a sociological study of a development project. It helps to highlight the 'differential responses to certain circumstances' (*ibid*). Ragin says that "casing (selecting cases for detailed study) is a methodological step" which takes place either at the beginning or at the end of a project, and adds that there is, however, a problem of identification involving cases, that is, whether the case matches existing theoretical ideas or helps to change/revise the theory (1994b: 218, 221)).

Participant observation was extensively used in following cases not least because it was found to be "a strategy that facilitates data collection in the field..., reduces the problem of reactivity..., helps [one] formulate questions in the native language..., and gives [one] an intuitive understanding of what is going on in a culture ... " (Bernard, 1988: 150). It is a fitting way for detailing the everyday life situations and events of both irrigators and dryland farmers, especially since the research was done in one irrigation scheme. Besides, it is one of the most convincing methods usable within the limits of research periods and limited sponsorship to give information that one can count on if the whole research is done properly.

Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were mainly used to gather information on the specific cases selected and on compilation of their life histories. On life histories Bertaux-Wiame says that 'the ... method helps us look at actual decisions and actions, and to perceive behind these practices the network of social relations which allow them to take place' (Bertaux-Wiame, 1981: 264). Existing records and documents on the research area were used to provide more information especially on background and historical matters.

Interface analyses

The concept of interface conjures up an image of "face-to-face encounters between actors with different interests, resources and power" (Long, 1992; Arce and Long, 1992:

214). Arce and Long point out "that interfaces contain within them many levels and forms of social linkage and discontinuity", which makes interface analysis a suitable method for selecting specific cases for detailed investigation. As Long puts it, "interface analysis is...a methodological device for studying linkage structures and processes..." (1989: 2).

Of course interfaces can also occur between groups and individuals, as in situations where leaders of groups meet other groups. The point is that social interfaces and/or structural discontinuities can lead to the establishment of written texts and contexts of texts for interactions and communication, not just in face to face encounters. According to Long (1989: 237-240) interface analysis is useful because: (a) it focuses on linkages between interacting actors and not just on their individual strategies, (b) it highlights differing world views and cultural interpretations between actors, (c) it stresses the need to look at interface situations diachronically, and (d) it contributes to the understanding of the processes by which planned interventions enter the life-worlds of the individuals and groups affected and come to form part of the resources and constraints of the social strategies they develop.

The use of such a method can be more effective when complemented by other methods that allow the researcher to treat all actors as having the capacity to influence the direction of change, without postulating *a priori* specific determining structures and processes; methods which capture the totality and give details of real life situations. An important method usable together with interface analysis is the case study. From within interface situations, cases of individual farmers, groups of farmers, Agritex officials and the Irrigation Management Committee as a farmer organisation, were studied in detail to answer research questions on farmers' strategies in the wake of external intervention, and to investigate the nature of social and cultural identities among groups of farmers in the context of contested access to land and water, both in the irrigation and dryland socio-economic, political and religious domains.

Ethical challenges and the local researcher

The issue of ethics poses one of the most controversial and yet least written about problems in current ethnographic work. There is a substantial amount of literature on the subject of science and ethics, and authors such as Barnes (1977) and Bulmer (1982) have given critical analyses of the issue. However, there is not much attention so far paid to challenges that the 'local'¹⁵ ethnographer encounters during the course of fieldwork. This section deals with some of the issues that came up during my own research as a 'local' ethnographer in Nyamaropa. Barnes (1977: 3) says that "...in social science ethical questions are intrinsic, ubiquitous and unavoidable", which puts researchers in a position where they have to look out for ethically sensitive aspects of their work and deal with them appropriately.

One of the less written about problems among many researchers' nightmares is that of being treated as a local 'celebrity', or well known and respected member of the community, consulted on several issues by local leaders and other local actors. There were times when I felt that I should not be available for consultations, especially when it came to how farmers related to 'their'¹⁶ extension staff, but it always gave inside information on how and why certain groups of farmers responded to particular situations or events.

Once I was caught up between the two main political (leadership) rivals in the irrigation scheme, when one of them kept asking questions that required me to provide information on what the other, or his supporters, were thinking about particular issues which they did not agree on. This I felt had something to do with 'over-enrolment' in farmers' affairs while pursuing detail which culminated in my almost becoming a 'double agent'¹⁷ in their sometimes hidden conflicts. They were both friendly to me, at times treating me like their own son, and my liking and respect for them sometimes got in the way. This sometimes made it difficult for me to ask personal questions, some of which I left to Richard, my research assistant, through whom they communicated some information to each other and to me.

The question that kept ringing in my mind was whether it was proper of me to inquire about their personal and political differences, or to problematise what to some of them were simple areas of disagreement, and while listening to them to be very critical, sometimes disparagingly, of them, meanwhile feeling good about myself, that I was doing good research. The same ethical dilemma was met in some encounters with extension staff. Some of them became friends of mine¹⁸, and there were some embarrassing encounters when they would be verbally abused by angry farmers, sometimes coming close to being beaten up; or, for example, when water for irrigation ran short, and/or when one of them made a 'mistake', such as closing water for farmers who had not paid up their irrigation fees before their deadline was due.

During the early stages of the research there were some farmers with whom my curiosity with almost all aspects of their lives made them suspicious of my actual intentions. There were stories from among them about the young man from the University, that "he only wants to sound us out... he only wants to test our minds...". Some of them actually thought that I had been sent by the government to monitor how they were treating extension staff, some thought that I was there to observe how they were utilising their plots, with the ultimate aim of recommending to government that they were too old to productively cultivate all their land and should give up part of it. However, most of the stories fizzled out with time, especially when I visited some of the people who had expressed such sentiments to share their views.

The local researcher may not always tackle some of the sensitive issues in the lives of those s/he is studying. In situations such as private rituals, although they may be willing to let one into the performances and actual practices, there are still some objections based on the fact that the outsider will tell others in the area the family's secrets. In such cases assurances are necessary, but there is the dilemma of whether one writes about it in the final construction of the ethnographic text or leaves it out for ethical reasons.

Mutual enrolment sometimes plays a crucial role in shaping the product of the research. I had one of the most challenging days of my fieldwork in Nyamaropa during the last feedback meeting I convened for discussing my findings with farmers and Agritex staff. They reminded me that they knew I had been in the area from 1993 watching and recording what they were doing and saying. After laying out the main findings during an address of about half an hour, there were some revealing exchanges, and some corrections of my 'facts' about them.

One of the salient features of that meeting was when farmers ordered me not to write about the plot-renting and sub-leasing that takes place in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. They actually had to take a vote on the issue when, with the support of some Agritex staff, I tried to persuade them to let me argue their case out positively

in the book. All efforts failed, it was a unanimous NO vote! They told me that they were writing the book through me, that it was their story, and I had to listen to them. Sub-leasing is a crucial aspect in the lives of people in both the irrigation scheme and dryland farming areas, and if I leave it out, their story will certainly be incomplete. I am actually still negotiating with them on how I can include it¹⁹.

Site selection

This was one of the interesting and challenging stages of carrying out research. First there was trouble concerning where to do research. I had initially chosen an irrigation scheme in a completely different province or region, in Matabeleland South Province. This is my home Province and I thought that there would be no great language, cultural and other related problems there. I had been interested in studying the place before, but had had no opportunity to pursue it. I was willing to sacrifice the thrill and anxieties that accompany learning about other people's ways of life in preference for my assumed smoothness of inquiry among a familiar cultural and language set-up. Experiences in Nyamaropa proved that I had exaggerated the probable dangers that lay in studying in the remote area with my tribal affiliations; the way I was treated was simply gratifying. But studying in Matabeleland was rejected, with the 'logistical' reason that we researchers needed each other closer by to share ideas and research resources. I had to find another area.

There were several irrigation schemes to choose from. One of my colleagues had 'pegged' or 'marked' four of them for study, and was still making up his mind which one(s) he wanted to discard. I chose one of them, but this led to a difference with my colleague who said it had some 'juicy' stories in its history and he could not give it up I decided to relinquish it. Then I chose a very remote one, quite removed from the rest of the schemes, 'pegged' too, to the north of our base in Mutare (the biggest urban centre in Manicaland Province where our research was initially restricted). He was not very keen on this one, and so I picked up what my colleagues called 'left-overs'. But there are no 'left-overs' in research! There was nothing like left-overs in Nyamaropa, unless it be 'left-overs' from Reynolds who is the only person to have studied the area in depth (through a socio-economic study) between 1966 and 1967. Then I started the anxious and challenging process of getting out to do fieldwork.

Thesis lay-out

The thesis is divided into four parts. Part One gives 'the story behind the study', with a background to the study in the form of Chapter 2. This chapter provides what I have called The Setting. This is Zimbabwe's agricultural history, the history of smallholder irrigation development, a background to Nyamaropa irrigation intervention, and an introduction to the different actors who appear throughout the book.

Part Two has two chapters and is about the embeddedness of the social, power and other relationships, social and economic differentiation, in land and water resources. Chapter 3 goes into empirical findings from the field with the issue of struggles over land and water among irrigation farmers. There is also a debate on water ownership as seen by different actors in the Nyamaropa area. This is a central chapter in the sense that it introduces the crucial issues of cultural and social identity in relations between formal irrigators and non-irrigators, between original inhabitants of the now irrigated

area and immigrants to the same area. These are some of the issues that set the scene for case analyses of the dynamics of development intervention, constructions and reconstructions of cultural and social identities.

Chapter 4, also in Part Two, is about the issue of different claims to water use, between irrigation farmers in the Nyamaropa project, and villagers in the catchment area who use river water which is the source of water for the irrigation scheme downstream. Here the argument is that spatial distinctions, cultural identities, and community identity, constitute a crucial entry point for the analysis of ways of assembling claims to resource use by different actors. Differences in community organisation feature as competing aspects of claims to resource utilisation.

Part Three is about the irrigation domain as a shared life-world. Chapter 5 is on gender images and irrigation life. There are cases of several widows who struggle to survive in a tough and competitive environment. A salient feature of this chapter is how women relate to the irrigation scheme through their families or individual plots. Walking through the irrigation scheme one is struck by a common feature of the area: roughly more than seventy percent of people one sees working or meets in the fields are women and children, with the majority of them being women. A striking, or rather startling, phenomenon in Nyamaropa is that almost thirty percent of plotters are widows! (although some of them registered as widows when their men worked in town, so that they would have access to irrigated plots. This was a stratagem to beat the rule prohibiting those with wage-working spouses from having access to irrigated land).

Chapter 6 focuses on irrigation extension specifically, and has cases of farmers' encounters with Agritex, and a case of a day in the life of an Extension Worker, revealing the different views of similar situations between farmers and outsiders, and among farmers themselves in the presence of outsiders. This chapter also deals closely with one of the central issues in the study, that of how social differences among people affect or influence and impact on their responses to new knowledge or information. In this case, it is a matter of how they relate to extension workers as promoters of change, improvement and innovation.

Part Four is on official (and unofficial) regulations and practices, looking especially at government practice through Agritex and the traditional institution through the Headman. Chapter 7 deals with a delicate and sensitive subject of age, inheritance, sub-leasing and renting, and the irrigation rules which were ignored. The average age of plotters in Nyamaropa was approximately 55 years, though there were plotters as old as 84 years. Most of them were first generation plotters, that is, those who cleared the plots themselves when the project started. They were still hanging on to them and regarded irrigation land as their family asset, against the official rule that they were lessees on state land. To maintain productivity, they sub-leased their plots to dryland farmers who need irrigated land for food. Some of them had established networks with local businessmen who rent part of their land in return for paying irrigation fees for the plotters. There were some long-term relationships of mutual assistance between the different types of farmers.

Part Five provides conclusions and theoretical analyses of findings. It also contextualises social difference and cultural identity in various situations among irrigators and drylanders. Discussed here are issues of how the different social groupings fit into the whole story of social dynamics of development intervention, and what some social theorists say on the issue of cultural identity and social difference.

This chapter brings together different theoretical issues raised in material found in the various chapters before it.

This final section also looks into the various problems facing 'irrigating lives' in smallholder irrigation in the context of intervention, and the issues and contradictions surrounding concepts such as cultural identity, and *strategic difference* in rural development. There is also discussion of what such a study means for a general understanding of rural development issues in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region.

Notes

1... My use of the term 'culture' here borrows from Rattansi (1992: p.4, cited in Yon, 1995, p. 485) who argues that culture 'cannot be understood simply as that which expresses the identity of a community, but rather processes, categories and knowledge through which communities become defined'. On a related note Anthony King says that a few decades ago 'culture was thought to be about values, beliefs, world views, or alternatively about what one need[s] to know to be accepted as one of them by any members of a cultural group, but it is now seen as being constituted through representation' (1990: 402-3).

2... Sometimes irrigation farmers referred to dryland farmers as nyope (meaning lazy), as backward and resistant to change, development or progress. In some cases, especially where Agritex staff met resistance of one sort or another from farmers, they would call some farmers' leaders 'dictators', and they were called the same thing themselves when they insisted on imposing some of their management 'solutions' to farming problems in the irrigation scheme.

3... These views about this irrigation scheme in my area in Matabeleland South Province are based on retrospection. Most of them are from what I remember to have been the case, and interviews with local villagers who remembered what it was like in those years.

4... This is a government department under the Ministry of Agriculture. It is the national extension services department with staff who live in areas where they operate, close to farmers. The department was formed from the merger of CONNEX and DEVAG, two departments whose functions in giving extension advice to African and European farmers at independence seemed to overlap.

5... The research by Cheater (1984) among small-scale farmers in the Purchase Lands in Msengezi District shows how a freehold tenure system impacts on farmers. In this example, enterprising Black African farmers were permitted to buy and use farming land.

6... Norman Reynolds, an economist from the University of Cape Town in South Africa, carried out a socio-economic study of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme for 14 months between 1966 and 1967, and published a PhD. thesis in 1969. He made several friends among irrigators, some of whom remembered encounters with him vividly and refer to him only by his first name. An interesting part of that experience is that some of the irrigators always referred to my work as similar to his during meetings, in bars and in some of my discussions with them. They repeatedly stressed that I leave copies of my book after I finish writing up their stories, just as one of his key informants (Chibonda) was sent a copy of Reynolds' thesis.

7... This means 'mother, 'mother of' or 'Mrs.' in traditional and contemporary Shona custom. In this particular instance it refers to Mrs. Hakutangwi. She is a 46 year old widow with six daughters. She is an irrigation plowholder with four acres in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, and two acres in dryland within the irrigation fence where water cannot flow to.

8... Extension Workers are Agritex staff who advise farmers on farming matters, train them to be 'better' farmers, and 'extend' new improved farming methods to them. They are government personnel. In the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme there is a full complement of Agritex staff (this is explained more in Chapter 2).

9... Nyamaropa irrigation scheme or valley is 175 km from Mutare and 170 km from Rusape, the two large urban centres in Manicaland Province. In Nyanga District, however, there is Nyanga village, which is still small, but growing, and developing facilities for buying grain from farmers, and

wholesale shops for farming inputs, but it still cannot absorb most of the farm produce from all farmers around it.

10... There was always the danger of being over-enrolled to the point of really being 'used' either as a spy or as a 'messenger'. I found this particularly dicey especially when dealing with conflict between two 'main' political rivals in Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. At one point I did not have to tell one of them about my having met his rival because he kept demanding to know what he had said about certain issues where they did not agree. One of my colleagues said that by seemingly working with them separately, which I was not and could not afford to do, I was afraid of one of the leaders (ZIMWESI Mission Statement, 1994). This sparked off an interesting debate on ethics of investigating the dynamics of political conflict among a group of socially differentiated people. However, looking at it in retrospect, I think it had more to do with being a 'local' and keeping one's social distance, especially as a younger person than most of them and coming from outside, than doing research the 'right' way.

11... As noted elsewhere, my South-Western Zimbabwean origin was likely to cause some discomfort, especially with my sometimes conspicuous Zulu/Ndebele accent when I spoke.

12... It took a couple of weeks of visits and attending meetings before most of the irrigators and dryland villagers got to know about my presence and purpose in the area. There was a lot of interest and willingness to discuss 'the state of affairs' in Nyamaropa with me, some of which waned when I could not pay enough attention to everyone at the same time. Although some of them might have objected to my 'budging' into their lives now and then, there was a warm sense of friendliness and respect in the way we related to each other.

13... Sometimes I would be in a local bar chatting to someone, or walking in the village, or working with someone in their tobacco barn or field, and they would ask me, maybe for the third or fourth time since we met, where exactly I came from. They said that my spoken Shona was sometimes fluent, in spite of the accent. Some of them wanted to confirm or cross-check their information on my background. A two-hour encounter with a villager would not end without the question: "Ko mati kumusha kwenyu ndokupi?" (By the way, where did you say your home is/where do you come from?).

14... There is a strong sense of respect for outsiders who respect local customs among this group of the Manyika (part of the Shona) people. Words like son, son-in-law and close friend are used when there has been established a good measure of respect and trust between the parties involved, or when one wants to establish that kind of relationship.

15... 'Local' here refers to being Zimbabwean. The issue of one's race did come up during my stay in Nyamaropa, especially when some elderly farmers recalled their encounters with Norman Reynolds who studied there in the sixties. They always mentioned that he was a white man; it was with a sense of praise and admiration, that he could leave his place in town and join them in their lives for such an extended period of time.

16... Irrigation farmers especially referred to extension staff as madumeni edu (our demonstrators). The term 'demonstrator' was inherited from the colonial period when extension workers were referred to as such. The interesting part of this relationship was that extension staff too often referred to farmers as varima vedu (our farmers). Some of them (extension staff) would say it and then correct themselves by removing 'our'.

17... Gouldner, who studied middle management and top management in a large organisation, found that some of the staff expected him to "give them information that would involve him acting unethically toward others in the organisation...to be ethical with them, but to break other people's confidence" (1967: 264).

18... All visitors to Nyamaropa Agritex offices are made to sign a visitors' book, and indicate their addresses. One day (halfway through the course of my stay in the area) just before the end of a meeting between Agritex staff and visitors from a non-governmental organisation outside Nyamaropa, the book came out and the clerk made all visitors sign. Then, as an after-thought, she came over to me and, actually, laughing about it, said, "there, you can sign too, isn't it that you are also a visitor?". The two extension workers seated on either side of me laughed too, a joke on my identity, but loaded with meaning.

19... When I went back to Nyamaropa to pick up my field equipment a couple of days after the meeting, I met the chairman of the Irrigation Management Committee who had been very vocal in the vote against including the leasing/renting issue. We talked about a few other things, then I told him that my teachers had told me that if I left the issue out of the book they would fail me. Throwing up his hands and walking away, he said, "Ngava foyirise havo, ngava foyirise, hamheno havo!" ("Let them fail you, let them fail you, it's up to them!").

Chapter 2

The Setting

Introduction

This chapter introduces the background and setting of this sociological study of Nyamaropa irrigation intervention. It is about some of the pertinent issues in development intervention, such as the political context and development ideology of the particular period. The political-economic and social context is important for understanding the reasons for undertaking such studies in the first place. The history of Zimbabwe's agricultural development at the beginning of the chapter places in perspective the type of economic or development policies pursued by government from the 1960s. Following this section is an introduction to the history of the development of smallholder irrigation schemes in Zimbabwe. This is much closer to the focus of the study, that of irrigation development, and looks in more detail than the previous section into issues of how irrigation schemes constructed earlier than Nyamaropa were operating, that is, under what political and social conditions they were developed.

At this stage it is important to clarify the ordering of the different sections of the chapter. It is the second and last section of Part Two, the introductory part of the thesis. The chapter starts with the history of Zimbabwe's agricultural development during the colonial period, highlighting legislative conditions and the social factors surrounding the creation of different tenurial systems, which saw the majority of Africans pushed into Native Reserves with low potential for agricultural production. This part is followed by the background to the development of smallholder irrigation farming in Zimbabwe. Here the emphasis is on factors that influenced the development of these schemes in arid areas around the country. Reasons discussed include that of irrigation schemes being used as famine relief projects, to ease food production and supply problems among rural populations. This sub-section places the discussion of the development of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme in its historical (and socio-political) context. There is a brief note on the location of the Nyamaropa area including altitude and distance from urban centres.

Then there is a section on the chronological reconstruction of the history of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and its surroundings. The reconstruction is by farmers who were interviewed in the irrigation scheme and dryland areas nearby. A discussion of some of the main characteristics of the area before irrigation intervention follows this part. Then there is a series of sub-topics meant to help reconstruct the area's historical development and social transformation, and these are: consultations, looking at methods used to introduce the new method of irrigation farming to locals, based on official records or correspondence; opposition to the project by local inhabitants, which deals with reasons why locals initially shunned irrigation farming; the role of traditional authority which looks at Headman Sanyamaropa's stance at the time of starting the irrigation project; and this is immediately followed by a section on forced labour which discusses the stage of canal construction and how labour was mobilised for the purpose.

There are two sections dealing with the issue of the liberation war and the nationalist movement in general, especially on how this period affected relations

among irrigators and dryland farmers; then there is a brief section on farmer organisation at the time under a section on the Co-operative; this is followed by a discussion of relations between irrigators and dryland farmers in general in Nyamaropa, including conflict over land, and accusations against irrigators who were labelled traitors for having joined the project; then there is a look at irrigation management of the time, especially the fact that there was talk about managers having been strict on adherence to regulations while at the same time persuading people to come and join; finally there is the crucial section which introduces the different actors in the irrigation arena in Nyamaropa. This section draws on evidence of group cultural identity, especially the way various actors present themselves as representing their group's collective interests. The identification of groups or social categories in this section does not imply that they (social units) are concrete representations of their groups as such, rather they are glimpses of the group's fluid identities at that particular time of contact. The last section on problems derived from the past is meant to hint at some of the management and political, social, and administrative dilemmas that the managing agency is bound to collide with in pursuit of smooth project management.

A history of Zimbabwe's agricultural development

The analytical route normally taken in recalling Zimbabwe's economic and agricultural history stresses the fact that the majority of the people in this landlocked country were victims of the creation of what has normally been referred to as a dual economy with segregated development of its various sectors. The main reason for this is that most documented evidence points to the fact that there was a deliberate policy of discrimination meant to establish a European hegemony over the African population in the former British colony (Page and Page, 1991; Rukuni, 1994).

What is also relevant, however, is to note that this duality was a result of the articulation of a particular type of economic system, that of capitalism, based on market relations. This was introduced in such a way that it was to co-exist alongside, and, gradually replace, the existing, less Westernised systems of production and exchange, often referred to as underdeveloped, hence needing 'modernisation'. Meillassoux (1975, cited in Geschiere, 1978) discusses the different ways in which the African external relations of production interacted, implying the presence of a system of production and distribution. Geschiere contends that the old relations of production were very often consolidated to a certain extent and used for the further development of the capitalist sector.

A rather romantic (yet partially true) view of the history of African agriculture in some regions within Zimbabwe before colonial intervention is that by its own standards, and in light of the sparse distribution of population relative to vast land resources, agriculture was said to be flourishing (Page and Page, 1991). Elders say that there was enough, at least more, rain, land, and cattle for people to provide for their families, than there is in the 1990s, for example. This, admittedly, was often complemented by trading in gold and ivory with the East, and local trade in goods such as hoes, salt, pottery and others (Palmer, 1977). But this should not give one the impression that pre-colonial life in Zimbabwe was all milk and honey, with hardly any problems.

Before the arrival of the British South Africa Company in Zimbabwe in 1890, earning their living from limited subsistence farming, keeping cattle, hunting and gathering, and limited trade, made people vulnerable to natural hazards such as droughts. Beach (1977) says that when white settlers came, they found traditional agriculture dating back some 2 000 years (cited in Rukuni, 1994: 17). Rukuni says that livestock was a major activity by AD 1000 and there was a local herd of about 500 000 at colonization (*ibid*).

The two main ethnic groupings of the majority Shona and Ndebele (who migrated from South Africa and settled in the South-Western parts of the territory) were not mere pastoralists; they were established farmers¹ in their own right and grew a wide variety of crops such as finger millet, bulrush sorghum, maize, groundnuts, potatoes, rice, sweet potatoes, cowpeas, pumpkins, squash, cucumber, tomatoes, melons, yams, cane, cassava, lemons, and others (Palmer, 1977; Rukuni, 1994: 17; Beach, 1977). Beach (1994) points out that in Nyanga and some parts of North-Eastern Zimbabwe, some groups of people in the 19th century or earlier practised what seemed to be intensive crop production, and there was evidence of the construction of earthen water channels for irrigation or similar purposes.

After a few decades of colonial occupation and influence, most Africans lost their fertile lands and part of their stock, and were pushed into wage employment as farm and mine labourers (van Onselen, 1976). The creation of Native Reserves from as early as 1895 (two Reserves of 2 486 000 acres altogether were established by 1995) and the settlement of people in what were seen by some locals as 'cemeteries, not homes' (Ministry of Information, 1994: 14), can be seen as the beginning of a deliberate policy to weaken African agriculture. By 1920, about 21 000 000 acres had been set aside for exclusive Native settlement (Rhodesia High Commissioner, series of undated pamphlets). This was meant to create an economically weaker class of people as a pool of reserve labour for European farms and mines (van Onselen, 1976; Arrighi, 1967).

Land in Zimbabwe is divided into agro-ecological zones, sometimes referred to as Natural Regions from the studies of Vincent and Thomas (1964), (see also Table 1).

Table 1: Zimbabwe: Natural Regions

Natural Region	Characteristics
I 613,233 ha (1.56%)	1,050 mm plus rainfall per annum with some rain in all months of the year and relatively low temperatures.
II 7,343,059 ha (18.68%)	700-1,050 mm rainfall confined to summer.
III 6,854,958 ha (17.43%)	500-700 mm rainfall per yr. relatively high temperatures, infrequent heavy rains, subject to seasonal droughts.
IV 13,010,036 ha (33.03%)	450-600 mm rainfall per annum and subject to frequent seasonal droughts.
V 10,288,036 ha (26.2%)	normally less than 500 mm rainfall per annum. Very erratic rainfall. Northern low-veld may have more rain but the topography and soils are poorer.

The remainder, 1,220,254 ha (3.1%) is unsuitable for any form of agricultural use.

Source: Adapted from Vincent and Thomas (1962), cited in Muir (1994: 43).

There was a deliberate policy to expropriate good agricultural land from the African population. This was legitimated by a series of legislative tools in the form of Acts. Some of the earlier attempts to weaken African agricultural competitiveness included recommendations by the Land Commission of 1925, which led the Legislative Assembly to pass the notorious Land Apportionment Act of 1930.

The Land Apportionment Act (1930)

This was the first Act that had a lasting influence on the state of affairs in the agricultural history of the country. The Act emphasised the creation of Native Reserves and instituted racial division of land into African and European areas. There were harsh conditions in Reserves with poor soils and cattle diseases. Taxation and the need for cash made it necessary to migrate and seek waged employment. There was the hut tax, head tax, dog and other taxes that could only be paid in cash. The urban influx that followed led to the creation of restrictive laws such as the Pass Law (1910). Meanwhile with more people still being resettled in these poor climatic conditions, and as a result of human and stock over-crowding and over-grazing, land degradation was inevitable. When the authorities realised that land could not be provided *ad infinitum* they initiated moves to 'improve' African agricultural practices. This move was not brought about by African initiative *per se*. The colonial state was not a homogeneous unit acting with one voice. This development can be seen as a result of political struggles and debates, taking place within the colonial government's structures, on the state of African agricultural development and its probable effect on the general economy of the territory, and indeed coupled with pressure from the nationalist movement especially after the 1950s.

This piece of legislation, created by the colonial government to authorise and facilitate the acquisition of potentially good agricultural land occupied by Africans, fostered feelings of resentment of Europeans among Africans. Through this Act, thousands of Africans across the country were forcefully evicted from their ancestral land. Johnson says that Reserves 'are almost all located on the sand soils...and exhibit to a striking extent many of the land pressure problems found on similar soils in other parts of Africa' (Johnson, 1964: 2). Some of the indigenous people who were not moved from their land happened to be in areas that the settlers found not to have much agricultural or mining potential.

Very little was done to develop African agriculture until the appointment of a former Methodist missionary from America, Emery Alvord², in 1926, who started paying more attention to African agricultural development. Again this was probably a result of pressure from within the government to change the state of African agriculture for the good of the national economy. His main purpose was to organise agricultural instruction for local people throughout the country, and to direct African agriculture in Reserves. Only in 1944 was a substantive post of Director of Native Agriculture created. The staff in Native Agricultural Development grew from one European and 50 trained Africans in 1926, to 84 Europeans and 541 African demonstrators in 1951 (Rhodesia High Commissioner, series of undated pamphlets, p.2).

These developments were followed by the Native Land Husbandry Act (1951) which enforced freehold tenure, de-stocking, mandatory conservation and cropping

practices (Rukuni, 1994: 19f). Rukuni says that the policy was unpopular and fuelled the tide of Black nationalism; it was repealed in 1961.

The initial reliance of the colonial economy on African agricultural production, especially for the supply of food to urban and mining areas, cannot be overemphasised. The Rhodesia High Commissioner's pamphlets (undated, p.1) point out that in 1950, African peasant producers, after they had provided for their own subsistence needs, contributed 46 per cent of the maize and meat, about 90 per cent of the small grains, and 80 per cent of the groundnuts in the agricultural industry.

Although there are specific contextual variations from place to place, African families worked in close co-operation and assisted each other in several of their activities. This partly binding nature of social relations was not broken by the efforts of authorities to make farming a less profitable individual venture. Kay (1970: 82) says that "members of an African society are closely bound into a network of groups by bonds of kinship of a clan or [ethnic group] ... [and it is] a fundamental right of every member of the ethnic society to be able to procure a living for himself and his dependents from the land (and its water resources)". He adds that "Africans are attached to their land and their ancestors who are buried in that land" (*ibid*). This is not an attempt to make Africans' relations to land and other natural resources look special or peculiar as such, but evidence points to the fact that some groups were closely attached to their particular pieces of land and treated them as their providers of means of livelihood, and rightly so. The common phrase, especially during the height of the liberation war, '*mwana webvu/ mntwana wenhlabathi*' (child of the soil), summed up this attachment.

There were circumstances that pushed people off their land, but this did not make them identify less with what they regarded as their land. The case of Chief Rekayi Tangwena who refused to leave part of Gaeresi Ranch in which his people had lived for a long time is an illustrative example. Nine Chiefs were buried in that land, and Rekayi was going to be the tenth. His alleged stubbornness had nothing to do with numbers of dead chiefs, it showed that "attachment was not just to land *per se*, but also to a particular piece of land" (Kay, 1970: 83). This example actually shows why there was so much resistance against the colonial institution of Reserves and general rampant evictions and subsequent resettlements, which led to the birth of several such development projects as the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. This is a critical dimension in the current (1990s) land and water debate in Zimbabwe.

There were three sectors in the agricultural industry in the 1940s: Reserves, African Purchase Areas, and European Commercial areas. These could be grouped into basically two sectors, namely European and African agriculture. Purchase Areas were created to cater for African farmers who had improved their methods of farming and could afford to buy pieces of land under freehold tenure (Cheater, 1984), and as a way of appearing to create opportunities for African farmers to own land.

This individualisation of farming was seen as a tool to give 'capable' African farmers a break from the constraining conditions in the Reserves, and was hailed as leading to development of the agricultural base of the economy. The move was criticised by Cheater (1975) who argued that "individual ownership of land is not the magical formula for development that some ethnocentric enthusiasts have supposed it to be, but it can have an important enabling effect on the development process when complemented by individual entrepreneurship among farmers and the provision by government of development advisors, agencies and loan finance" (Cheater, 1975: 25).

This view of a positive connection between individual holding and faster development was, it would seem, part of the reason behind the construction of smallholder irrigation schemes to settle smallholder African farmers as full-time irrigators. But it caught on much later, which means that there were other reasons behind irrigation development. The following section looks at smallholder irrigation development in Zimbabwe, together with some of the main objectives and problems behind them.

Small-holder irrigation development in Zimbabwe

Studies of development projects or programmes in Zimbabwe have generally been more impact assessment surveys than analytical investigations of social details of the nature of intervention. The section on the Zimbabwean agricultural history helps to locate the analysis in its proper background, and the focus here is not exactly how the system of government operated, but how its organisation and objectives created the kind of projects that it did. This approach, in a way, follows after the work of Long (1992: 36) who proposed that in a Mexican study of irrigation projects they should start with an interest not in irrigation 'systems', but with irrigation organisation. The concern, as Long puts it, was to see and analyse how various parties organise themselves around the problems of water management and distribution (Long, 1992: 36).

A history

The historical background of smallholder irrigation development can only be understood if put in its proper context of the larger framework of colonial agricultural development policy, which was predicated on creating a dual agricultural system that significantly favoured large-scale commercial (mostly European) farmers against smallholder African farmers. Roder (1965) contends that from 1912 to 1927 smallholder farmers constructed and operated their own irrigation projects. The first schemes were in the Eastern Districts along the Sabi Valley and its tributaries.

Beach's historical studies indicate that irrigation practices were present in the lives of pre-19th century groups of Shona-speaking ethnic groups in areas around Nyanga in Eastern Zimbabwe. No precise details exist on this, except evidence of stone constructions and earthen canals (Beach calls them channels). Recorded history on the subject tells us that some of the first irrigation schemes were Mutema and Mutambara, constructed after 1900 but before the 1930s by some local villagers. With the appointment of Alvord in 1926 to improve African farming, government started its active involvement in smallholder irrigation, but there was still much involvement from among plottolders who identified with the projects and regarded them as theirs (Rukuni and Makadho, 1994: 128, 129).

Alvord assisted farmers to develop small schemes of about a hectare or less to supplement rainfed farming, while government offered limited extension support also actively supported by Alvord. The main reason government first promoted smallholder irrigation was as a form of famine relief and food security. These small schemes were regarded as a form of insurance against poor harvests and as cash generating ventures to take care of tax demands (Rukuni and Makadho, 1994: 128-9; Meinzen-Dick, 1993: 4).

Weinrich (1974) says that in most African countries, irrigation schemes were planned as "essential bases of an agricultural revolution" (citing Dumont, 1966, p. 32). She adds that in Zimbabwe,

"...irrigation schemes were introduced by government to relieve the rapidly increasing population pressure on tribal lands. Several District Commissioners said to [her] that these schemes were not started to make Africans rich but to prevent social unrest. *They must therefore be seen as plans for subsistence, and not as plans for the economic advance of irrigation farmers*" (Weinrich, 1974: 12, my emphasis).

It is crucial to grasp the context in which smallholder irrigation schemes were constructed. This will help in the analysis of shifts in policy objectives within the agricultural sector, especially in light of the fact that these schemes were meant just to settle landless people, 'not to make them rich', but gradually that perception changes to something like, 'they must be economically viable', and they must not depend on government subsidies.

However, that happens to be another issue altogether. Of prime importance here is how farmers in irrigation farming deal with the different challenges they come up against, and how they relate to each other as socially and culturally different actors, how the cultural identities are constructed and maintained, diffused and re-established, that is, negotiated and manipulated, in daily experiences in the context of irrigation lives. From the way smallholder schemes were put up, one can see the way official attitudes and practices have changed (see Table 2 below), but there is little evidence in the literature of how farmers deal with different types of changes in their lives. It is the contextual nature of constructing cultural identities and re-shaping them over time, to suit new or changing circumstances, that needs more or special attention, in order to bring out the effects of such rural development interventions in people's lives.

There was a shift in irrigation policy when Alvord returned from a trip abroad in 1935. For the first time he advocated full-time irrigation without dryland plots. It would seem that from then on there was less consultation, and less co-operation between government and farmers in the development of new irrigation projects (see Table 2, from 1935 onwards). With the amendment of the Land Apportionment Act (1930) in 1950, more Africans were removed from designated land and forced to settle in drier, outlying areas. Some smallholder schemes constructed during this period were meant specifically to resettle displaced populations³ (Reynolds, 1969: 8; Rukuni and Makadho, 1994: 129; Magadlela and Hebinck, 1995: 5). Policy makers in the late forties in government argued for the settlement of Africans on irrigation schemes. The Report of the Director of Irrigation in 1949 said,

"[i]t is considered that a very great increase in irrigation works intended for settlement by natives should be planned for. There is no other way of settling agricultural communities at sufficient density for a large population to be absorbed in a limited area" (cited in Roder, 1965: 116).

Table 2. Zimbabwe: Evolution of smallholder irrigation policy

Period	Policy objectives
1912-1927	Missionaries encourage irrigation development among small farmers.
1928-1934	Government provides services and helps farmers develop irrigation schemes but farmers retain control.
1935-1945	Government takes over management of communal irrigation schemes.
1946-1956	Land Apportionment Act of 1930 is amended and Blacks are moved to Native Reserves. New irrigation schemes are created to resettle Black farmers.
1957-1965	Government curtails development of new schemes because they are not cost effective.
1966-1980	Government policy of separate development for Blacks and Whites and introduction of strategy of rural growth points, mostly based on irrigation.
1981-1990	Government policy (?) emphasises reduction of irrigation subsidies and greater farmer participation in the design, financing and management of scheme.

Source: Adapted from Roder (1965), Rukuni (1984), and Rukuni and Makadho (1994: 130).

There was need to augment water supplies and make best use of available land to enable it to carry the largest possible population consistent with a good standard of living. Irrigation was to play a significant part in this development. Heavy subsidies involved in irrigation operation and maintenance prompted government to halt construction of new schemes between 1957 and 1965. Ironically, the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, one of a few 'bigger smallholder government schemes', with about 500 hectares earmarked for development, was constructed during this period, between 1956 and 1960. The Department of Native Agriculture employed an economist in 1957 to review the profitability of its irrigation development programme. He concluded that all smallholder African schemes were uneconomic (Hunter, 1958, cited in Rukuni and Makadho, 1994: 130).

During the war some irrigation schemes were deserted. For example, the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme was left with a few farmers after the rest, more than 200 families, left for fear of victimisation by Nationalists, who labelled them traitors for having joined a government project (see section on Nyamaropa history below).

Since 1980, government has pursued a strategy of encouraging farmers to learn to run the schemes themselves through the promotion of Irrigation Management Committees (IMCs). These water users' associations were supposed to be elected from among farmers to work in conjunction with Agritex and other interveners (DERUDE, 1983; Pazvakavambwa, 1994). Government maintained subsidies in smallholder irrigation schemes on the grounds that they were socially and politically desirable for improving household food security (*ibid*; see also Rukuni and Eicher, 1987).

While there seems to be but a limited economic achievement from smallholder irrigation development in Zimbabwe, large-scale commercial irrigation projects have

achieved crop diversification, with assistance from the National Farm Irrigation Fund set up by government in 1985 to expand irrigated area in both small and large scale sectors. Very little of the money was utilised by smallholder farmers, for various reasons such as the need for group borrowing. Currently (1990s), there is debate on the utility of continuing subsidies by government for smallholder schemes, especially with costs of operation and maintenance constantly rising.

Most smallholder schemes were faced with the constraints of distant markets and poor, or insecure, water supplies, and an over-reliance on government subsidies. The view that irrigation potential in Communal Areas is limited or that the projects are uneconomic, should not be used as the sole reason to either withdraw subsidies or prematurely turn them into farmer-managed projects (Rukuni and Makadho, 1994: 137). They still need government support to maintain their infrastructure, and skills for operating some of the structures are not yet available among farmers.

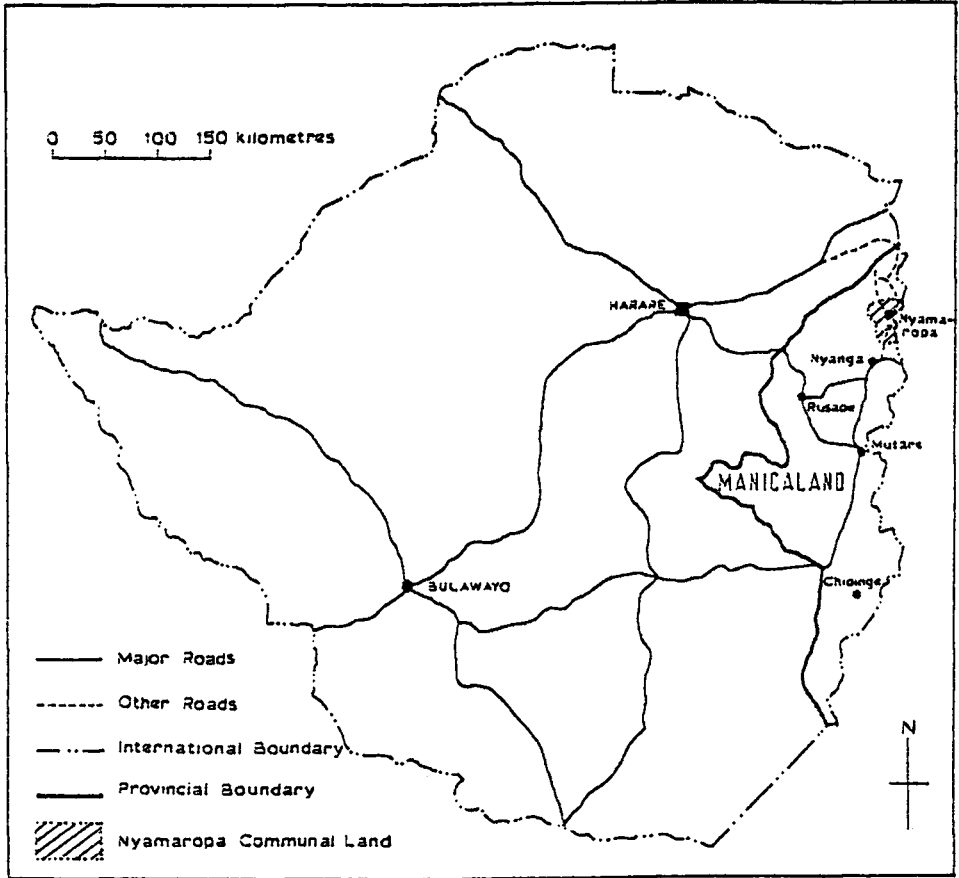
A salient aspect of the above context is evidence of heavy government intervention or involvement not just in smallholder irrigation development, but in the whole agriculture industry. What differs is the level of commitment to sustainable transformation in the various sub-sectors. The location of some of the projects, and the capacity of farmers in them to *grow* or to develop markets, were some of the curbs put in place 'naturally' by virtue of being in such a scheme, partially crippling these farmers' chances of creating economically dynamic ventures through the irrigation schemes.

As food resources for subsistence purposes, the irrigation schemes did meet their objectives in most cases. Policy shifts in recent years, which call for economic viability, miss the point altogether. They should start where the source of the problem lies, the initial purpose of the project and the assumed capacity for positive changes, and address performance and production problems from there. Otherwise farmers in these projects regard changes with suspicion, thereby giving half-hearted responses to attempts to change operations. There are some irrigation schemes that have been seen to be doing quite well, but these are more exceptions than the rule.

Location of the Nyamaropa Irrigation Scheme

The Nyamaropa Communal Area is situated about 180 km north-east of the Provincial capital Mutare, about 70 km east of Nyanga town⁴, in a valley surrounded by hills stretching northward from the Inyangani mountains in the south (see Map 1). The irrigation scheme area assumes the form of a 'saucepan' in that it is in a depression within a range of hills around it. The hills on the eastern side are in Mozambique, across the bordering Gairezi River. The Nyamaropa area has an altitude of 750 m, and the nearest urban-like area and local government administrative centre, Nyanga village, is about 1,150 metres high, a difference of 400 m with the Nyamaropa valley 70 km below.

Map 1: Location of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme



There is one main tarred road servicing the area from the small town or village of Nyanga. The road surfacing ends at the irrigation scheme. This was completed in 1983. Farmers say that it was meant to ease transport problems for their produce from both the irrigation scheme and surrounding dryland areas.

Murozi river, which supplies Nyamaropa irrigation scheme with water had dropped to almost a 50 percent flow from what it was in 1970s and early 1980s. Farmers and extension staff blamed this on illegal irrigation of gardens along the river in the catchment area.

As of January 1996, the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme covered 442 hectares and had 508 households. The new extension area towards the displaced local drylanders was estimated to cover about 70 hectares with at least 83 households.

The Nyamaropa irrigation scheme is not the only one situated in Natural Region II (see Table 1), but one of a few, and this makes it slightly different from the rest of the schemes in the province which are in Natural Regions IV and V⁵ (Rukuni and Makadho, 1995). When there are good rains dryland farmers around the irrigation scheme get better harvests than irrigators because the soils are good. This could be one reason why they refused to join the irrigation scheme in the first place. Initially there were no discernible advantages in the project except for the obvious year-round access to water and more than one crop per year.

In Nyanga district, African victims of the Land Apportionment Act (1930) were literally 'trucked' to lower, hotter and drier areas to the north east of Nyanga town around 1951. Most of them were settled at a place called Bende Gap which is much higher and cooler than Nyamaropa further below. When the authorities realised that the land was good enough for commercial agricultural production, they sent the trucks in again and removed the people to even drier areas such as Katerere, Kute, Nyamubarawanda and Nyamaropa. Some of the elderly villagers around Nyamaropa recall scotch carts with four wheels drawn by six oxen ferrying people and their goods to these places. It is not clear where some of the displaced people settled, and several areas have been mentioned as sites where some of them went to settle to the east and north east of Nyanga. However, those victims of evictions who heard about the irrigation scheme from afar made the move to go and irrigate, and joined the project.

Some pertinent views on Nyamaropa irrigation scheme's history

Listening to farmers' talk about their lives in the past, relating stories of what happened to their ways of life, to their landscape and to their outlook on life, one may easily think that they are reading an old history book, one written by someone who was not trying to glorify the role of either the colonial state or the Nationalist movement, but someone who was there when change took place, someone whose life was both positively and negatively affected and influenced by almost each and every turn of events. There is no one true history of Nyamaropa, but several versions of its constructions. Part of my aim in the early stages was to understand the different versions of the area's history, and gain insights into how social relationships and cultural identities especially of the different and fluid social units and groups, have changed over time as a result of changes in relating to the irrigation project and to different actors through interactions.

Evidence of daily irrigation practices in their socio-political context in remote areas of Eastern Zimbabwe, or any other part of Zimbabwe for that matter, has not been

highlighted in irrigation literature. What matters, or what should matter for practitioners now is not just why irrigation schemes were put up, but whether they had to be constructed to address food security issues, to provide water and farming infrastructure to large numbers of displaced landless Africans who had formerly survived on richer lands, or simply to shift their production from subsistence towards commercial practices; and it is how farmers in these projects live, how they make a living daily under such often constraining conditions. How did affected farmers cope with the changes and how did they perceive such dramatic changes? A look at the early stages of irrigation development, starting with the period immediately before the irrigation scheme was constructed, could provide some insights into why the project turned out the way it did, becoming a shared resource between or among so-called legitimate or legal irrigators and illegal drylanders and other lessees, setting the scene for shifting, emergent cultural, social and economic differences among groups of farmers in the same locality of Nyamaropa.

A chronological reconstruction of a project's life

There are a couple of theories put forward to explain why government constructed the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme where and when it did. Some farmers say that the government wanted those people who were displaced from prime commercial agricultural land, in places like Nyanga, as a result of the Land Apportionment Act (1930) and other previous laws, to have somewhere to settle. In a way it worked as some kind of resettlement for them. Colonial authorities put up irrigation infrastructure and hoped that Africans would utilise it to their advantage, hence keeping them away from nationalist politics and other activities that could threaten hegemony by the European settler community to establish and sustain a lasting hegemony in all sectors of the Rhodesian economy. They hoped to create a system whereby they would be able to change the lives of the African population to fit into these plans. Howman (1955) even talks of finding ways of grooming African leaders who would be used to monitor African developments in their own backyards, by devising structures through which leaders would emerge!

By constructing the scheme, the government was going to provide water and land to people who were made landless by previous government laws, thus enabling them to grow crops more than once each year. Besides improving their production capacities and earning them sizeable incomes, this was going to keep most of them from flocking into towns and creating social and political problems there. Irrigation would, hopefully, stem the rural-urban migration tide and keep Africans busy in production, but on a scale that would not make them effectively compete with Europeans or threaten European markets and farming livelihoods.

Most resettled people thought that Europeans were following them to disturb their lives, probably to move them again. Some of the locals (Barwe ethnic group) thought that the fate of their *wawuya* (literally meaning 'those who came', immigrants) colleagues was befalling them too, and did their best to avoid irrigation intervention by opting out.

One of my oldest informants on the history of Nyamaropa, Chishiri (82), a dryland farmer who, thirty three years down the line, was still bitter about losing his ancestral land, and would have liked to be part of the project after all those years, but could not find a plot to do so, even for the sake of his grandchildren, said,

"...they evicted us from our land...we had good crops, and people were harvesting a lot of yams and millet, but we lost the fields, we were afraid..., most of us were not sure of things then..." (Chishiri, local dryland farmer, July 1994).

This was a common feeling among dryland farmers; a feeling of loss, mixed with self-blame and blaming of authorities who did not do a thorough job of teaching local villagers about irrigation farming. None of them blamed the Nationalist movement for discouraging them from joining, probably because the latter were now the government.

Discussions with farmers in and around the irrigation scheme from the first days when I visited the area suggested that there were conflicting stories about what went on before the arrival of the first land surveyors and irrigation engineers, during construction, and soon after the completion of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Reynolds (1969) says that the decision to construct the scheme was finally made on the strength of the argument that it was a unique setting, that it had more potential than the Sabi schemes (studied, for example, by Roder, 1965) to free itself from government subsidies (Reynolds, 1969: 16). The opinions of some of the officials, such as demonstrator Mukonyora and project designer Watermeyer, finally led to the acceptance of the project, and construction went ahead from 1956 until 1960 when the first irrigated crops were produced. Official records and documents indicated that there were no serious problems in securing labour for the project from local villagers through their Village Heads, and in acquiring a water right.

Nyamaropa before irrigation intervention

Headman Sanyamaropa's people lived in small huts made of mud and poles in small villages scattered⁶ mainly in the plain, pan-like area, and on the foot of the hills surrounding Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, at the edges of the bushy area whose periodically swampy sections they cleared for cultivation. Some of their villages were across the Gairezi River which borders Zimbabwe and Mozambique. They could cross the river at will, especially before the height of the liberation war in the 1970s, because security along the border then was relaxed.

By 1996 some of the local Barwe people still felt that the border was an inconvenience and a violation of their freedom of movement across the river to their relatives in Mozambique. To them, the border had no significance except that it imposed an unnecessary divide between people who regarded themselves as belonging to one ethnic group under the same leadership of Headman Sanyamaropa. Quite a number of them had dual citizenship, and carried around both Zimbabwean and Mozambican identity documents⁷.

Most of the local people at the beginning of the scheme did not know what was taking place, they mostly thought that it was all a big government strategy to get them to work on European farms for cash. Some of them literally fled from their places either into Mozambique or onto surrounding hills.

One of the first irrigators, Chibonda (one of my key informants, who came from Chipinge more than 300 kilometres away to work in canal construction and decided to settle in the irrigation scheme), was given a plot which was used by the authorities as demonstration field to show the reluctant locals the "beauty of irrigation". His plot was

meant to show locals that the government did not just want to remove people from their land *per se*, but wanted to boost their chances for survival under drought situations. The government had to find ways to appeal to people so that they would accept the project. It was probably one of their worst mistakes to use an immigrant for a demonstration plot, local villagers attached everything about it to its foreign characteristics in every sense. A local, one of their own, might have had a different impact.

Shifting cultivation

Although it is not easy to verify, it is said by most locals in the area that the original⁸ inhabitants of the place, who were of the Barwe ethnic group, practised shifting cultivation on a limited scale for grain; relied on fishing and hunting for protein, and on gathering fruit and tubers to supplement their diets. It seems that both cultivation and hunting were major sources of food although cultivation was on a limited scale. They placed high value on their land which was under the Headman's custody. They respected and honoured it because they believed it was through land that their ancestors gave them food and water.

Before the arrival of Agricultural Demonstrators and White men in the Nyamaropa area, locals say the place consisted largely of thick bush⁹. Some people stayed along the river and some had their scattered huts on the foot of the hills. They used to cultivate on a limited scale on small plots in the wet land towards what is the South Eastern side of the scheme today. Their crops were maize, sorghum, millet, yams and other local varieties of crops. Most of the yams were grown along the banks of the Gairezi River on fertile soils. People used to peg their small plots by tying bunches of grass together to show others that a particular piece of land had an 'owner'. The local population was small, but women and children had to use family pieces of land to cultivate because most cultivable land had been claimed by elders by pegging (but they did not cultivate all the claimed pieces of land).

There was an interesting link between hunting and land 'acquisition' or pegging for cultivation among the Barwe. They had ways of trapping or snaring wild animals for food, which was not strongly prohibited as it is today. What happened in relation to land was that when an animal was caught in someone's trap, the spot on which it fell belonged to the hunter for future cultivation even if the animal ran a few hundred metres from the initial location of the trap. If someone was found cultivating on that piece of land they would promptly be reminded of the big catch, and they would leave the piece of land. This tale did sound tall to me, but there was no easy way to verify it by others who said that was the case in 'the good old days'.

As a farming method, shifting cultivation had the advantage of restoring the fertility of the soil during the often extended fallow periods. Outsiders felt that local people had major food production or supply problems, and suggested that intensified cropping on a larger scale could help avoid starvation in years of drought. With such oral history recollections in their minds, local villagers saw irrigation development and immigrant irrigators as a threat to their very heritage. Although their group cultural identity was certainly affected by the project, they still had certain aspects of their cultural belongingness that kept them together, such as observing *chisi* and attending rain-making ceremonies.

The disappearing school

Some farmers say there was a small school in the area called Sanyamaropa. When it began was not clearly remembered by most informants. Irrigators say that they only recall finding it there. Some Barwe villagers say that it was set up by Missionaries who were passing through the area as early as 1940, and that very few people attended lessons at the school. One of the earliest immigrants in the area, Mapfurira, found the school operating in 1954. Today there is hardly any indication that the school ever existed where locals point out its former location, save for a heap of old broken bricks. Instead, there is a big farmers' shed where meetings on community and irrigation issues are held. Most villagers know about the school but few of them have anything to say about it except that they hardly remember it.

In his study of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme (1966-1967), Reynolds (1969) said that the local people had hardly any previous contact with the world outside Nyamaropa. Information from Nyamaropa villagers about the school, although thin, suggested that they had been reached by external influences. They may not have been fully receptive to the educational drive by whoever set up the school, but its mere existence is evidence of the fact that external intervention started much earlier than the introduction of field conservation contours that preceded irrigation development. Furthermore, some young men in the area had been either to Harare, Bulawayo or South Africa for employment. Although their numbers may be limited, the fact remains that there was external influence among local Barwe people. Reynolds (1969) suggests that the Barwe had very little contact with the outside world, a point on which I have doubts.

However, some of them were not very receptive to outsiders, for a variety of reasons, such as those related to security, especially to the fact that some villagers knew of villages which were burnt down during the war because they gave food to the Nationalist guerrillas. Some villagers were still not very keen to see cars around their villages, and extension staff cited cases where some of the local people were arrested for dealing in illegal drugs such as *marijuana* (dagga) across the Mozambican border. Some of them were quite curious of course, and came forward to meet strangers, or 'to check them out' as one young man put it.

The first Agricultural Demonstrators in Nyamaropa

Around 1951 Agricultural Demonstrators started coming to the area. The first ones included Kundhlande, Mariga and Chabikwa, and their main mission was 'to fix the land and the fields for the local people'. They started telling people that their fields should be restricted to certain areas, and they discouraged, if not completely stopped, the pegging and claiming practice along with shifting cultivation. People did not want to leave their original land, and they threatened the intervening extension workers with the much feared magical unknown. Demonstrators are said to have prepared themselves for it as one of them was known for defying witchcraft threats and called himself 'Chabikwa' (meaning something which has been cooked and made ready to take on any tough or troublesome people and situations). Demonstrators insisted on going on with the whole process amid witchcraft threats, and made people dig field contours which most of them passionately resisted, leading to quite a large number of locals leaving the country to go and fight in the liberation war from Mozambique.

After the failure of local powers to keep demonstrators off the land, the development train moved in, this time with the irrigation scheme. People were given the opportunity to come and join the irrigation project, but most of them refused. Some farmers in the area believed that the demonstrators who later constructed the scheme were those who had brought them the much-hated contours which had cut people's farming land into small patches divided by waterways (for conservation purposes).

Around 1954 a African Demonstrator, Richard Mukonyora, was the first to identify the area's irrigation potential, and he recommended it to his European seniors who, after some persuasion, finally took it up. In 1954 the Native Commissioner, on behalf of farmers, applied for and secured a provisional Water Right (No. 3885) which was to be granted finally and permanently after completion of the project. Construction of the scheme started in earnest in 1956. Between 1956 and 1960 many changes in Nyamaropa's landscape took place and these are remembered by local people as marking irreversible developments brought in from outside that changed their outlook on life.

It was during this period that locals first experienced constant contact with Demonstrators and Europeans, and were subjected to their control and coercion in their own backyards¹⁰. The District Commissioner, locally known as *mudzviti* (a term referring to settlers or raiders, and used to refer to the Ndebele ethnic group from the southern parts of the country: *madzviti*, plural) for Nyanga came several times to talk to Headman Sanyamaropa and his people about the possibility of persuading the local Barwe people to join the irrigation scheme. But before that, he had instructed the Headmen and Village Heads¹¹ to mobilise local labour for the construction of the main canal. White managers were not always harsh with locals because they wanted them to join the scheme, but they were not going to beg them to change their views about the development intervention. Local leaders had to do the unpopular work of getting their people to enrol for labour. Among local irrigation farmers, there were mixed feelings about who was really responsible for the whole project, but most of them were quick to blame the white managers and engineers who were supervising the construction of structures for the irrigation system.

Initial responses to initial encounters with irrigation intervention

Initially, those who were promoting irrigation farming and allocating plots realised that the local population was small, and that a large number of outsiders could be accommodated. The immigrants were given four acres each, and later two acres were added to those who did very well with their plots. Some farmers say they started irrigating in 1961, while others claim that they first irrigated in 1960. Canals were not lined and there were no syphons, which made it difficult for water to travel fast from one plot to the next, making the actual process of watering difficult. Some water controllers had night shifts to ensure that everyone got their share of irrigating. Farmers grew butter, and sugar, beans, cotton and tobacco as new cash crops. Local irrigators maintained their production of traditional crops such as *madhumbe* (a type of local tuber like yams or potatoes), sorghum and maize, and they later added sugar cane production in wet lands along the Gairezi River for sale in the local market.

MacVick, one of the early managers of the scheme, supervised the team of African workers who included Chibonda (details in Chapter 7), to dig canals for the first time

in 1956. When this was done, local people still showed disinterest, resulting in the show cases with some farmers, the first of which was in Chibonda's plot. Most of the initial work, including tillage, fertilisers and other inputs, was done with the assistance of the government on the demonstration plot. When the crop was harvested, people were called in to see the outcome of the new wonder, and when it was sold and the farmer was given his money, others were called together to witness the benefits of irrigating. Some people responded positively to the experiment, but most of the locals avoided any links with the irrigation scheme. While there are several other possible reasons to explain their disinterest, it could also be partly because the experiment was on someone who was himself regarded as an alien, coming from Chipinge, a different administrative district altogether.

The period soon after the completion of the construction of the project had some distinctive characteristics of people's uncertainty and fear of victimisation. It was characterised by early irrigators' initial experiences of the new way of farming. Some of the first irrigators recount the performance of their first crops and the excitement of getting cash from their sales. The first crops were maize, cotton and beans in 1960.

Consultations: on official exigencies and practical dilemmas

'For the record': peeping into official correspondence

The official stand of the District and Provincial offices was to settle displaced people in the irrigation scheme as soon as possible. There had to be effective ways of placating local resistance to the project, but in such a way that they saw the advantages of irrigating.

From the following documentary evidence from Nyamaropa, it is clearly apparent that the authorities used the old 'carrot and stick' method to try and get people settled in the new project. A couple of letters (below) written by some of the officials dealing with the problem of Nyamaropa people's resistance to irrigation farming, cited in their vivid detail, could not have illuminated the situation (or problem) more clearly.

On the 24th of July 1962 a letter, in the form of a report on the situation in Nyamaropa, from the District Commissioner's office in Nyanga, written by the Commissioner, Reid, to the Provincial Native Commissioner, Manicaland province, had the following information:¹²

"Around the irrigation perimeter, six kraals are situated whose inhabitants have lived there for many years cultivating the land which has now to come under irrigation. The total number of landholders in the kraals is 144. The main canal was completed in 1961, but by that time political agitators had been at work, and by *playing on the ignorance and natural fears and suspicions of conservative, backward people towards anything new* they managed to arouse considerable opposition towards irrigation. They also succeeded in influencing [H]eadman Sanyamaropa. *To dispel ignorance* I sent all kraalheads and some others on a tour of Nyanyadzi [irrigation scheme in Chimanimani District, see Bolding, forthcoming] and afterwards held a meeting of all the inhabitants of the project at which the whole business of irrigation, and the benefits that would flow from it, was explained in detail. *To dispel fears of being bulldozed at once into a new method of farming on a small acreage which they knew nothing about, and which the peddlers of subversion had told them was going to happen to them*, I told them that on

the contrary I appreciated their fears and that we would start slowly with a nucleus of volunteers so that the remainder could see how to go about this type of farming, what the yields were like, and generally get used to the new idea of irrigation. This caused considerable relief and I expect, took some wind out of the sails of the agitators. If I had taken any other line I would have had the whole lot against me right from the start. Volunteers, however, were slow in coming forward as behind the scenes the [H]eadman remained hostile. It is possible that the [H]eadman is being intimidated by ZAPU¹³ agents into maintaining a show of hostility so that his people will be reluctant to adopt irrigation. The usual tactic by agitators is to get at the tribal authority in those areas where he has some influence over his followers, which is the case at the project. There was already a waiting list of 51 applicants from elsewhere in the district and outside, 17 from elsewhere were already plowholders. After reports that more people are coming, I then called the [H]eadman to my office... and told him that I wanted to see more of his people settled in irrigation plots this year, and that I expected him to give a lead. I also told him that although I still did not intend to hurry matters or force people into irrigation, I was not going to wait forever, and that I suspected him of *holding up progress by adopting a hostile attitude*. He denied of course that he was opposed to the scheme, and added that he understood the advantages of it, and wanted it to go ahead, but that *he personally wished to see how the present plowholders fared before taking the plunge himself*. I was later told by the Land Development Officer (LDO) that he had heard that the [H]eadman had been on the point of trying irrigation himself, but a ZAPU Land-Rover came through the area recently and stopped at his kraal, and he has now changed his mind. I intend to get the Land Development Officer and the Group LDO who has long experience working with Africans to call up the kraals one by one and *persuade more people to try irrigation*. I also intend to let in some more applicants from outside. I'm afraid it will take some time to settle the project in this manner, but there appears to be no reason to hurry, and it will be settled on a sounder basis this way than by compulsion. *The people are becoming gradually interested in irrigation, and will even be more interested if the present plowholders get a good price for their wheat and seed bean crop. Also if I let in a gradual flow of outsiders they will begin to get worried. They will all come round eventually except for a few possible diehards who will have to be moved elsewhere*" (my emphasis).

This letter was full of a range of views reflecting the state of the intervention situation, at that crucial stage when authorities wanted to get the project going by linking it up with the people targeted for its use. It also shows the indecision and general administrative and project implementation dilemmas that the authorities behind irrigation development were faced with in Nyamaropa. They were aware of the insecurity and uncertainty that local people had about irrigation farming, and wanted to use persuasion to try and win them over, at the same time keeping the use, rather than threat of use, of force on the edges, such as accepting some of the applications from outside, which would threaten local access to farming land as a resource.

Two years down the line, on the 25th of March 1964, Native Commissioner Reid, for Nyanga District, wrote again to the Provincial Native Commissioner in Manicaland, about the situation in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. He said,

"... by March (1964), only 28 of the 150 new holders were original inhabitants of Nyamaropa, (from the 150, 115 were males, while 35 were widows, 122 were newcomers [immigrants]¹⁴ transferred to the project from other areas in the district). *The attitude of dryland cultivators is mixed, some are genuinely ultra conservative, have no interest in making money or improving their lot, and only wish to be left alone to cultivate in their old traditional way. These diehards who are led by [H]eadman Sanyamaropa are hostile towards irrigation and have been encouraged by political agitators to stay that way.* Others would like to go over to irrigate but are afraid of the [H]eadman who has considerable influence. I told Sanyamaropa that he and his *diehards* [will have to accept change], that in all probability they would get an *ultimatum* this year [to either join or move out]. I am in favour of giving the dryland cultivators a date by which they will either have to take up irrigation or leave the project, otherwise this situation will drag on indefinitely, but the problem is what to do with those who finally refuse to go over to irrigation as I have no large blocks of vacant land left to settle them. Those who will not take up irrigation will have to... join other kraals and settle themselves where they can, which is not very satisfactory. The settlement of these people is a problem, but until they are given some sort of ultimatum and compelled to make up their minds I will not know how big the problem is. The [H]eadman will have to remain in Nyamaropa since it is his '*dunhu*' (territory). *It is this [H]eadman who is largely responsible for holding up progress at the project, if he were to be moved away from the project area it is possible that many of the dryland cultivators would go over to irrigation*" (my emphasis).

On the 24th of April, in 1964, the Secretary for Internal Affairs, Fimis, sent a letter to the Provincial Commissioner and the District Commissioner for Nyanga, saying that Nyamaropa should be retained for the Nyanga people as much as possible, but

"...in order to bring pressure to bear on the [H]eadman, word could possibly be spread that irrigable land exists, but is not being released for the purpose by this Headman, and public opinion may thus bring pressure to bear on him to change his mind..."

On the 4th of October, 1964, the Provincial Commissioner wrote to the Assistant Conservation and Extension Officer (Tribal), with a header written "Is there a chance for a final settlement of this problem?". He went on to say that,

"...only a small proportion of farmers have joined the irrigation settlement from amongst the original dryland farmers, and that prospects of the 125 who have not yet joined, together with the Headman, joining appear remote. *They have been warned repeatedly, at meetings held by the District Commissioner over the past 3 years, that they should either join the irrigation scheme or be prepared to be moved elsewhere.* It is imperative that this move be carried out, as they are now occupying the land available for irrigation expansion" (my emphasis).

On the 1st of October 1964, the Provincial Commissioner wrote to the Deputy Secretary for Development, informing him about the intention of the Secretary for Internal Affairs to call Chief Sawunyama¹⁵ and [H]eadman Sanyamaropa to Salisbury (now Harare) to speak to them about not making full use of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. On the 9th July 1965, the Extension Officer for the Nyamaropa irrigation

project, Bishop, wrote a situation report about Nyamaropa irrigation to the Group Irrigation Officer in the Department of Conservation and Extension in Umtali (now Mutare). He said that,

"... at first, response was slow but from the beginning of 1963 up to July 1965, African farmers began to take real interest. On the first of October 1963, there were 102 farmers, and by the end of January 1965 there were 243 farmers. There was a waiting list of 40 people. *Men were being given 4 acres each while women [and widows] were getting 2 acres.* In the 1964 season, irrigators grossed over £1,300.00 from cotton and beans, but dryland farmers continue with their subsistence production for the 1965 season. Irrigators bought ±150 tons of fertilisers, drylanders do not use it. *It is my belief that if some firm action were taken, a great many of them would join the irrigation project*" (my emphasis).

These were some of the initial differentiating characteristics identifying the two groups from each other, or separating local dryland farmers from immigrant irrigators in the area. The inference here was that locals did not know how to farm because they did not use new or improved technical methods such as those prescribed by external advisors and adopted by irrigators. In spite of the evidence of high yields achieved by irrigators, dryland farmers (the so-called 'diehards') still did not come into the project, resulting in some resolutions to force villagers into the irrigation scheme or evict them. There was, it seems, no attempt to find out whether anything could be learnt from Nyamaropa's local farming methods. There were new identities between men and women relating to the land resource, as men were being given larger plots than women. Immigrants, apparently, took up the practice of seeing locals as backward and primitive, and everything local was derided as low and not to be associated with. Unfortunately, this included the name of the local ethnic group, Barwe, which was regarded as an insult even by some of the Barwe people themselves, and was rarely used in public, except in jokes. Sometimes it was used in meetings by some local Barwe leaders when they were emotionally stressing a point that had something to do with their ethnic identity, such as in a meeting when they were discussing the extension of the irrigation scheme to give some locals a chance to be irrigators, and there was a rumour that some immigrant irrigators wanted to get land there too.

Table 3: Different types of farmers in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, as of 1965, showing also total acreage between 1963 and 1964.

	1/10/63	6/3/64	12/8/64	30/11/64
Originals ¹⁰	25	28	40	43
From outside	77	121	178	200
Total widows	18	35	49	54
Total Men	84	114	169	189
Total farmers	102	149	218	243
Total acreage (ha)	372	526	774	864

Source: Unpublished Agritrex records, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme.

On the 30th of August 1965, the office of the Secretary for Internal Affairs sent a confidential note to the District Commissioner in Nyanga, stating that he 'should not move dryland farmers off the designated irrigation land since rains were round the

corner, but noted that the Tribal Trust Land Bill would be promulgated soon permitting the Minister (of Internal Affairs), with the consent of the Board of Trustees, to declare an area an irrigation scheme with occupation by lease only. The *whole basin* and not just the fenced area, would be so declared. People occupying the area would be given the option of accepting terms of lease or moving out, with provision for compensation if necessary'.

On 31st August 1967, the Secretary for Internal Affairs sent a circular to all staff in the Ministry, on irrigation schemes in Tribal Trust Lands and their Managers. It said, "With effect from the first of July, 1967, the management of all irrigation schemes in Tribal Trust Lands would fall under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the District Commissioner's office will oversee their proper functioning. The country is facing a socio-political-human problem. For the maintenance of peace and stability, it is necessary to find employment, of one kind or another, for the thousands of unemployed Africans either already in towns or flocking to them. Industry is making a valiant effort to absorb them but cannot at present hope to gain an ascendance, therefore, it is incumbent on this Ministry to place as many Africans as possible on the land, with the assurance that they will annually reap an abundance of food with a surplus, depending on their own industry, for sale. This can only be achieved by the fullest development of irrigation resource of the Tribal Trust Lands and by their settlement on a subsistence and cash farming basis. Of necessity we must not over-emphasise the economics of any irrigation schemes, we must not be over-sensitive to the types of soil available, the first criterion must be "can a sufficient crop be made to grow on the land, given water?"; other problems and considerations must be deemed to be secondary". [There was reference to the Tribal Trust Lands (Control of Irrigation Schemes) Regulations of 1967, published by Government Notice No. 903 of 1967].

There was an urgent need to get the Nyamaropa project into operation; officials in the Internal Affairs Ministry tried to avoid further alienation of sections of the African population, the displaced Manyika groups had to be resettled somewhere quickly. The irrigation project was the ideal place (as the above quotation indicates), but there were internal contradictions in the way the project was implemented. On the one hand, the authorities wanted to settle all locals inside the scheme for it to gain acceptability, yet on the other hand, they sought to make sure that immigrants had enough land to be resettled (in the irrigation scheme). The inevitable development in this context was their lack of patience with local Barwe locals who shunned irrigation; they registered large numbers of Manyika immigrants who were only too glad to occupy the land, and this was the source of social problems later to afflict the project and its surroundings.

When canals were complete, the District Commissioner came to the area and pleaded with the local people to join. He talked to the Headman and his followers about the advantages of irrigating, and that it was all for their own good to join. Current irrigators say that preference for farmers to start irrigating was given to the people under the Headman's area. Some of them had provided labour that helped dig the main canal and some of the supply canals, and under whose land the irrigation fell.

The first choice fell on Sawunyama's and Katerere's people¹⁷ (Katerere is one of the neighbouring Chiefdoms). They were told that they were being given the first priority

because the irrigation scheme was on their land, and they were warned that if they did not take it up, people from other areas would be allowed to take over and start irrigating. Some meetings called by irrigation authorities were attended by a few locals who were advised about the importance of irrigating. Subsequently, local resistance forced the authorities to let the immigrants into the irrigation scheme. This view, however, contradicts another version of the story which depicts a situation whereby Nyamaropa was basically a scheme constructed for settling villagers evicted from designated 'European land'.

As pointed out earlier, most of the people who were settled in Nyamaropa did not like the place, for a variety of reasons, such as its notoriety for malaria outbreaks. When they finally settled, however, they found that there was a lot of good in terms of fertile soils, especially in the irrigation scheme. They were encouraged to grow cash crops such as cotton and beans, which did well. When the reluctant locals saw what irrigators were getting they became jealous and some sought to join. Some of them thought that the plot allocation system was biased and the irrigation awareness campaign was not effective or thorough enough. They said that they should be the ones irrigating and not immigrants because the land still belonged to them under the control of their Headman.

Opposition to the project or to change? The local Barwe and irrigation intervention

Knowledge of the potential advantages of irrigation among the local Barwe seems to have been over-shadowed by fear of the unknown and uncertainty surrounding the whole project from the start. Irrigation farming was an alien tradition to them and was deemed not suitable to their ways of life; besides, it was going to turn all their leisure time into long hours of hard labour throughout the year. They were going to toil on smaller pieces of land when they could still have secured their food supplies from the larger dryland plots which they cleared outside the designated irrigation area. The other argument pushed forward in explaining local resistance to irrigation farming was the activities involved in crop production and required by irrigation management.

Local Barwe men did work in the construction of the scheme, but few of them joined to start irrigating. They earned the money and wanted to keep their larger tracts of dryland plots, and did not welcome the irrigation scheme. They were furious about the loss of their ancestral land but knew that they were almost powerless (at least for the time being) against the force of irrigation development and change. They only had to find different ways of fighting the system, such as labelling immigrant irrigators 'traitors and spies' for White colonial authorities, when the national war of liberation intensified in the late sixties and in the 1970s. Rainfall patterns were often good then, and locals were happy with their production levels without irrigation (Samunda, local irrigator and local leader, personal communication, 12 August 1994).

From the start, locals laughed at their local colleagues who joined the irrigation scheme, saying that they would soon get to a situation where they would be forced to work for White managers. They intimidated them by saying that the irrigators would be woken up by a loud bell early every morning to go and work in the fields. They were not sure what was happening, they spread rumours that if an irrigator failed to cope with the work, all his/her property would be confiscated because s/he would have acquired it through working in the scheme, and that no one would be allowed to leave even if they wanted to do so of their own free will.

The message among locals was that irrigation was a risky business not worth wasting time on, and to worsen the confusion, locals began to believe that their plots were being acquired just as the land of the immigrants was taken over by Europeans in their previous settlements. Those who dared join did not see most of the evil that was being talked about outside, except that there was indeed a tough course to follow for everyone, and those who could not stick to the rules such as meeting fee-payment deadlines, or those who ignored recommended cropping programmes, were immediately evicted. There are no precise figures indicating the number of farmers evicted during the early period.

Before the digging of supply canals, local people were offered 6 acres each to cultivate, but first they had to clear their allocated pieces of land. The idea seems to have been an attempt to see if the irrigation scheme would accommodate both the local people and those who were coming to be resettled in the project. Besides the initial shows by volunteers, irrigation authorities did not have the patience to teach the locals about the need for and advantages of irrigation. The Headman did not want to irrigate, and some of his people could not go ahead and do what he seemed to be opposed to. Those who did not want to irrigate had to leave the scheme, and they later became the dryland population on the hills surrounding the scheme, although a sizeable number of them crossed the border to Mozambique.

As noted earlier, there were interactions between the Headman and the District Commissioner. The latter came to talk to the Headman about the issue of locals refusing to join the irrigation scheme, and is said to have encouraged those who wanted to irrigate to do so and those who did not want to join to get off the land. He was tactful in that he approached the Headman first, knowing too well that the Headman did not want to have anything to do with the irrigation scheme. The District Commissioner and the Headman are said to have agreed that when water started flowing, all those with plots in the area would start irrigating.

All prospective irrigators had to clear the land for themselves to start ploughing. Those who got their plots pegged on land that was previously cultivated by the locals before the scheme were lucky not to go through the tough period of clearing their own fields, but some local drylanders have always begrudged them that. It seems that the idea was that they should clear their own plots so that they would feel that they were doing it all for themselves and not for the state, and not for Demonstrators or European bosses who were behind the project, as a way to get them attached to the land.

From the way the whole issue was handled it was hardly possible for local villagers to fight back to reclaim their land. It was either irrigation or eviction from their ancestral land: most of them chose to leave. People who heard about the irrigation scheme from afar applied either to the irrigation manager or to the District Commissioner for a plot in the project. Some of the applications were from mines or farms outside Nyanga District, such as the one below:

*c/o Locke Craft
P.O. Box 271
Que
11th Jan, 1966*

The Ex' Officer

*c/o Nyamaropa Irrigation
P.O.Inyanga*

Dear Sir,

Will you please give the full details about the Nyamaropa Irrigation Area? If one is to enter as one of the residents in the project how many acres of land is he given? How much is to be paid per year, what are the qualifications of entry?

*I am willing to become one of the residents of the project provided the local kraalheads accept me. I am eagerly awaiting your further instructions.
I have the honour to be Sir.*

*Yours Faithfully,
Simon Mlomo, (24/01/63).¹⁸*

This letter reflected the type of relations that existed between locals and immigrants, especially the fact that the applicant was aware of the conditionality of his acceptance, illustrated in the statement '*provided the local kraalheads accept me*'. This is one element from among immigrants that indicated their awareness of probable social and cultural variations, it showed the beginnings of group cultural differences and identities even before the prospective farmer(s) travelled to the irrigation scheme. Interestingly, the author of the letter said that he was '*willing to become one of the residents of the project*', and not exactly a resident of the village as it was traditionally delineated. In this sense, some of the applicants already located themselves, spatially and in their minds, away from the local social set-up, and only wanted to identify with 'the project'. It also shows that the new settlers depended on the efforts of the authorities to provide them with information about the project besides their own social and kinship networks, as seen in the applicant's 'eager wait for further instructions'. This was one way of also revealing the need for irrigated land, or land to settle, among people around the country. The applicant was working in a town more than 300 km away, but needed land to settle permanently. This applicant's situation as shown in the letter alone revealed the desperation for settlement land among some people, and by inference, meant that when they got the chance to settle somewhere they would make sure that they protected and defended that opportunity. This could explain why most immigrant irrigators initially observed or adhered to most of the rules, and co-operated with irrigation management.

Two years after an applicant wrote the above letter, the District Commissioner for Nyanga wrote the following note to the Extension Officer in the Nyamaropa Irrigation Scheme:

*OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER,
P.B. 12
INYANGA
29th September, 1965.
The Extension Officer (Mr.Bishop)
Nyamaropa Irrigation Scheme*

Applicants for Plots: Nyamaropa Irrigation project.

Until further notice no more newcomers are to be allowed to join the Irrigation project. People who are at present resident in the kraals in the project area may join the project, and may continue to apply for plots in the usual way, but no others.

(signed)

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER¹⁹

This letter was not followed by more local registrations to join the irrigation project. Later however, the above ruling was loosened to allow more newcomers to join. About five locals were among the first people to irrigate during 1960, the first year of irrigated crop production. The rest of the irrigators came from other areas outside Headman Sanyamaropa's territory. Some of the villagers came from Mutasa, some from Nyanga, Bende Gap, and Mutare. Reynolds (1969: 46) says that some irrigators came from as far afield as Harare and Marondera, more than 300 km away. Locals had discussed their problems among themselves and word had spread about the forceful evictions from European land, hence resistance was inevitable.

During the early stages each farmer cleared his/her allocated piece of land. The government did the levelling of the land later, but farmers had to make it ready for this, they had to 'stump' off the trees on their own. There was a time when the government tilled and levelled the land to encourage others to join. The homesteads were pegged by the authorities for farmers' residences. Irrigators were grouped together to the north of the scheme and made up one large village in the form of the colonial mine and farm compounds. This encouraged the establishment of closer ties among immigrants who were living as neighbours, and removed them from regular contact with local villagers on the other side of the irrigation project. The spatial difference, clearly visible in Map 2 below, was one of a series of distinguishing features between the two main groups in the area, and it fuelled their differential constructions of distinct cultural identities based on relating to the irrigation project, to land, and to the traditional institution in the area. Some of the locals who made the decision to join the irrigation scheme moved from their dryland villages into the northern side where most of the immigrant irrigators had built their homesteads, and some of them became Christians like most of the immigrants, although some of those who joined later remained in their dryland villages.

Role of traditional authority

Headman Sanyamaropa's view was that whoever wanted to join the irrigation scheme was free to do so, but had to pay *mutete*²⁰ (gift as a sign of respect and asking for permission to reside and cultivate in the Headman's territory). He is said by immigrant irrigators, and some of the locals who knew him, to have been an easy person to deal with. His brother, a militant Nationalist, was the tough one. The latter was the one who led a group of local villagers to burn down a government building in the irrigation scheme in protest against the construction of the project and the loss of land for cultivation. All early irrigators paid about a pound each to Headman Sanyamaropa, and two and a half shillings to the village head, before going into the irrigation scheme, and getting a stand to build a homestead.

Sanyamaropa had significant influence on his people, who were still seen by extension staff and some irrigators as conservative and tradition-conscious, because they literally ran away from cars, and did not feel comfortable around White visitors - though this could have had something to do with the war situation during that period. The Headman is said to have claimed that he did not inhibit anyone from joining the irrigation scheme. He instituted a rule among his people that whoever wanted to join the scheme was free to do so, but they should first give him a live chicken, and then go ahead and irrigate. A chicken then cost less than a pound, but still few farmers could afford it for the sake of joining the irrigation scheme. Prospective irrigators (immigrants), it seemed, could afford the one pound and the two and a half shillings, since they had everything to gain from the investment: they virtually had few alternative sites for resettlement.

Some farmers say that the Headman told them to go into the scheme and start irrigating, but they turned round and said "you too *Changamire* (meaning Headman, or any respected person), you go in first and we will follow suit". He did what they expected him to do, and they followed suit: he stayed out! He is said to have had no interest at all in farming from the beginning. Some irrigators who may have had the chance to see him said he was fond of his local brew of beer, and entertainment. But this could well have been a way of denigrating local traditional authority for political reasons by immigrant irrigators, and they did this emphatically with the Headman in office during the study period (Magadla, 1995) by calling him a drunk²¹. He made the labelling easy for them by the way he spent a lot of time at drinking places with some of his assistants, something which irrigators and some converted local irrigators made jokes about in the local bars and in their group meetings.

The authorities knew that locals did not want to join the irrigation scheme from the outset because their efforts to persuade them had only partially failed, so they might have set out to play a double game by, on the one hand, denigrating traditional authority to make new irrigators feel secure and set the project into operation, and, on the other, utilising the Headman's support, both in further attempts to persuade locals to join, and in efforts to make farmers identify with the land and its traditional custodians, in other words, to 'feel at home'.

The situation would have been different had the Headman persuaded his sons or relatives to join as an expression of his willingness to see his people irrigating. Some Nyamaropa people today (1990s) think that he had no food problems and could not have realised what problems people had with their cultivation during years of droughts. He was earning some money from government anyway. Moreover, people who were joining the scheme were *paying homage* to him in the form of money, grain, and chickens in the traditional way of settling on, and cultivating in, his land (Bourdillon, 1987: pp. 67-71, discusses the importance of land among some Shona people). The Nyamaropa Headman may have misled his people, but that may have been the intention of the authorities who wanted land to be available for resettling displaced people in the scheme. There are so many twists and turns to the story that there seemed at the end of it to be several contradictory versions of the historical development of the irrigation scheme, shrouding 'real issues' and reasons behind the way things were done from the start.

There was what could pass for a contradiction between traditional authority and government; government openly persuaded people to join the scheme, but the Headman, so often seen as a government functionary, implicitly discouraged people

from joining. Because he did not want to become a plowholder himself he knew that not all his people could afford to part with, or get, a chicken to give to him for those purposes, so he would still retain some support and a level of authority in the traditional domain. A large number of people later turned out to be behind him, especially locals, and this is seen in such incidents as the burning of a building of the agricultural office in defiance of the new ways of farming. Although the culprits were apprehended, they had made their point that they did not like the idea of authorities seemingly blackmailing landless people into irrigation farming. These were some of the earlier features of relations between locals and immigrants, and they continued to change over the years with more locals partially accepting irrigation farming, and immigrants establishing links with locals for labour and draft power. In the 1990s, the relationships and cultural identities of the two main social units (immigrants and locals) had reached a transformed stage whereby large numbers of immigrants, now old and weaker after years of toiling in the irrigation scheme's labour intensive farming tasks, rely on labour from the youth, and from dryland farmers who are keen to have a piece of the action. Different cases and situations characterise the various households in the two contexts of course, but there have been shifts in their relationships over the years leading to a change towards the acceptance of the role of local drylanders in the irrigation scheme's farming activities.

Part of the area now covering the irrigation scheme was a special place for the Headman and his people. There was a *vlei*²² spot where they could always grow some crops such as yams, hence their bitterness when they lost it to the irrigation scheme.

Forced labour?

The Headmen, Village Heads and their helpers went around villages recruiting able-bodied men for work in digging canals. Some farmers say that labour was not forcibly recruited, it was voluntary, and people got paid about three pounds each month for working in the scheme, and were given food during work. Some say that they were forced to work because the village head who failed to provide his contribution of three men each month would be on bad terms with both the Headman and the District Commissioner. So Village Heads would make sure that those men who worked in towns would be recruited to work in the canals when they came home to visit their families.

Forced labour was thus an early feature in the irrigation scheme's history. For the men who were working in towns or mines, coming home was a big risk of losing one's urban job. The labour for the construction of canals and roads came largely from local people, some of whom refused to join. They worked for the money but did not want to be permanent members of the scheme. Village Heads from the local Barwe ethnic group were the main labour recruiting officers for the project authorities. They had their rotations of villagers to alternate in working on the project, and refusal was not countenanced. A few of the people who worked on canal and road construction later joined and started to irrigate.

Some farmers said that cows were slaughtered regularly to feed the hard-working men²³. For recruitment, Village Heads would use their informers to get to know who was at home for the weekend: these men would be waylaid, and their identity particulars confiscated so that they would not be able to travel. All Africans had to have their identity documents (or Passes) to go anywhere then, especially anywhere

near towns. The men would then be forced to work on the project for the said three months, earning about two pounds a month.

A few employers are said to have come all the way from Harare to look for their employees (whom they had trained) and to have taken them away directly from the canal or road construction site. Those working there were given daily tasks to complete, say, about 5 metres of the canal route to dig. The work is said to have been tough because almost everything was done manually, all pick, shovel, hammer and chisel. But there were machines that did part of the tough jobs such as rock blasting for canal construction. The levelling of irrigation plots was done later in 1983 by machinery, together with the lining of most of the canals.

The Nationalist movement in Nyamaropa

The period between 1964 and 1970 was characterised by intensified political conflict between irrigators and Nationalist supporters inside and outside the scheme. It was a period of heightening Nationalist feeling in general, and irrigators were on the receiving end for having accepted the colonial imposition of the irrigation project, and its subsequent (assumed and feared) regulating effect on the lives of people who were living and cultivating their ancestral land undisturbed. Irrigators were branded traitors and threatened with death by some liberation war soldiers and locals.

Nationalist activities were spreading in the 1960s²⁴. In 1965 one of the Nationalist leaders, Joshua Nkomo, (vice-President of the Zimbabwean government during the study), visited the Nyamaropa area. He told farmers not to allow colonial settlers to dictate to them how to use their land, discouraging further settlement on the scheme by both landless immigrants and locals. The irrigation scheme was thus regarded as a political project meant to promote the interests of the colonial government (Reynolds, 1969, also refers to this visit). These developments played on the interests of the different people involved in the project. Immigrants were especially caught in a corner here since they needed land to settle and be able to make a living. Some of them did settle outside the irrigation villages or compound (as shown on Map 2 above), but there was not enough land for everyone, and irrigation for most outsiders was the attraction.

Thus the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme started operating during a difficult period. Nationalist leaders did not want farmers to accept the irrigation scheme because they claimed that it was being used as a political gimmick by the colonial regime to create a buffer between Nationalists and the rest of the farming community in the area. Irrigation farmers would be seen to be eating from the hand of the government in such a way that they would not listen to anyone who came in with a story that was against the government, especially one pointing out that the scheme was located on the border with Mozambique where some of the liberation fighters were being trained. The Nationalist stance was meant to win popular support, following popular opinion, especially that of the local majority which rejected irrigation development. This included the whole stretch of settlements along the Gairezi River whose people had to be politicised by Nationalists against the irrigation project specifically, and against the colonial government in general.

The liberation war and irrigation development

For most irrigators the 1970s, especially the period up to 1978, were characterised by apprehension, uncertainty, and fears of retribution from locals who had lost their land to the irrigation scheme. When the war reached its peak in 1978, the irrigation scheme was temporarily closed. There was a gun battle between liberation fighters and government soldiers at the edge of the irrigation scheme where there was a camp of government soldiers. Soon after this incident irrigation staff left the area, and most immigrant irrigators went off into towns and other distant villages for refuge and fear of victimisation. Some local irrigators deserted their new irrigation homesteads and went back to their dryland relatives, again to accusations of being traitors.

Only a few of them stayed behind to protect their property; some of the property of those who could not stay, was plundered, but some of them came periodically to check if their homes were still in order. Local dryland farmers said that irrigators were only paying for their crimes of settling on land that was not theirs. But the war was not between Manyika immigrant irrigators and Barwe local villagers as the story may suggest. Rather, it was between local villagers, supporters of the liberation movement, and government, with irrigation development on the side of the latter. The one pound *mutete* (gift/homage) that all immigrants paid to the Headman when they came into the area and started irrigating was said not to have been enough to grant them 'local' status.

The war situation was harsh and protracted. Nationalist leaders told people that when the war was won everyone was going to get enough land to work on and live comfortably, without enforcement of repressive rules by outsiders. With such hopes and ideas in mind some people left the country to join others in Mozambique. Until 1978, most irrigators stayed on and continued to irrigate, much to the chagrin of Nationalists and the rest of the non-irrigating local population.

The Nyamaropa area was a highly sensitive place in security matters and this was indicated by the presence of an army camp near the irrigation scheme. Nationalists made it clear that whoever was found to be supporting the settler government's objectives would be punished, probably by death. They said that farmers should not go on farming for the White men to enjoy the wealth of the land. This is one of the reasons why most irrigators left the project during the height of the war and went to different places. After the war they moved back in and reclaimed their plots, but they had to do a lot of work because the place had become bushy and unkempt. Most farmers did not have enough money to buy inputs to resume farming. At least government helped with free or subsidised seed and fertiliser after 1980, especially with winter wheat seed soon after the war. Some people prepared those plots that had been left lying idle before the war because they were not well levelled. The post-war period ushered in new relationships between immigrants and locals and new identities going beyond the war veterans, revolutionary peasant and sell-outs categories. The war was over and there was no excuse for not joining the government irrigation project. More local villagers became more interested in joining the project and those who could get plots deserted by immigrants who did not come back joined immediately. There were also renewed claims for lost cultivation land, and new calls for opening up new land for irrigation to cater for the interests of locals.

The 1980s

The period soon after independence was generally marked by sweeping political and attitudinal changes among both irrigators and dryland farmers. There was a shift towards irrigation among drylanders in Nyamaropa. There was also significant support from government for smallholder farmers in general in the form of free or subsidised input supplies soon after 1980. Most drylanders wanted to join the irrigation project. Those who were lucky enough to get free or deserted plots did join. Most of them got plots on what later became Block D (see Map 3), with smaller plots averaging 2 acres per holder, half the average size of holding by the majority of early immigrant irrigators.

The formation of the Irrigation Management Committee in 1981 was said to have changed appearances in the sense that farmers had more say in the running of the irrigation scheme. Some of the farmers said that the way things were done was not good for development, because there was too much populism and politicking among farmers' leaders, which went a long way towards stifling local progress. The *laissez faire* type of management was even blamed by the official managing agency, Agritex, for farmers' alleged lack of co-operation in some cases. Extension staff argued that there was too much politics, often brought in by farmers in their disagreement with Agritex's recommendations. This 'politics' was actually about farmers claiming that they were their own masters in their farming practices, especially in the irrigation scheme, and telling extension staff not to be too pushy in promoting new ways of farming. Some farmers would bring up the issue of freedom from the colonial oppression of the previous authorities who were allegedly strict in management, telling Agritex staff not to act like them, or even threatening to take contentious matters to political leaders beyond the Nyamaropa area. On the issue of lack of firm control, some irrigators cited cases where friends and relatives of irrigation committee members were given large plots which they could not manage or utilise fully. Most of these allegations were not easily substantiated because plot allocation had informally changed. It shifted after independence from forfeiting an unused plot to the authorities, to inheritance within the family by registering a family member in case of death or absence of a registered plotholder.

In 1983 the government carried out extensive rehabilitation work on the scheme which included the lining of canals. This caused a lot of anxiety among farmers who felt cheated of their land when construction of roads and canals cut their plots into smaller sizes. Agritex then suggested that farmers swap or shift their plots, probably to make it easy to re-allocate land, but the farmers were infuriated. A group of women went to the office and stripped off part of their clothes in front of extension staff²⁵. This is one of the most powerful forms of protest, seemingly the final before extreme measures, such as violence, are taken: the strip show protest worked: Agritex backed off from the proposal after the emphatic 'show of objection'. This was mainly by women from the immigrant group of irrigators, most of them with larger pieces of irrigation land and constituting a majority among irrigators.

The Co-operative

Farmers in Nyamaropa, with some assistance from the irrigation manager and Demonstrators working in the area then, set up a co-operative in 1963 to market

irrigation produce on behalf of irrigators. Reynolds (1969: 94) points out that before the co-operative, marketing was done through the African Development Fund (ADF) on a temporary basis. The co-operative certainly made the marketing of produce more organised and less of a pain. But it was not a blessing to everyone; local businessmen who were benefiting from marketing produce on behalf of farmers were deprived of the monopoly of marketing and transport.

However, some of them were not to be outdone and devised strategies to beat the system: they set their buying prices for the produce much higher than that of the co-operative so that farmers were attracted and sold to them. While the co-operative made the purchasing of inputs much easier, the advantage of businessmen was that they would give farmers their money immediately after sales. The co-operative would get one cheque from a buying company and take weeks, if not months, to cash it for distribution among farmers.

Reynolds (1969) says that the co-operative was the only effective contact that farmers had with officialdom, especially after the split between the scheme and the surrounding villagers had reduced the effectiveness of farmers' links with government through the traditional authority. A co-operative officer based in Rusape would visit the scheme several times a year, but farmers believed that the co-operative was their own initiative.

Reynolds points out that it was alien to their type of social and economic organization, and they needed some form of education for it to succeed (Reynolds, 1969: 95). His point only helps to highlight the kind of thinking that existed during those years concerning intervention in rural areas. The idea of rural communities managing to organise themselves was not credible to development practitioners and, apparently, not to researchers either. What I noticed, however, was that farmers had their own separate ways of organising their lives which could and should be understood better by intensive extended observation and participation.

'Wet and dry' relations

"Irrigators need us for work in their fields...most of them are old...their children work in town... we need them, especially on the land issue, so that we can get food for our children... so we need each other, but the problem is that they pretend that they are in their own land with their own separate rules when we are under the same authority of Headman Sanyamaropa...Yes I do not deny it, our people refused to join the irrigation project when it started, but they did not know how useful it would be in future, there were good rains then, and no one wanted to pay money to cultivate their land. People thought that they would be forced into working for the White man for nothing...those who joined had nowhere else to go because they had been evicted from land bought by White farmers, and they needed somewhere else to live. This is still our land too and we need to benefit from it...where do you think our children are going to live and farm? We will have to share it at the end, you just wait and see..." (Masunungure, Secretary to Headman Sanyamaropa, 14 August 1995).

This quotation by Masunungure, a dryland farmer and close aide of Headman Sanyamaropa, introduces the debate not just about mutual inter-dependence between irrigators and non-irrigators in the area, how the two groups need each other in order

to survive in a rather harsh environment, but also the critical issues of group cultural identity, especially between immigrants and locals, and the centrality of access to resources in their often turbulent relationships. It also draws from a historical point of view of land shortage caused by the coming in of people who were being resettled by colonial authorities.

Some of the immigrants were sympathetic to the situation of locals, but still felt they saw a good chance to earn a living and grabbed it. Mautsa (65), a former teacher and one of the vocal irrigators who believed that farmers must run the irrigation scheme themselves, because it was in their best interest to do so, rather than entrust it to government employees, said of the early days:

"We had nowhere else to go after evictions from high rainfall areas by European settlers. This was just the right opportunity to get somewhere to stay and farm, and we took it up...most of the local Barwe people did not want to have anything to do with the irrigation scheme, and this gave outsiders a chance to get most of the plots" (19 August 1995).

There is also the argument raised by dryland farmers about the need for a piece of the irrigation scheme, as it were, for their children who might not have enough land to cultivate because irrigators who came from outside Nyamaropa took most of the cultivable land. The points raised by farmers here present the debate about access to irrigated land, latent conflict between irrigators and dryland farmers, and the need for an understanding of the problems faced by ageing irrigators, landless dryland farmers with little food and water, and the meaning of irrigation development to these two particular (identified) groups of farmers in Nyamaropa. Many of their differences, conflicts, and general hostility emanated from relations linked to the land issue, and they linked it up with access not just to land, but to water, both from the canal and 'rain from the heavens above'. Initially, identifications between locals and immigrants centred on geographic origins, ethnic affiliation, attachments to land and traditional authority, and acceptance of local rules, or creation of a separate cultural identity based on immigrants' interests and values, such as irrigation land and Church organisations. The above 'sites of identification' had a lot to do with the types of relationships that emerged between the different social and cultural groups in Nyamaropa.

Displaced²⁶ Barwe people settled on the surrounding hills to the south overlooking the irrigation scheme, bitter about losing their land, but happy all the same to have avoided direct control and supervision by the colonial government. Some of the Nationalist locals threatened to beat up irrigators who were found working on *chisi* (a day sacred to the spiritual guardians of the land), some told me stories of their oxen having been un-yoked by militant locals and they being accused of causing misfortune and drought to the normally healthy community and environment of Nyamaropa.

There were stories about irrigators who had their hoes and other tools confiscated by the Headman's policemen until they came forward to pay fines either in cash or in the form of a goat, for working on a sacred day. Irrigators said that they would do community work together with drylanders, such as repairing roads or building schools, but some of them would not attend their traditional rituals and ceremonies because they regarded them as meaningless, and local people as poor and retrogressive. However, it was also during this period that some local people joined

the irrigation scheme when they saw the benefits that made the strenuous work that they badly wanted to avoid look worth the effort.

Some dryland farmers tried hard to force irrigators to join in their traditional ceremonies in order to "harmonise relations in the eyes of the spirits". They insisted that irrigators should not wear red clothing during the main farming or rain season, even if they stayed away from the rituals. Some irrigators insisted too that if drylanders were not happy with the irrigators' attire, they should go ahead and buy them suitable clothing! The following quotation from an immigrant irrigator, reveals some of the problems that the two groups of farmers (as periodically constructed and identified by farmers themselves) met in their relations:

"...but why do they want us to do that? We cannot be sitting at home when there is work to be done just because someone else feels like staying at home, irrigation is a full-time business [venture], we cannot be observing traditional holidays all the time, we pay money to irrigate, and we have to get something out of it... they can stay at home if they like, I will hide in my maize and weed... these traditional resting days are for lazy people. I know that they say that we are destroying traditional ways of making rain fall, but how can we serve two masters at the same time? Extension workers want us to work hard and produce good crops because we put a lot into it... the Headman and his people want us to stay at home and observe *chisi*... so what do we do? I have my resting day on Sunday when I go to Church, so how many resting days do I need...?" (Mai Hakutangwi, widow and irrigation farmer, 19 June 1994).

This was one of the crucial cultural distinctions between immigrant and Christian irrigators and local villagers, some of them Church-goers too, but strict on observing traditional rites. Local irrigators found themselves caught in between, and some of them took sides with either party as it suited their situations. This adds to the discussion on problems of how irrigation development clashes with local traditional mores, norms and rules. There was the collision between the Church and traditional authority structure in the form of people being expected to observe traditional resting days and at the same time do their work up to Agritex expectations in their irrigation plots.

For those irrigators and drylanders who attended Church meetings together there was no great problem in relating to each other. One of the informants, Mapfurira, who was one of the leaders of the Apostolic Faith Church in the area (and had been in the Church for over 40 years), pointed out to me that dryland farmers accused some irrigators of letting out their cattle into the dryland plots to destroy crops because irrigators thought that drylanders were weak and their crops were bad anyway. When confronted with this problem irrigators bemoaned a shortage of grazing land in Nyamaropa which was a well known problem in the area.

When the war was at its peak in the late seventies and irrigators were fleeing the place, dryland farmers laughed at them saying that they were reaping what they sowed by settling on land that was not theirs. Dryland farmers did not have to flee because they were not aliens, and they had stayed clear of the government project, and identified with and helped the liberation war fighters with clothing and food.

Before the worst part of the war, there was a time when relations between new irrigators and local people were so tense that neither group could visit the other for beer parties, public ceremonies and community meetings. Movements of irrigators,

especially those who came from further away, were restricted for fear of violent reprisals from the locals if one was caught off-bounds. Locals had their beer drinks and parties separate from irrigators, most of whom started going to Church. Nationalist sentiments linked up effectively with the wishes of locals who opposed irrigation development (the two fed on each other well), hence irrigators were labelled sell-outs. Churches grew among irrigators, giving them a *sense of community and identity* as a group of people with some shared common experiences in spite of their different backgrounds and origins.

Before the construction of the irrigation scheme, locals had many ways of entertaining themselves and whiling away time. For example, they would dance to drums and hoe-blade tinkling music. For most immigrant irrigation farmers, what mattered was going to Church and then off to the field to work. Church regulations prohibited participation in many traditional parties. They saw themselves as belonging to a different group of people; with their own new cultural identity in the construction stage around irrigation status and Christian values, much higher than the local Barwe. They responded differently to change, with a tendency among immigrants to take risks and experiment with new methods of farming. They had been forced to change initially, by being forced to move from their 'original' villages to new resettlement areas such as Nyamaropa.

Irrigation management

On the farming side, many irrigators got good harvests, were sometimes paid quite reasonably by the buyers, and did well enough to buy themselves farming equipment such as ox-drawn cultivators, harrows and ploughs, and build nice brick houses to the envy of some non-irrigators. Managers, of European descent, and African demonstrators, who were coming and going, did teach them how to farm, but some of the farmers said their management was sometimes too harsh in the sense that one mistake, such as planting earlier or later than the set date, could cost someone their plot. The advantages of this strict 'authoritarian' system of management, however, were said by some of the early irrigators to be that all irrigators would stick to the rules, and the scheme worked well, and all was smooth if each one played their part well and obeyed the rules.

There were differences in irrigation management for periods before and after the war. For example, before 1980, people were allocated plots by the manager. Field staff would be told who was given which plot, and they would have nothing to do with the allocation itself unless consulted. It was the same story where water distribution was concerned. Farmers, or their co-operative, had no active hand in it. The Manager and his Demonstrators were the ones fully in charge of the running of the scheme, and they knew who needed water, where and when. When a farmer thought that hiser field was dry they would run to the office and see the manager or one of the Demonstrators, who would come to confirm the need, and then open the water for that sub-block.

After the war, the Irrigation Management Committee (IMC)²⁷ was given power to allocate plots together with Agritex. Water distribution was in the hands of the government extension department staff. There was a Water Controller for each of the four blocks, who liaised with extension staff and farmers on water scheduling and distribution. Problems were said by farmers to be in the discriminatory way of doing

things in the irrigation scheme. Those in the IMC had the leverage to offer plots to their friends and relatives without a system of checking by the managing agency. Preferential allocation was unfair because there were people who had been on the waiting list for a long time and would have liked to get their chance when there was an opening. While they condemned Agritex for being dictatorial sometimes, irrigators seemed to prefer a strong arm type of management in some issues such as water control and distribution whose ill-management could lead to disastrous harvests, and a *laissez faire* type of management where they could do what they wanted especially concerning which crops to grow on how much land per season.

Some of the older farmers actually bemoaned the lack of strict control in irrigation management since independence. The different views here seemed to be based on differential access to land. Most local plottolders with smaller pieces of land wanted stricter control of water so as not to lose any irrigation turns or get less water. The majority of immigrant plottolders with larger plots, and those among them with reputations for stealing water, preferred to keep the system flexible. Extreme measures advocated by the latter group included calls for removal of Agritex staff, advocating farmer-management of the irrigation scheme. Agritex's views on the subject of management were based on the need to see improvements in production levels. On struggles among farmers, the head of the extension department's office in the area had the following on the situation:

"If you look at the number and types of problems we have been having in Nyamaropa, you will realise that the problem is not that of water shortage. Water is a big problem, I agree, but it is not the main source of conflict among farmers and between farmers and extension staff. The problem, as I see it, is that of organisation and leadership among power hungry farmers. Some of these people will fight to get positions, yet they are not willing to take responsibilities that go with those positions, they just want the benefits. If farmers elect leaders who are able to represent their interests first, they will have fewer problems than they are having now. We can't choose leaders for them, they will say we are imposing things on them, like they have already accused us of dictatorship. So let them decide, it is their scheme, and it is their life..." (Sikume, Agricultural Extension Officer for Irrigation, Nyamaropa Irrigation Scheme, 22 September 1995).

Farmers said that before the war water distribution was not a problem because the White managers (especially the one called MacVick) were strict, and it was good for the irrigators because no one got an unfair share of water and land.

There were some plots that were not well levelled out and water could not flow through, and these had to be levelled swiftly under the manager's supervision. But afterwards there were situations where farmers had to desert their plots because they were not ready for use, and could not be immediately fixed for lack of appropriate equipment. Agritex, the IMC and the rest of the farmers seemed to agree that the water was not sufficient because there was an increase in irrigated areas without a proportionate increase in water supply. There was talk of getting water from the perennial Gairezi River nearby, but it had remained mere talk. Some people hoarded water when it was their turn to irrigate, and this had ripple effects on, and delayed, each block's irrigation turns.

As far as payment of fees was concerned, the early days saw people paying their fees without too many problems, but later it seemed most people were not interested in paying what they owed. Some senior immigrant irrigators thought that there were serious problems with irrigation farmers who said that they could not afford to pay the fees. They said that any ordinary irrigator could easily pay from sales of a tomato crop in only half a border strip (two metres wide and 50 metres long). The Z\$58 paid per acre in maintenance fees was seen by some farmers as easily affordable by most irrigators who were able to market even one crop per year. Most farmers had 4 acres each and could pay Z\$232 a year (approximately US\$25 per year at 1996 exchange rates).

The difference was that during the early days of the project farming inputs were generally cheaper, and the fees seemed to fit the situation. Farmers saw things differently from their points of view as a result of their social and cultural differences. Hence without a clear grasp of the nature, meaning and implications or extent of these group differences, it would be difficult, and sometimes impossible, to understand why actors behaved the way they did under particular, changing circumstances or contexts, or why social groups in Nyamaropa continuously shift their identities in interactions with others.

Setting the scene: different social actors in the Nyamaropa irrigation domain

This section looks at group social and cultural differences as manifesting themselves through changing forms of social interaction in social interfaces between and among them in the Nyamaropa area. Although I mention interfaces here, the interest is more in sketching out the social actors in the encounters than the interfaces themselves.

It is in the encounters that actors' situations are better defined, together with their various identities whether as irrigators, dryland farmers or members of other small groupings. The categories do overlap sometimes, and different categorizations pertain to different contexts or situations. Looked at in this way, it is neither easy, nor necessary, to treat the categories or groups as fixed identities, although some do *seem* more fixed than others. Some of the initial differences among farmers here were derived from categories recognised or created by the first outsiders to work in the area, by the managing agency, Agritex, those recorded by Reynolds (1969), and those that I encountered during my own investigations.

The use of interface analyses led me to pick out some critical cases and interface situations of encounters that brought out the different perspectives of the different actors involved in the particular 'actions'. This in turn shed more light on their constructions of related cultural identities in different contexts and for different purposes.

Irrigation farmers

By March 1996, Nyamaropa had about 430 ploholders. The 'different' farmers shown in Tables 3 and 4 give a glimpse of the situation of cultural diversity, and similarity, which constitutes the background of types of relationships that often emerged, disappeared and re-emerged in different forms among the different actors. This sets the stage for the type of reception that outsiders are likely to get, and helps one to see beyond the interfaces of different cultural domains, into the basis of an actor or actors'

responses or actions. In this way one is able to understand why certain encounters or situations were characterised by particular types of behaviour or relations. The introduction of the irrigation scheme created most of the social and cultural differences; interacting with it and other farmers in it created and shaped some of the new identities and relationships. The extent of identification with the new project was one basis for group identity construction among farmers, and being an irrigator was seen first as a threat that could even put one's life on the line during the early stages which saw the intensification of the liberation war. Being a non-irrigator was a sign of patriotism, in line with Nationalist sentiment, in as much as being an irrigation farmer was regarded as being a sell-out.

Among themselves, irrigators could be divided into several groups. I must emphasise here that there was no single category or group of farmers that was found to be exclusive in any significant way or permanent. Farmers with totally different backgrounds and interests could be seen liaising on almost all their dealings. Most of them were involved in mutually beneficial forms of association, such as hiring a dryland farmer's oxen and paying with one season's use of a strip of irrigated land for the services. Irrigators who borrowed oxen from others were regarded by some of their colleagues with oxen or tractors as lazy. The idea was that if one had been an irrigation farmer for more than 10 years (one immigrant farmer's estimate, Mautsa), they should have managed to buy themselves a pair of oxen from farming returns. Among irrigators, there were locals and immigrants, but differences between these two groups were not easy to pick out because of diversities within each group, here reflecting the fluidity of the groups. This does not mean that different identities were non-existent, they could recognise each other by surnames and *'mitupo'*²⁸ (totems). Besides that, local irrigators had stronger links with dryland farmers compared to immigrant irrigators.

Sometimes local irrigators took sides with the traditional authority led by the Headman in disputes, such as on the need by everyone under the Headman to observe *chisi'*²⁹, the traditional resting day. Most of the local irrigators were in one particular block, Block D (see Map), which was developed later, in the 1970s and early 1980s. They had smaller plots than those who joined earlier and got bonus plots. There were leadership wrangles among irrigators which tended to assume ethnic dimensions most of the time, with Manyika immigrants (the majority of irrigators) always voting for an immigrant Manyika leader, and local Barwe irrigators seemingly supporting their own candidate. Ethnic loyalty was a reality in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, an accepted factor in local politics, and an element reflecting cultural identity and group affiliations with what could potentially serve one's interests better. This was not openly talked about, but it was acknowledged by almost all those concerned with the issue. It is discussed in more detail under discussions on identity. Apparently, this seemed like a miniature reflection of the type of politics we have at National level, which happens to have ethnic characteristics most of the time. There were other groups among irrigators, such as women, widows, the youth, children, permanent workers, businessmen, absentee plowholders, and those who were almost permanent lessees. Women did most of the work in their family plots. Some of the men disagreed with this judgement, arguing instead that men did the heavier periodic tasks, such as ploughing (also increasingly and commonly done by women), and women cleaned up the rest of the repetitive duties after them.

Then there was the group of elderly irrigators who were referred to by some extension workers as 'senior citizens' of Nyamaropa. This was a sensitive part of the section. Because of what could be seen, ironically, as part of the success of the irrigation scheme, some farmers gave their children a good education, and they got good jobs in urban centres, and only came to Nyamaropa briefly over weekends and during holidays such as Christmas, Easter and Independence day, to visit. Some of them told me that they did not foresee themselves settling in Nyamaropa to inherit their parents' plots. The meaning of this was that the elderly members of the irrigation community had to rely on hired casual labour for any acceptable levels of productivity from their plots.

Among irrigators in general, although inheritance of plots was not the legal way of transferring plot ownership, farmers had gradually changed this in practice until it had become the norm that a plot stayed within the family of the plotholder, especially the one who cleared it. Some of them had strong links with families in dryland areas around the scheme, with whom they worked for the already mentioned mutually beneficial deals. This brings us to the next issue, or next set of actors.

Drylanders

The majority of dryland farmers around Nyamaropa irrigation scheme were those who had rejected the irrigation project when it started and were removed from the designated land. Most of them were from the Barwe ethnic group that has Mozambican origins. However, there was also a small group of Manyika dryland farmers who settled in the area before the scheme started, and did not want to be involved when it started operating. These two groups of dryland farmers were settled on opposite sides of the scheme (see Map 2). A succession of dry seasons and comparisons with irrigators' harvests gradually changed their views concerning irrigation farming, and by 1996 most of them were involved in renting pieces of irrigated land in the irrigation scheme, sometimes allegedly causing disruptions in the management of the project by their (alleged) lack of experience or knowledge about irrigation farming.

The issue of leasing and sub-leasing was regarded by some farmers as taboo, not to be talked about³⁰. The flourishing illegal deals between irrigators and non-irrigators, and some businessmen, were treated with caution because of their sensitivity. The justification for the practice was that it benefited both parties. Drylanders especially benefited directly by being able to grow wheat for food every winter season. The problem was that this was the dry season in general, with need for restrictions on water usage, but it was the period that saw more land being cultivated than in the normal season, including dryland farmers' portions under legal plotholders' names.

Businessmen

Some businessmen in Nyamaropa, people with retail shops, grinding mills, or 'bottle-stores' (pubs), played an increasing role in changes that were taking place in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Almost all of them were involved in farming, or started off as farmers and went into business later. Manyuchi, Nyamurundira, Kapadza, Manyaira, Mautsa, Masamvu and Hondo were some of the well known business people involved in irrigation farming. Their styles of farming were more

commercialised than those of the non-business people. This is only as far as their level of mechanisation, employment of farm labour, use of extension advice, new technologies such as hybrid seed and chemical fertilisers, among other indicators, were concerned. The trend in Nyamaropa was that most businessmen rented land in the irrigation scheme to use for their farming purposes from other irrigators who could not utilise all their plots for a variety of reasons.

Elderly plotholders

There was a large number of first generation plotholders in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Most of them were the elderly irrigators (those over 60 years), who said that they did not want to be denied the chance to produce their own food, by rules put up by someone who probably had their own home and piece of land somewhere else (referring to extension staff who came from other regions of the country). They argued that although they were on state land, it was high time they were given somewhere they could call home and not 'remain squatters for life'. They said that they would continue to sub-lease and share-crop with drylanders and businessmen, because it kept them on the land while giving them some food and cash; and for allowing deals for subleasing, they saw themselves as helping government with drought relief aid for dryland families who would have harvested very little to sustain their families. There was an element of truth in that.

Some of them were taken away by their children to go and live with them in towns, but kept coming back to check on their land and homesteads. Most of them saw their plots as their personal assets although they were not legally entitled to them. There were complaints by some of them, such as Chibonda, one of my key informants on historical reconstructions, when they were taken away into town by their children, that the children wanted to share their wealth while they were still alive. Those who were permanently resident in Nyamaropa supervised hired labour and harvested their crops, earning themselves a better living compared to most dryland villagers.

The Nyamaropa youth

Young people in Nyamaropa who finished school and could not get jobs in town worked in their families' plots and waited for the day when they would register their names as plotholders in the scheme. Some of them actually looked forward to it as part of their career objectives. I talked to a class of more than 60 Form 4 and Form 3 pupils ('O' level classes) about their aspirations, at Bumhira Secondary School, the only secondary school located near the irrigation scheme. Some of the pupils said that when they left school they would like to acquire a plot in the irrigation scheme and grow a lot of tobacco. They had probably seen their parents' cheques with thousands of dollars after selling their tobacco on the auction floors. The irony of it was that those who expressed this interest were booed by the rest of the class as having very low aspirations. So-called higher aspirations included wishing to be a pilot, a teacher, a medical doctor, a nurse, and other professions outside farming. Getting a job in town, outside the irrigation scheme, was regarded as a step forward, while remaining in the irrigation scheme to farm was, for most young people, regarded as being a failure. This image was reinforced by the young men who crowded local bars in the evenings and sometimes fought among themselves over money, beer, and other minor issues

when they were drunk. This does not necessarily mean that they were an insignificant part of the social scene in Nyamaropa, in fact they played important but often unacknowledged roles in household activities.

There were reported cases of theft of farm produce for sale or of cash from farm proceeds by family members, especially unemployed adults working in the family plots. Although some of them received pocket money once in a while, they relied on the hope that perhaps one day they would become the holders of the family plot. Like children, they hardly had a say in community irrigation affairs, and few, an insignificant number actually (below 30 years) attended meetings on irrigation issues. Their views, apparently, were limited to their family decision-making within the household, and some of them seemed to have an important say in helping out especially those plottolders who were much older and not working in the fields at all.

Women and widows

The common sight of a plot with farmers working in Nyamaropa showed that most of them were women. Widows made up a large part of the farmers who still woke up and went to their fields every day in Nyamaropa. Who were they, and what did they do with themselves and with their time? I have already mentioned that the majority of people who worked in the fields were women and children. Tasks such as planting, weeding, and harvesting could sometimes be left solely for women and children. Although there was a high incidence of women working with children in their plots, some men were also found to be involved in the same tasks as those normally regarded by most people in the area as women's jobs. Cases selected indicate that some men delegated to their women what needed to be done while others made joint decisions as a unit.

There was evidence of some women irrigators doing almost everything there was to do in their households while men were either at work in towns or doing something else. Widows were a distinctive, and interestingly dynamic, group of irrigation farmers in the way some of them formed what appeared as '*confederations of widowed households*' to assist each other at times of peak labour demands and for other social needs (see Chapter 5). There seemed to be a high incidence of widowhood in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Survey results from the study indicated that about 30 percent of the formal irrigation plottolders were widows. There were some women who falsely registered as widows so that they would receive drought relief inputs, or even to secure a plot in the first place, hence the need to deconstruct the whole issue of widowhood before making generalisations was paramount. Checks with some of the extension staff and Irrigation Management Committee members confirmed the statistic, together with the possibility of faked (strategic) widowhood to gain access to irrigated land.

As mentioned above, widows seemed to occupy a special place in Nyamaropa, and some of them had a system of operating which saw them helping each other as groups with special needs of their own. What is different or new in this set-up is the fact that widows were regarded as weak, less able without their husbands to produce good quality cash crops and to make enough money to take care of their household's needs; though evidence from Nyamaropa shows that widows were able to do very well on their own. The case of Mai Hakutangwi in Chapter 5 gives a detailed case analysis of how a widow survived and, by local standards, prospered, in an often hostile male

domain, where she was generally regarded as an underdog in most activities related to irrigation's market-related or commercial farming ventures.

Catchment farmers

Catchment farmers represented a small, but significant and culturally distinct group of farmers in the Nyamaropa social, political and farming scene. They were spatially removed from the irrigation scheme's physical domain (20+ kilometres away), connected though, and critically so, both by sharing the same river water with irrigation farmers down stream, and by some of them being related through kinship to some of the irrigation farmers. Their appearances in Chapter 4 introduces the element of cultural distinction and its strategic use in situations of conflict over the very resources that they share. Spatial difference and cultural identities clearly project here the distinctions that groups of farmers in separate but related situations employ in negotiations over resources. Catchment villagers depended on farming for the main source of incomes and food supply, in the same way that irrigators did in the government irrigation scheme, but the former did not have formal or legal entitlement to the use of the same water that their ancestors had been using for decades. This was the argument used by irrigators in their negotiations, but catchment farmers were adamant that their traditional or historical use of the same rivers for various purposes was a good enough right to entitle them to water use. This is where they brought out their cultural weapons in this resource war when they mentioned that irrigators were suffering because of their cultural decadence over the years, especially by not observing *chisi*.

The Irrigation Management Committee (IMC)

The committee type of farmer organisation in smallholder irrigation schemes only started after 1980. In Nyamaropa this was the farmers' representative body which replaced the co-operative after 1980. The core committee included the chairman and vice chairman, secretary and vice secretary, and a treasurer; then there were committee members representing villages, sometimes up to eight of them. The role of the IMC was to liaise with Agritex and other outsiders, and to represent farmers' interests on all matters that affected them. The committee normally had a one year term, but some committees could continue for three years or more without elections especially when members (apparently) 'refused' to step down by creating excuses from the need for them to stay on in positions, such as unfinished projects.

The IMC could fine farmers who stole water, and together with Agritex, could recommend that a farmer be evicted for failing to pay irrigation fees, for example. It also looked for buyers of produce from towns on behalf of farmers. In Nyamaropa, there were allegations that the management committee was dominated by Manyika immigrants. Local irrigators often cited the 1993 case when the committee, chaired by a local (Barwe) irrigation farmer, was forced out of office by a Manyika group for supporting a type of irrigation system that was regarded as likely to lead to a loss of land for irrigators with larger plots. Ethnic differences were an influential force in Nyamaropa irrigation politics³¹, but they did not get to be discussed openly or very often, unlike cultural or group identities which were a regular subject in meetings and in bars around the irrigation scheme.

Block Committees (BCs)

Block Committees only emerged in 1995 as a result of Agritex and local irrigators' collusion against what they both termed lack of effective representation and the arrogance of the Manyika-led IMC. Within the IMC there were farmers from the local Barwe ethnic group and others from neither group. These were members elected for their leadership qualities such as the ability to challenge Agritex staff in meetings on behalf of farmers. Relations were sour between some of the IMC members and Agritex, and Block Committees were seen as a way of removing the IMC from power. Farmers who did not like the IMC members, or had clashed with some of them in the past, and most local irrigators who had smaller plots, together with some immigrant irrigators who were convinced that there was a need for change, supported the idea which was carefully marketed by Agritex and the 'deposed' (1992) former IMC leader.

Their main argument was that each block would have committee members to monitor what was going on in the block in terms of water distribution and general management, and they would work closely with the block's Extension Worker and Water Controller. This, they argued, meant that they would quickly identify sources of problems which the IMC could not previously identify, and it would be difficult for them to steal water. There was a growing rift among irrigators on ethnic grounds. The block that started the move was Block D, where most of the local irrigators from the Barwe ethnic group were 'housed'. But some of the members in support of the Block Committees were immigrant irrigators (more of this wrangle in Chapter 6).

Agritex staff

In 1996, there were five Extension Workers in the Nyamaropa area, one for each block in the irrigation scheme and one in the dryland area (there were two female extension workers when I arrived in Nyamaropa, one in the irrigation scheme and the other in surrounding dryland; (the latter transferred to another area in 1995). There was an Agricultural Extension Officer (Irrigation), one Supervisor, the oldest member among them, who had served more than 30 years in extension work around the country.

Both the Officer and the Supervisor were responsible for extension in both the irrigation scheme and its surrounding dryland areas. There was one Clerk and one Office Orderly. There were also four Water Controllers³² for each of the four blocks making up the scheme. The four Water Controllers had one Foreman. There were about 20 General Hands who helped maintain the irrigation infrastructure. The most senior of all Agritex staff in the scheme was the Officer, followed by the Supervisor, Extension Workers, Water Controllers and General Hands.

The Headman's court

Headman Sanyamaropa was the ninth in line as far as official and traditional 'records' could tell. He was officially installed in 1995 after practising for several years (Magadlela, 1995). He said that he was in a tough position which saw the deterioration of traditional standards of good behaviour ever since the irrigation scheme started. The irrigation scheme started when his brother was the Headman, but he saw it all, especially the way immigrants started abusing traditionally sacred places by going to

pray on sacred mountains, in rivers, and under sacred trees. Some of them were not observing *zvisi* (plural for *chisi*), the traditional resting days, causing drought, which made even those who observed it suffer.

The Headman blamed immigrant irrigators for general moral decay in Nyamaropa, and said that it all came with the coming of the irrigation scheme, but concluded that it was a useful type of farming which should be increased. He had been on the waiting list of Agritex to get a plot for years, and was glad that he was going to get a plot in the new extension area of the project. Large numbers of farmers from the irrigation scheme were fined \$50 each or a goat for not observing sacred days. The Headman and his court of about six regular 'assessors', as they were called by his secretary, tried different types of civil cases that were brought before them, including those among irrigators. However, some irrigators took their cases directly to the Zimbabwe Republic Police, who had a camp in Nyamaropa, on a hillock overlooking the whole irrigation scheme (Map 2).

The Councillor

The Councillor was a politically elected representative of an administrative ward of Nyamaropa, which comprised six villages. He represented the ward in Council meetings at Ward and District level. He was a member of the ruling party. In the Nyamaropa case, he worked well with the traditional institution, and said that as a former teacher, he understood very well that they all had the same interests in developing their area. Normally, Councillors and the general local government structure were seen as having taken away powers from Chiefs and Headmen. The Nyamaropa Ward's Councillor used to be an irrigator, but left after the war, his mother still had a plot in the irrigation scheme, and he was involved in irrigation affairs in his capacity as a Councillor. He worked with Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), and one of the VIDCO chairmen was the secretary to the Headman, which saw a merger of the two sometimes conflicting roles of local government structures and traditional institutions in one person's dual roles or loyalties.

Other outsiders

There was a variety of other external interveners in Nyamaropa who were involved with farmers. An interesting group of actors was that of buyers of farmers' produce from the irrigation scheme. There were private individual dealers who came to Nyamaropa to negotiate with farmers on prices to buy their crops such as beans and other horticultural crops. Some food processing companies came to Nyamaropa and struck deals with farmers on providing seed for particular crops to be grown, and agreed to come and pick them up and pay farmers for their trouble. Some of these deals fell through when external dealers did not honour their part of the deal. Farmers became sceptical of external intervention related to cropping arrangements to grow crops for specific buyers without a binding contract.

There were also Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that were involved with farmers in Nyamaropa area for a variety of reasons ranging from attempts to source water for the irrigation scheme to promoting development of the area in general. One of the active NGOs in the Nyamaropa area and its surroundings was the Nyanga

Development Projects (NDP), locally active especially through its smaller localised unit on the Nyanga Vegetable Growers' Association (NVGA). One of its Development Workers (DW) was stationed in Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and worked closely with some irrigation farmers. One of his close associations was with Samunda, a local irrigation farmer who also worked in close co-operation with Agritex and was said to be 'more flexible and understanding' than other popular irrigation leaders.

An inventory of some problems derived from the past

The do-it-yourself solution as a trouble maker

Farmers who cleared their own plots when irrigation started would not hear of any changes in the way of farming that would entail their move from their original plots to other plots formerly used by their colleagues. During the early days some of the immigrants had nowhere to live, so they made makeshift shelters while clearing their plots, at the same time building huts. One of the early irrigators, Kapadza, who joined in 1962, told me how he cleared his four acre plot with his wife, just the two of them, and stayed with a friend while doing it.

This is one way immigrants made close friends amongst themselves amid hostility from local anti-irrigation campaigns. When Agritex suggested that they change to the Block System there was fierce opposition. Irrigators felt that they could not afford to change to a plot that had probably had poor husbandry for years, maybe to a plot that had never had cattle manure applied to it, or one that had been so badly kept that water could hardly flow to the other end of the field. Besides, most of those who cleared their own plots were so attached to them that they could not bear the idea of changing "for the mere fact of making life easy for the Agritex guys" in terms of management. In addition to that, there was the common belief in this community that each farmer had his/her secret magic that s/he used to treat his/her field in such a way that it could only be productive under his/her own use. Farmers became attached to their plots to such an extent that they could not be moved from them in case of changes in management. Over the years they have come to regard the plots as their personal assets in spite of the obvious status of tenancy on state land.

Plot allocation

The design of the scheme may have had nothing to do with it, but the allocation of plots in Nyamaropa really made the current water distribution problems as insurmountable as they have seemed in the 1990s. What happened was that the first farmers to irrigate were allocated four acres each, but later, probably in order to lure most of the locals who were saying that land for plots was too small for them to join, those farmers who were said to have done well in their first irrigation seasons were awarded two acres more as a prize. This was often in another area of the scheme where land was still available. There was no consideration of the labour problems or of farmers losing time commuting between two distant fields, nor was there thought of the fact that they would be so attached to these plots that they would not want to move from them to allow for changes in management.

Water distribution headaches

The serious watering problems that this system of plot allocation caused were not foreseen. Farmers were having problems following water around the scheme and repeatedly running to the Agritex office to ask for water. Farmers said that they found themselves too busy looking for water at different times to water different crops at different places in the scheme, and not tending to their other problems. Agritex was using this problem as one of its strengths in the argument and call for the promotion and adoption of the 'suspicious' block system.

Age, inheritance and labour

Demographic factors in Nyamaropa posed interesting issues of analysis in that the scheme seemed to be reeling under the very factors that could be said to be indicators of its success. Some of the irrigators who managed to save enough from their produce sales gave their children a good education, they subsequently got good jobs in towns and no longer looked towards farming as their means of earning a living. Some irrigators were getting too old to keep on working on the land. Children were not there to inherit the plots, some just came and registered their names when their parents died and leased them out to friends or relatives. Some of the elderly farmers hired permanent and casual labour to do all the work while they supervised it.

There was an 'open secret' phenomenon of elderly irrigators sub-leasing part or all of their plots to other farmers, businessmen or drylanders for a variety of reasons. Agritex staff said that the irrigation scheme had problems of absentee landpersons, widows who could not manage their plots, divorcees who had no resources and faced labour problems, and single parents some of whom left the scheme when they secured employment in urban areas, often leasing to relatives or friends who might lack the commitment to keep the plot in order. Table 3 below shows figures of farmers who were regarded locally as 'different', or had what passed for special circumstances in terms of their capacity and knowledge of irrigation practices.

Table 4: Figures of 'not-so-ordinary' farmers

Type' of farmer	Number
Widows	119
Widowers	12
Divorcees	11
Single parents	23
Absentee landpersons	36
Total (of 'out-of-the-norm' land holders)	201
Total No. of ploholders	450

Source: Compiled from Agritex records, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 1994.

This simple table shows the number of respective groups of farmers with plots seen by Agritex, by some farmers, and by some outsiders as likely to present or face problems in terms of levels of production, accountability in fees payment, plot husbandry in general, and inheritance squabbles.

Plot sizes and scale of production

Some farmers complained that the plots that they were allocated from the start were too small for any one of them to produce on a scale large enough to fully commercialise. They said that they would like to be fully incorporated into the market but could not cope because they had problems marketing their crops which were not enough for some buyers' quotas.

One case in 1995 saw farmers clash with the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (CCZ), local and Provincial politicians, and concerned the relocation of the cotton grader from the irrigation scheme to another region altogether on grounds that farmers were not producing enough bales to warrant having the grader based at the Nyamaropa cotton depot. He was said to be underemployed because Nyamaropa farmers produced too little cotton to warrant him being permanently based in the area. Farmers were challenged to produce 100 000 bales of cotton each summer if they wanted the grader to be brought back. They cried foul, claiming that their plots were too small and they needed to grow food crops too for their own consumption.

Farmers wanted to be involved actively in the market in order to sell their produce. The problem of distance from the urban centres and the lack of reliable transport facilities kept their active participation restricted to cotton, maize, tobacco and beans. These crops were not as perishable as fresh vegetables such as peas and tomatoes, which could have earned them more money had the facilities and conditions permitted.

*The block system*³³

Farmers thought that the need for a block system was a result of Agritex's failure to deal with its task of managing the scheme. As a suggested solution, farmers thought that this was a joke, and if not, it was an insult to their three decades of commitment to the scheme and the whole area. Tempers were high in a meeting held to discuss the proposal with farmers sometime in 1993. A team of irrigators was selected to go and tour Mushandike irrigation scheme in Masvingo Province, a scheme which was said by Agritex to be doing well under the system.

They came back and told their colleagues not to accept the idea because they had been taken to see a garden for people with other plots in the dryland area. It was thrown out. Most of them felt that it would suit better those who had dryland plots and used irrigated land for supplementary purposes or as a resource to counter negative effects of dry seasons. They suggested that they might think about it if the authorities allowed them to keep part of the land that they originally cleared. They did not agree on this issue because most irrigation farmers would not hear of parting with a metre of the land they cleared themselves and had been using for more than three decades.

Discussion and conclusions

The Nyamaropa irrigation scheme emerged out of a host of contradictory political and social circumstances such that its development cannot be easily understood without a fair knowledge of its historical context. The idea of seeing it as a big pot boiling over with a variety of dishes, different chefs cooking up their recipes, representing different actors in the area with different agendas, constantly constructing and shifting identities as groups change from one focus and representation to the other, brings to light the aspect of diversity, multiple realities, heterogeneity and actors different activities and strategic interaction. It raises the question of whether the irrigation scheme as a project for social and economic development addresses (or addressed) the various needs of the different people involved in different ways in it.

The need to understand the historical setting of the project cannot be overemphasised, especially as we need to have a good grasp of how the present micro social and political situation in the project came about from the point of view of the different people involved at different stages and levels of its development. Different groups' cultural identities and relationships should be understood from the historical context of the community's social development and change over time, as the project assumed different and changing meanings to different people, whose identifications were also shifting with their new views of what the project meant to them and their colleagues at different times of its development. The social make-up of Nyamaropa cannot be understood without a clear and close-up grasp of the historical factors from which it emerged.

Nyamaropa has several histories, no ultimate truth, but different versions of the truth constructed from differing views of different people. Farmers saw the irrigation project differently because they came from different backgrounds, had different ways of farming, and related differently to their colleagues with different cultural identifications which were constantly shifting during interactions with others linked to the same project. Immigrant irrigators regarded it as their home since they had nowhere else they could go after being removed from their 'original' settlements by new tenurial regulations. The irrigation scheme offered them a place to relate to in a new way, as an economic resource with regular supplies of water, where they worked closely and had to co-operate with other farmers sharing the same land and water resources, a common social and cultural domain, related and interlocking interests and aspirations, and related or shared identities.

For local irrigators, the project offered a chance to set new targets in their farming lives by being able to grow more crops per year than the one summer crop they were used to. It also meant more demanding work, more investment in inputs, and working closely with extension staff. For dryland farmers, together with Headman Sanyamaropa, it was initially an unwanted development, but that changed when dry seasons came in succession and the project offered the only locally viable option to earn a living or grow enough food, and they moved in to try and find plots, sell their labour, or rent irrigated plots with cash or in exchange for draft power or labour. This shifted the local discourse on irrigation development and intervention in general from a hostile attitude towards a more accommodating identification with and claim of part of the irrigation resource.

Production of cash crops such as tobacco, cotton, and some horticultural crops, was an added advantage in the opportunity to irrigate. As a technical, physical artefact,

they regarded the irrigation scheme as a means of achieving reasonable production levels of both food and cash crops, a means to sustain their livelihoods. The first farmers to join the project as irrigators had to clear their own plots for them to start irrigating. This created an attachment to the piece of land cleared that cannot be easily broken. This, it appears, was part of the process of the social creation of technology, which happened to later set socio-technical parameters for the use, or change in use, of the particular technology in the form of farmers' refusal to change plot 'ownership'.

On the social transformation of the irrigation scheme there was a potentially explosive area in clashing, almost always contradictory, social groups, based on ethnic differences, on different religious and belief systems, and on origins and perceptions of the irrigation scheme among them, worsened by spatial locations of farmers' homesteads around the irrigation scheme. For the different social groups, the irrigation scheme ushered in a new way of relating to different social groupings, sometimes with clashing perceptions of how to utilise the irrigation resource. On a higher level of discourse, it introduced a strong challenge to established beliefs by changing people's faith to the Christian Church. Local people had to learn to live with immigrants who could not easily enrol themselves into the ways of locals because they believed themselves to be better-off than the local inhabitants. Although some of them made friends, their differences were a sensitive part of their relations that kept reminding them of their different origins.

Agritex, as an outside agency promoting the adoption of improved farming methods among smallholder farmers, was caught in the middle of farmers' relationships and played a significant role in trying to influence the course of change either in management or other related areas in Nyamaropa. Some of the irrigators who joined the scheme early were too old to do the work, and sub-leasing part of their plots had become a prevalent, illegal, but condoned, practice. Extension staff argued that it helped farmers remain on the land, while keeping the irrigation scheme productive; a humane and understanding stance it seemed.

As a political project, the irrigation scheme was a government means of improving the lives of disadvantaged groups of smallholder farmers who were settled in poor areas, and an attempt to show the authorities' commitment to the betterment of smallholder African farmers. Farmers were registered as lessees themselves because the project was (is) on state land. They had to fill in forms for permits to reside, to cultivate, and to depasture stock. At the same time they had to pay money, *mutete*, to the Headman and Village Heads to be able to live there.

In 1996, thirty six years down the line, they regarded this as an unfair situation and repeatedly asked to be granted title to their small plots, in the same way as people who mortgage for properties in town finally get title to the particular property, but there has neither been an indepth study on the value of an average smallholder irrigation plot, nor a serious consideration of giving them title to the pieces of land. Some relatively well-off irrigators said that they could be doing much better with larger pieces of land, way above two hectares. The Headman felt that he deserved a piece of the irrigation cake because it is on his land (his predecessor refused to join, and irrigation plots have evaded them ever since), and was repeatedly involved in clashes with irrigators who did not observe traditional rules such as rainmaking ceremonies.

Briefly, and rather generally for a start, the above situation sets the stage for a sociological analysis of smallholder irrigation development in this particular location of Eastern Zimbabwe. Social and cultural identity among different actors introduced in

this chapter reveals the extent and effect of irrigation development and its impact and effect in creating differential access to resources among rural producers in this particular area.

The following chapter looks more specifically at some case analyses of changing social relationships and shifting identities in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, centred on the embeddedness of farmers' relations in land and water, how relations shape themselves around water and land, and how the two also shape social relationships, or have relationships shaping themselves around them. There is an emphasis on *leadership and cultural identity*, which were part of the focus of the different ways in which actors with conflicting views of the same situation interacted. The social and political interactions of these actors in the context of access to land and water resources opened up the concealed ever-present bases of social and cultural identities among a group of people living together.

Notes

- 1.. The use of this term in this context may be contested, and rightly so. What is a 'farmer', and what is a 'cultivator', or a 'peasant producer'? It is my belief that pre-colonial villagers in some areas around Zimbabwe, especially in the Nyanga area, were farmers, not least because Beach (1994) provides us with evidence of intensive cropping, of some specialisation of sorts, but also because their farming practices and general farming 'economies', although limited in scope, were also complex and diversified. This may, however, exclude migratory groups or those which practiced shifting cultivation such as the Bemba of Zambia (Cheater, 1986; Long, 1992).
- 2.. Emery Alvord was one of the first non-Africans to develop an interest in the development of the African agricultural sector. He was a former Methodist Missionary who is known to have started the extension services and the Master Farmer Training programme among smallholder African farmers in formerly Native Reserves in the Southern parts of Manicaland Province in Eastern Zimbabwe.
- 3.. Nyamaropa was one of the projects constructed during this transitional period, when the government was slowing down smallholder irrigation development (Roder, 1965; Reynolds, 1969, Chapter 2).
- 4.. Nyanga town was often referred to as Nyanga village because of its small size. It had a small population of commercial farmers and it was more of a tourist centre than a town with prospects for industrial growth. However, with its high potential for agricultural growth and cooler climates it was specially suited for horticulture produce, and there was a belief that the 'village' might yet become a sprawling urban centre with canning factories and other horticulture-related industries.
- 5.. Vincent and Thomas' (1962) work on Natural Regions or Agro-Ecological Zones goes a long way to explain differences among geographical areas in Zimbabwe. See Table 1.
- 6.. There was no clearly planned settlement here as such. Villagers who were forced to move off designated irrigation land settled at the foot of the hills to the south of the irrigation scheme (Map 2). Some of them said that they had their homesteads pegged for them by Demonstrators, but most of them claim that they pegged them themselves without outsiders' assistance, which may account for the scattered random or unplanned nature of the distribution of their homesteads compared to those resettled by government authorities during that time.
- 7.. I call this small group of social actors in Nyamaropa '*Zimbicans*' to capture the duality of their citizenship (Zimbabwe and Mozambique). They actually participate in political, economic and social activities in Nyamaropa, and sent a representative with a gift of cash to the installation ceremony of Headman Sanyamaropa in August, 1994, as a show of their allegiance to their traditional leader.
- 8.. 'Original' here refers to the people whom locals were told (from their oral history) had been the first to live there. It was a matter of how far back they could recall, or what versions of the history were carried through folk stories about originality.
- 9.. Some of the villagers said that there were no huge trees as immigrants who cleared their plots

would have outsiders believe. They said that it was open land with tall thick grass, and some big trees *here and there* (Dryland farmer Samunda, 17 July 1994, personal communication; not the local irrigation leader, but a relative of his). One of the engineers who designed Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, Watermeyer, said that the area was full of tall grass which sometimes posed problems for surveyors (Watermeyer, 12 March 1996, personal communication). He did not mention a thick forest with wild animals which some immigrant irrigators told me about in the history of the area before irrigation started (the two views were from two completely different sides to the Nyamaropa story).

10.. Reynolds (1969: 15) says that local people had some (limited) contact with the outside world before the irrigation scheme was constructed. He notes evidence of one small school, and stories about a White man who used to come from Nyanga on horseback, as showing the limited contact with the outside world. Stories of farmers' travels and migration to urban areas as far as Bulawayo and in some cases Johannesburg were not uncommon in Nyamaropa, which indicates that there was a strong element of contact with 'the world' outside Nyamaropa.

11.. Village Heads were sometimes referred to as 'kraalheads'. This is neither an English, Ndebele nor Shona term. It is likely to have its origins in Afrikaans from South Africa, and may be introduced by fortune hunters who came up with Cecil John Rhodes to settle in Zimbabwe from 1890.

12.. Highlighted parts in the letter indicate sections that I find crucial for one's understanding of official discourse on irrigation issues during that period. I especially did not want to shorten the letter because that would take out the punch from the message of what kind of development intervention the villagers around there were subjected to. The appearance of the text with several scattered italicised sections may not be attractive, but I believe the highlights certainly are.

13.. ZAPU stands for Zimbabwe African People's Union. This was the main Nationalist organisation at that particular time, before the split which led to the formation of ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union).

14.. This distinction of farmers into groups (a form of cultural identification) started even before Reynolds studied the area in 1966-7. But he was the first to make a conscious and rational categorisation of farmers into groups or social units, based on their origins. His study takes the identifications further by investigating the changing patterns of relating to the main distinguishing characteristics: relating to the irrigation scheme and to each other (immigrants and locals) over time.

15.. The Chief of this particular area was Sawunyama, but he did not play a central role in deciding whether people should join or stay out of the project. He actually complained that he was not told much about it (Chief Sawunyama, personal communication, 1995).

16.. 'Originals' is one of the terms used by project implementers in Nyamaropa to refer to local inhabitants of the area. Sometimes they would call them 'locals', a term which Reynolds (1969) used extensively to refer to Sanyamaropa villagers from the Barwe ethnic group.

17.. Chief Sawunyama and Chief Katerere were neighbours, and some of their people had common clans and backgrounds.

18.. Cited from the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme's records, May 1995.

19.. Cited from Agritex files, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, May 1995.

20.. *Mutete* was a gift given to a traditional leader as a sign of respect. It was normally given to the Headman or Chief of an area by people who came to ask for permission to settle in the area. Visitors to such leaders were also expected to pay *mutete* as a sign of recognising his authority. *Mutete* could be in the form of cash, a chicken, a goat or anything that had some form of value.

21.. Bratton (1978: 16) says that Chiefs were sometimes branded 'stooges' of colonial authorities by nationalists and their 'followers', especially for blindly accepting externally introduced changes.

22.. During interviews, I noticed that some dryland farmers and a few irrigators referred to the irrigation scheme as '*mudambo*', meaning, 'in the *dambo* or *vlei* area'. This was not merely because part of the irrigation scheme occupied an area that used to be a *vlei* where they grew '*madhumbé*' (a type of vegetable tuber in the potato and yam family), but because the project could be used for crop production in dry seasons.

23.. Some farmers gave accounts of cows being slaughtered every week to supply meat to workers (Chibonda, senior irrigation farmer, 22 November 1993).

24.. There were two main guerilla groups in the liberation war. There were ZIPRA guerilla forces who were based in neighbouring Zambia under (PF) ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo, and ZANLA forces

from Mozambique, under ZANU (PF), led by Robert Mugabe. Nyamaropa is on the border with Mozambique, hence there was regular contact with ZANLA forces.

25.. This was one of the most embarrassing and serious insults that one could get. Normally when women did it they meant to embarrass the target of the action in a demeaning manner, and a stigma stuck on the victim for quite some time.

26.. 'Displacement' may not be such a suitable term to use with reference to all Barwe villagers living in the designated irrigation scheme area. Some of them left on their own, that is, they chose to live when intervention came because they did not want to live with rules and regulations around them. A similar account of groups of people's repulsion to external influences is found among the Maka of Southeast Cameroon (Geschiere, 1982). In anthropological work, where people seem resistant or sceptical of any kinds of changes from outside, this is often referred to as being acephalous (Jan den Ouden, personal communication, 1996).

27.. The way Nyamaropa irrigators organised their Irrigation Management Committee (after some leadership courses) shows that external education may not necessarily solve their organisational problems. A more integrative approach that lets farmers decide what their priority goals are *may* achieve more positive results. An external definition of a problem may not be the same as that of the people affected.

28.. For example, one successful local irrigator (other irrigators referred to him as such), Sakubende (76) said that most of the local inhabitants, the Barwe, used Mheta as their *mutupo* (totem), while the majority of the Manyika immigrants used *Ganda* (skin) and *Dziwa* (pool). Use of similar totems signified a form of relationship.

29.. This was the traditionally sanctioned day on which no one in the area was supposed to work on the land or till it in any way. Some followed the movement or phases of the moon; when it was full, when it was a small 'slice' and when it 'died' (and is not seen for a few days), two days at each phase. The one day a week (Friday in Nyamaropa) was said by the Headman in Nyamaropa to have been the day when 'liberation war fighters rested and cleaned their guns' (Magadiela, 1995; see also Bourdillon, 1987: 70 ff).

30.. It was difficult to give an accurate figure on this because farmers continued to subdivide their plots and re-allocate them to their children, wives, and friends.

31.. It was an acknowledged fact that most people around the country voted on ethnic grounds. This could be seen in the patterns of general election results for 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995, especially comparing Matabeleland Provinces, Mashonaland Provinces and Manicaland Province, and their candidates.

32.. Water Controllers were officially graded as General Hands, but within the irrigation scheme the role of Water Controllers was seen as a form of promotion from the largely menial tasks performed by General Hands.

33.. This was a type of irrigation practice whereby each farmer would have an acre of each crop in each of the blocks per season. Advocates of the system argued that it helped in water distribution, pest and disease control, if a whole block had one crop. To Nyamaropa farmers, this meant a threat of losing one's original plot which they cleared themselves and were familiar with, and the risk of being put in a plot which might not have had good husbandry over the years. Nyamaropa irrigation scheme had four blocks, and some farmers had six acres in different blocks around the irrigation scheme. These farmers, especially the early settlers, were afraid that they would lose two acres in the process. Locals with smaller plots, averaging two acres, supported the idea, and this opened old wounds in the land debate between immigrants and locals.

PART TWO: The Embeddedness of Social and Power Relations in Land and Water Issues

Chapter 3: Contested Domains The interlocking of leadership, land and water issues

Introduction

This is one of the central chapters in this study of Nyamaropa irrigation intervention. Its centrality is in that it deals with the crucial issues in farmers' lives in and around the irrigation scheme. These are land, water, leadership, social relationships and negotiations over cultural or group identity.

The meeting at the Headman's homestead in August of 1994 is the highlight of the discussion in the first part of the chapter. It is the context from which important discussion issues about group identity emerge. It shows how the different groups identify each other, relate to and perceive each other. By its mere composition, this particular meeting reflected the character of social and cultural diversity among groups in the study area.

The second part of the chapter deals with water and leadership wrangles among irrigation farmers. This issue had an ethnic dimension to it, which was itself a controversial matter in Nyamaropa in spite of its being less publicly discussed than, for example, common water shortage problems. Also discussed are issues of strategic action by various social actors involved in different projects in the irrigation arena, mainly Agritex's attempt to remove the sitting IMC from office by forming Block Committees (BCs) (which did exist in other irrigation schemes around the country), and the rivals of some IMC members enrolling Agritex in their attempts to make the IMC look redundant.

The common thread in the chapter is that of different cultural identities of social actors in groups who are sometimes purposefully constructing ways of gaining and/or maintaining access to leadership positions, gaining respect as groups, or projecting a group's chosen identity and interests against those of others at any time. Part of the focus is on how different groups mobilise themselves around the control of water, notably in the form of rain, and the control or strategic use of beliefs that concern what makes rains fall. Accompanying water control, inherent in social and political relations between different actors within the irrigation scheme and outside, is the issue of access to irrigated or arable land. Both water control and access to land are embroiled in what can be seen as some actors' strategic actions aimed at achieving particular stated benefits, which reflect on the concept of leadership as just one of the contested and contentious issues in the area. This contestation of leadership includes competing constructions of cultural identity among the different social groups at the local level, which forms part of the developments that can be better characterised as the Nyamaropa social domain.

Before the description and presentation of the meeting in the first part, I first discuss some relevant issues concerning local perceptions of traditional leadership in the study area in general.

A note on traditional leadership

In the Nyamaropa area, people often referred to leaders in abstract terms; sometimes they tried to avoid being direct and mentioning names. One of the common phrases used in reference to leaders was *watungamiri wedu/ abakhokheli bethu* (our leaders), which could be used to refer to politicians in central government or at the local level. It was sometimes used in references to civil servants such as Agritex staff, or to traditional leaders such as the Chief and the Headman, and other local community leaders such as the Councillor, Church leaders, the political party chairman, or the IMC or BC members.

Sometimes the term *wakuru wedu/ abadala* (our elders) was used more or less in the same manner to refer to elders as local community leaders. This usage put into the 'leadership' circle people such as businessmen, church elders, and respected members of the community without any particular 'public portfolios' in local social or political organisation. These were people who were regarded as relevant consultants in important local decision-making processes.

In Nyamaropa, when dryland villagers and irrigation farmers referred to local forms of social and political organisation they also spoke of *wamiririri wedu/ abameli bethu* (our representatives). The Councillor and Village Development Committee members were their representatives on community development issues, and the Headman and Village Heads led or represented them in traditional matters such as appeasing the spirits and conducting rain ceremonies.

Both drylanders and irrigators in Nyamaropa recognise the authority of Headman Sanyamaropa, but to varying extents because of their often clashing cultural or group interests and identities. Their differential acknowledgement of traditional values or the importance of traditional authority was based either on their origins, ethnic affiliation and 'totemic linkages', or whether one believed in Christian values or not, and how much they were willing to look aside and attend traditional ceremonies, something which irrigators' Churches forbade them to do. Some Christians in Nyamaropa had an almost disdainful attitude towards the traditional institution, especially when the latter tried to enforce what were regarded as traditional values. These relationships, and beliefs, were part of a range of resources used by different actors in their various projects to achieve some of the objectives they set themselves. The strategising element came out more clearly in the way local irrigators, while appearing to be staunch Christians in Churches with a majority of immigrant irrigators, continued to align themselves with the traditional institution when it came to issues that called for the community to have more respect for traditional leaders. The main reason for this fence-sitting attitude could be explained by their stronger local ties, both kinship and cultural, based on partially changing identifications with what was 'local'. This element, one could argue, accounted for the continued diversity of interests and identities among irrigators in general, and especially among leaders in jostling for local political positions of leadership.

The following sections discuss different ways in which different groups of farmers in the area related to different forms of authority or leadership at the local level (as in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and its surrounding dryland area). The context of the discussion is the interconnectedness and complexity of leadership, land, water and social identification in this particular arena, replete with changing constructions of what constituted each of Nyamaropa's social and other multiple realities.

Headman Sanyamaropa

The history of the dynasty of the Sanyamaropa Headmanship was blurred. Old men close to the Headman told me that they served under previous Headmen and knew that the Headman himself was Manyika, not Barwe. The Chief, Sawunyama, said that the Manyika group of Sanyamaropa came from Mozambique much earlier than the Barwe and moved further inside to the South of Nyanga, around Mutasa area, from where the ethnic group split up into several sections under the leadership of some Headmen. He added that Headman Sanyamaropa was sent to the Eastern valley to look after and lead the group of Barwe people who lived in the valley, which they accepted with hardly any significant resistance.

The Headman, Kushora Sanyamaropa¹, was the ninth of successive Headmen in Nyamaropa area. The Chief said that the first person to go into the area was Nyambuna, and the place was initially called after him. The name change came after an outbreak of diarrhoea in the last century that wiped out large numbers of Nyambuna villagers. Local elders in Nyamaropa said that no one knew what the disease was, but the description of bleeding fitted symptoms of diarrhoea or dysentery. After this plague, the area became known as Nyamaropa, meaning a place of killing or a place of death.

The Headman's aides said that there was less contact between the Headman and the Chief than they would expect, and blamed this on the geographic distance between them. This was probably one of the strongest reasons why many outsiders, including Agritex staff in Nyamaropa, referred to the Headman as Chief. He actually played the role of Chief to many people, and was sometimes addressed as such by some of his people. Officially, the District Administrator said that he was a sub-Chief. But the Chief, Sawunyama, denied it and confirmed that Sanyamaropa was a Headman.

Many local dryland farmers often spoke of the Headman's drinking habits. His aides said that there was nothing wrong in that, claiming that everyone did it. But irrigators seemed to be more keen on noticing, even emphasising, that the Headman liked his drink, more than any other group, for political reasons and to denigrate the traditional institution which they regarded as oppressive and retrogressive. Headman Sanyamaropa said that from the 1960s when irrigation farming came into the valley, things started to change in Nyamaropa. Immigrants brought in their new ways of doing things and especially Churches brought in a lot of confusion in people's beliefs, and in how they related to land, water, rain and their leaders. The introduction of the irrigation scheme changed how they identified themselves and with whom or what they identified themselves.

Headman Sanyamaropa said that all farmers should share the water since they lived in the area and were watched over by the same spirits. The Headman tried cases of wrong-doers from his area at his homestead (including irrigators). He said that he played a unifying role and expected all people to respect traditional rites. He believed that if all people in his area observed *chisi* (resting day) and followed the customs of the land as inherited from the past, the rains would start falling just as they did in "the good old days". However, the Headman's views on water and rain sometimes precipitated clashes between his people and local Churches.

The Headman's colleague on the 'water front', Rainmaker Sabadza, said that there were evil winds that stopped rains from falling just before the rainy season started. He

sometimes went across to the hills in Mozambique to perform special rituals to 'close' down the bad winds so that it may rain again, but this was not complemented by people's general behaviour where they wore red clothing and carried umbrellas² during the rainy season and did not observe *chisi*, which were believed to stop the rain from falling. Chief Sawunyama, Headman Sanyamaropa and Rainmaker Sabadza, the prominent traditional and spiritual leaders in the area, argued that contemporary rainmaking ceremonies were conducted by people who were not qualified to perform the rituals. They used to be a sacred preserve of elderly members of the community. Old women who had reached menopause would prepare specially brewed beer from finger millet, and appointed elderly men would talk to the spirits amid offerings of tobacco snuff and the special beer to the spirits; normally they would be drenched wet by heavy rains by the time they reached their homes from the ceremony (Rainmaker Sabadza, pers. commun.). But not today. All this could be a way of sensationalising the past to discredit present religious practices, but it does serve the purpose of getting people to listen to what the traditional leaders have to say.

The Meeting

Agritex, the Headman and IMC relations

Agritex and the traditional institution under Headman Sanyamaropa had been through some rough times in their relations. This was a result of what the former regarded as lack of respect for civil servants in the area, expressed in the Headman's aides issuing summonses or orders to Agritex staff to attend meetings convened by the Headman. In one such incident, irrigation staff refused to go to the meeting which they were *ordered* to attend in July, sparking a row between the two sides, both claiming to represent custodians of the land and the law: government on one hand, and ancestors on the other. Agritex staff said that the Headman must stay clear of irrigation affairs, but agreed that he should lead local people (including irrigators) in strictly traditional occasions like rain-making ceremonies, which would benefit everyone in the area if they worked.

After 1980 there was a policy shift towards a populist stance in government that saw farmers claiming the right to do what they wanted with their plots, saying they had fought for them during the war. This populist³ stance of irrigation management unfortunately partially incapacitated Agritex from acting decisively on, for example, farmers not following cropping programmes and defaulting on maintenance fee payment. In meetings farmers often reminded each other that they fought in the war to get land, and they should not let anyone harass them over it. But Agritex said that since they were in a government-managed project, farmers must adhere to irrigation rules, "which are there to protect the powerless" (Extension Officer Sikume, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, pers. comm.).

The IMC, as a farmers' body, was meant to represent their interests in interactions with Agritex, interveners and other agencies coming into the area. This committee's operations in Nyamaropa presented a particularly interesting case as there was a time when it was said by Agritex, and some farmers opposed to it, to be almost non-existent, save for its chairman who had to keep looking for buyers for irrigation produce, or negotiate with Agritex on issues raised by farmers such as acreage per crop per season. Committee members said that they were no longer interested in

working with the chairman because he was too dictatorial. Some local irrigation farmers said that they did not know what the committee was doing. Agritex said that the committee was non-functional, there was only the chairman who was literally running the show on his own (he had been nicknamed 'King of the Valley' in Agritex circles in Nyamaropa).

Agritex and the IMC seemed to be always in conflict, especially on issues of water management, cropping programmes and adherence to by-laws. There had been accusations and counter-accusations of dictatorship which had gone up to the District Administrator (DA) in Nyanga and to the Member of Parliament for the area, but the interesting part was that they continued to work together amid these conflicts, sharing the commitment that production must go on. Information deriving from case studies and subsequent interviews indicated that most irrigators looked down upon dryland farmers who were not associated with the irrigation scheme in any way, and regarded them as lazy (*nyope/amavila*) and retrogressive.

The setting for the meeting: A collision of domains and a recipe for confrontation?

There was very little water left in the dam supplying the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme at the end of August in 1995, and I thought that farmers were likely to call a meeting to discuss their next move. The drought in the previous three seasons had hit dryland farmers hard, and like irrigators they were seeking to find ways to solve the problem of the shortage of good rains. There were accusations and counter-accusations among different groups of farmers on different issues. Some irrigators blamed dryland farmers who came to rent irrigated plots and wasted water, together with catchment farmers who stole their water. Dryland farmers blamed the drought on irrigators who had defiled and failed to respect traditional mores and norms which were oriented to creating an atmosphere conducive to good rains through religious practices, and who engaged in what they saw as deviant cultural practices.

When I went to Mutare town to write out my notes for July, I asked Extension Worker Sithole to notify me if a meeting came up in the few days before I went back. The following day he radioed and told me that there was going to be a meeting the following Friday (the normal day for meetings in the area since it is their traditional resting day), not directly about water in the irrigation scheme, but at the Headman's homestead and about water in the form of rains not falling as they used to in the good old days. I made sure that I would be there, but I had no idea what kind of meeting it was. Any meeting at this stage would certainly be worth attending. I travelled on Thursday afternoon so that I would get a good idea of the situation a day before the meeting.

The Extension Worker had told me that Headman Sanyamaropa had called the meeting and had summoned all heads of Church denominations and all Village Heads in the area. He had also summoned Agritex, but not directly, only through the Agricultural Extension Officer Sikume, who happened to be the leader of the ZAOGA Church in the area. The agenda was said by Agritex and some farmers to be to talk to all leaders about the loss of traditional values and ethical codes as a result of the invasion of local tradition by foreign ways of life. Several weeks before that, the Headman's secretary had called up all businessmen in the area and discussed the issue

of raising funds to build a hall at the Headman's, in which he would hold meetings and try civil cases.

Initially, all residents of the Headman's area were supposed to pay \$2 each towards the project, but this changed for business-people who were then asked to pay \$50 instead, or a bag of grain (maize) which cost Z\$80 at that time. Sithole told me that the Headman's main secretary, a young man aged 25 years, came to the Agritex offices a week earlier and started accusing Agritex staff of deliberately ignoring the traditional authority under which they worked. The Agricultural Extension Supervisor, Runganga, told the young man that he (Runganga) was of the same royal totem (*mheta*) as the Headman and could not be pushed around because he was also royalty. The young man was said to have been softened by that, and never bothered them again. Extension staff actually did respect traditional leadership in the area, but individuals varied.

This meeting had the potential to become a heated encounter between social actors from the two main domains, the one of irrigation farming and Churches in Nyamaropa, and the other of the traditional institution headed by Headman Sanyamaropa. I use the term 'domain' here rather than 'field' because it stresses common normative or value frames, or an institutionalised area. A 'field' is more open, with relationships not organised so cohesively. For example, within the irrigation domain, there were relationships between the Church and irrigators. Most irrigation farmers who attended Churches openly and ridiculed traditional religion: hence the specific way in which the Headman, in summoning them to the meeting, mentioned that irrigators (Christians) had some explaining to do about the breaking down of traditional norms. There were relationships between local dryland farmers and the Headman. These were based on cultural identity and on partly identifying with the common situation of being dryland farmers; these made them treat each other as of the same group even though significant numbers of the same dryland farmers attended Church meetings in the irrigation scheme.

This background to the impending meeting is intended to show the potential for clashing of the two groups of farmers, the two domains of irrigated farming and dryland cultivation, and the two domains of Christianity and local traditional beliefs. This coming into contact of the two domains, in what one can term the religious arena of water relations, was about to heat up all the relations between different groups of people in Nyamaropa.

The day of the meeting

On the Friday morning of the 5th of August (1994) I went to the Agritex office to meet Extension Worker Sithole for our arrangement to go to the Headman's meeting. The meeting was scheduled for nine in the morning, and we were not going to be late. I thought we would walk the two kilometres to the place, but Sithole insisted that if we walked we risked being thrown out since we were both not invited, so we drove slowly towards the place in the white Suzuki jeep with 'ZIMWESI' and 'University of Zimbabwe' printed visibly on its sides. He said that we would give the meeting an air of dignity and importance, which the Headman needed. He (Sithole) had a bad bout of flu, I understood why he did not cherish the idea of walking in the cold. He told me that some of the people in that part of Nyamaropa were quite sceptical of cars, that they might think that we were policemen out to arrest some of them for brewing

kachasu (an illegal brew made up of a variety of ingredients and highly intoxicating), but I hoped we were not going to disrupt the meeting by our rather conspicuous arrival and presence. When we got there, some people were already seated but the meeting had not started. It got under way as soon as we got there.

The meeting was meant for community leaders: Village Heads and Church leaders in the area. Most Village Heads and Church leaders came from the irrigation scheme, but there were no Church leaders from dryland areas around because there were said to be fewer Christians outside the irrigation scheme, and they all went to Church in the irrigation scheme anyway, led by irrigators, except for those who went to the missionaries at Regina Coeli 5 km away. There were 19 Churches around the Nyamaropa area, but the most active and popular were the Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Apostolic Faith Mission, ZAOGA, and Johane Marange. The IMC chairman had been invited but was not present at the meeting.

The secretary, Alois, who was chairing the meeting, seemed confident of himself and his role among the grey haired advisors of the Headman, and the mostly elderly Church leaders. He was wearing a white dust coat, like a lab technician or a medical doctor, and sported a fancy 'youthful' haircut (the 'box cut'). I had met him before and he had expressed his displeasure at the way irrigators did not respect the Headman. As a young dryland farmer himself, he was looking forward to getting an irrigated plot one day.

The Extension Worker told me that he was the chief spokesman of the Headman, and was chosen by some of the elders and the Headman because he was better educated than most of them, and could interpret and explain the law and written documents for the Headman. I thought that it was rather inappropriate to have a person of his age (mid-twenties) presiding over such a meeting. The Headman then came and sat down after everyone else was seated. We all clapped our hands rhythmically in the respectful traditional way of greeting someone of his status, with a chorus of greetings from the group of participants, and the meeting got under way.

At first Alois outlined a few points about the law, and then asked probing questions directed at Village Heads and at each Church leader. He asked each one of them to tell the *dare/ idale* (court) what they thought the Headman's institution was all about. The common answer was that it was for trying cases of wrong-doers in Nyamaropa and punishing them according to the traditional laws of the land. There was grumbling from the audience, and from that, one could tell that some elders were disturbed by the direct questioning (classroom-type) by Alois - or was it just my own sensitivity to what one ought to say to elders? Then it was my turn to face his direct questioning. He looked at me, seated next to the Extension Worker, and said: "Before we proceed with this meeting, is there anyone here who is either a lawyer, a barrister, or someone in the law profession? If there is, may they stand up and leave now before we proceed, because this is a closed meeting, we do not want people getting the wrong idea about how we do things here"⁴.

All along we had not been introduced. I asked Sithole, who as one of the Extension Workers was quite well known to them, to have us introduced, and he put up his hand, was asked to say what he had, and he gave the introductions and clarified our purpose as observers and listeners. I had met the Headman and his aides before, but it seemed we had to explain the purpose of our visit then, which was a tactical move to show them that there was no favoured guest and the Headman did not just let people

into his meetings without knowing who they were. At the same time he asked for permission on my behalf to take notes, which I was granted, but not for free: he was immediately asked by Alois to take minutes of the meeting (probably because he seemed eager to write, but more because he *could* write fast!).

On crimes: 'thou hast defiled my land'.

Alois asked the elders why traditional rites in the area had been ignored, why they had blasphemed against tradition in the area. Each question was directed at one member of the audience at a time whom he picked out by pointing at them with his pen, and they came in succession:

"Why have you tampered with traditional monuments and sacred places? Why are there no longer any traditional laws that help us take care of our customs? Why is it that you Village Heads allow people to exhume dead bodies for reburial elsewhere? Don't you know that that is a crime? Why is it that people now stay with "foreigners" and Whites in our area without notifying the Headman about it? Do you know that these people do not have the same respect that we have for our tradition or our sacred places? They climb mountains and roam around into sacred places without being warned to stay away? You should always notify the Headman about all this. These things have ruined us, and it will not rain well until they are taken care of, and we have to work together to do that" (Alois, 5th August 1994).

Then he touched on business issues: "There should be no form of money-making business that starts without the knowledge of the Headman. Why is it that you Village Heads now just agree to everything that anyone from outside says? There is only one good example though, when Red Star Wholesalers came into the area they invited the Headman for the official opening of their business, which is a very commendable thing to see" (Alois, 5th August 1994).

At this stage Alois read out crimes that he said Village Heads had committed in the area. They all had something to do with the fact that traditional norms had broken down, and Village Heads had done nothing to keep them. He asked the participants to split into two groups of Village Heads and Church leaders to discuss topics he was giving them. Church leaders were asked to discuss among themselves what they thought should be done about some Churches which did not respect the ways of life of the local people they found there, with reference to the fact that they prayed anywhere and everywhere, disturbing local spirits residing in those places. During the discussion I joined one of the two groups, that of the Village Heads, and, Sithole joined the Church leaders' discussion group.

Before they split into two groups, one of the Village Heads⁵ said that they were surprised that the Headman was blaming them⁶ as if they were responsible for changes that came up with independence. He said, "But why are we taking the blame for something we never had a hand in? Why is our leader coming back to us as if we caused all this? Are we not victims just like him?". He was most likely referring to the way government put up Village Development Committees (VIDCOS), Ward Development Committees (WADCOS) and Councillors with almost parallel roles to those of traditional leaders. The chairman then strongly warned the Village Head not to give wrong ideas to others, but to express his views in his discussion group. One of the

Village Heads interjected and said that the Headman and Village Heads had been kicked out, but now they were being asked to come back and be actively involved in local development affairs. He said:

"Why do you want to split us anyway, we are all in the same situation and maybe we have the same story".

"You will talk about that in your group", came the reply from Alois.

Group discussions

After the chairman had given his express instructions, two groups were formed. There were more Village Heads (fourteen) than Church leaders (nine). Village Heads said that they knew of crimes such as people digging up two graves for the same person. They said that the person who does that must be made to pay for the other one. 'What crimes does the Headman think we have committed? Why does he not just go ahead and charge us with the crimes and we will pay for them? The whole point may be that he just wants us to gather here and be told that we have to do this and that. Government wants to reinstate powers of traditional leaders. Maybe he wants us to pay him some money, but why can't he come out clearly? What does he want us to do?'

On Churches, Village Heads asked each other what the law of the land said, and settled for the fact that if Christians built their worshipping houses there would be no problem, and if they did not go about praying everywhere, then there would be no complaints from the Headman. One of them said, "those who pray everywhere are the criminals that must be dealt with, especially the new Churches'. We have to realise that there are both drylanders and irrigators in these Churches, although there are more irrigators than drylanders... What is our role as traditional leaders in marriages that take place in our areas? We have to re-establish that" (elder Samunda).

Alois came over to our group, came straight to me and shook my hand. Then he asked me how I saw the whole situation. I told him everything seemed alright, and that I was enjoying the discussions. Then he stood there listening to what was being said (we were all seated). After a few more minutes he called back the groups for feedback and combined discussions.

Some of the oldest men in the dryland area, who were advisors to the Headman, were asked by the chairman if they had something to say to the *dare* (court). They said that they were all ears and wanted to know what Village Heads and Church leaders had to recommend in the form of corrective measures, and they would come in when things were not being done the right way: "We are all ears, we are here to advise, if we see you going wrong, we will tell you" (elder Chishiri, related to Alois).

Just when everyone was getting ready to start the main discussions on what the chairman had prescribed for group discussions, the Headman's son, commonly regarded as the heir to the position, stood up and addressed the gathering. I thought for a minute that this is a way of disturbing the proceedings, he is taking over the initiative from the young secretary of the Headman. Alois did not challenge him. He just kept quiet and listened along with all of us. He obviously understood what was going on. The heir apparent said that he was aware that Village Heads should be taking care of traditional ceremonies like rain making, and added that Christians should play their part for community benefit and development.

He went on to talk about what he thought were the main issues for the meeting: (a) that rain ceremonies should be conducted the old traditional way, (b) that those who cannot participate in them should pay \$10 each to their Village Heads towards the holding of ceremonies: he pointed out that this was meant specifically for Christians, and that was why they were invited in the first place. He stressed that no one was necessarily forced to pay, especially Christians who might find such ceremonies offensive to their beliefs, but added that they all wanted rains, but could not force people. He seemed to have taken over the flow of the proceedings. Basically, he did not say anything new or different from what the younger man, Alois, had said. He was reiterating, and emphasising the main points of the meeting. This was probably a way of showing everyone present that he had a say in the meeting too, making his presence felt.

I thought that since he was the heir apparent, maybe he had the right to interrupt or take over the chairing of the meeting, but he did not, instead after what later seemed to have been cutting a long story short, he took his seat between the Headman and the elderly aides of the Headman, and let the chairman proceed with the meeting. One of the Village Heads later told me that it was appropriate for the Headman's son to say something in such a meeting so that his position on issues under discussion was known.

Joint discussions

After the Headman's son's address, or rather summary of issues at stake, the two groups were asked to give their views for discussion. Village Heads were the first, and they said:

"As Village Heads we are aware of most of our people's problems, and of the fact that the Headman called us here to talk about these issues, it is good that we are all here including Church leaders, so let us arrive at some form of understanding on what steps to take to redress the wrongs in our land".

Church leaders were next to speak. Their representative or spokesman was the leader of the Anglican Church in Nyamaropa who used to be an immigrant irrigator but moved out during the war and never rejoined the irrigation scheme (he became one of the almost permanent lessees). He said:

"We did not come here to destroy anything or to do any wrong, we are aware of problems outlined so far concerning our area, and we will not stand in the way of anyone who is doing something to help us all get rains. When the time for rain ceremonies arrives, we will do all we are supposed to do for everything to go well for us all. We are in the Headman's land, and we know that we just have to follow the laws of the land, we are glad that we are allowed to pray in peace. At least you did not say that those who do not want to follow your rules should pack and go (followed by bursts of laughter from others), there is no problem or complaint from us about what the Headman said, and we appreciate the fact that we were called here to talk about these issues together. The Headman is Headman by virtue of the fact that he has people to lead, and we are part of those people, we are all Sanyamaropa's people, and we will not cross the laws of the land. We found Sanyamaropa here with his people when most of us came to start irrigating, we are *wawwya* (immigrants),

and *wawuya* are generally good to those they find at a place since they want their acceptance. *Wawuya* want a place to stay, and they always do things right in order to secure their new place of residence. There are many people who are now praying, who are Church members, especially *mudambo* (in the irrigation scheme) and they have to know how things are done around this area. It is a very good thing that we have met here today to go over some of the troubling issues in our area. Sometimes people make things tough for Village Heads, for example, why do some people not observe *chisi*? Admittedly, Churches do some things differently, and assist in different ways. If we resolve things in this meeting, let us all try to stick to them, if we agree on certain days for *chisi* for example, we have to stick to that. It is good to talk about these things and strike an agreement. The laws that have been discussed here are clear, and most of us are familiar with them".

At this point I thought: how does one reconcile traditional norms and Christian beliefs? There was almost an air of apologising in the speaker's voice, and most people in the audience seemed to agree with him.

Some of the participants in the discussions expressed concern about how people in the area generally did not follow traditional rules any more. One of the Village Heads said that some people who preached about the need to observe *chisi* did not observe it themselves, and asked how others could respect the day with such examples. He said, "Children are our common problem, we do not teach them to do the right things, and when things go wrong we start pointing fingers. People now sleep around in bushes and this brings curses to our land. Let us work together to solve common problems".

There were exchanges among the different members of the audience until the Headman himself spoke directly for the first time, the place suddenly went very quiet, and he said,

"*We are all the same here.* I am always ill these days and I do not get to do things the way I want to. Irrigators say they have water and are in business, and that they cannot just take a day off to acknowledge ancestral guidance, but they should respect the laws of the land in which they live. The way some of these irrigators have been doing things here is disappointing, I remember at one time someone died, the drum was beaten, and some people who heard it responded, but some irrigators who were in their fields just continued working as if they had not heard anything. People are supposed to respect the sound of death (from the drum), when rains stop coming, everyone suffers, but *the whole thing is spoilt by a few.* Where are they going to get the water to irrigate if the rains do not come as a result of their mischief? Village Heads should have policemen to arrest such criminals".

One of the Church leaders, Nyakatawa, head of the Methodist Church in Nyamaropa, and an immigrant irrigator himself, urged everyone to do things right, and then asked, "... but what does one do when one gets water on *chisi*?". The Headman answered and said that if one gets water on *chisi* they should go ahead and irrigate, but they should not touch the plough or hoe, they should not work in such a way that they scratch the

land. But the problem with this condition in the irrigation scheme was that some plots were not well levelled and farmers needed to use hoes or shovels to guide water to the end of the field, which apparently was against the rules under discussion there. The Headman then said,

"When I start arresting people you are going to say that I hate them, but I will do that if people go on like this. Village Heads should be more vigilant, or else I will arrest them too (laughter), if your people mess up, you are responsible for it because they are your children. I have the powers to arrest and/or punish you, and you know it. Some of you do not come to the Headman's meetings, you say you have a lot of work to do, all of you should respect the laws of the land".

The previous speaker, an irrigator and Church leader responded and said:

"Churches are not banned here, we are free to do what we want, we give to and worship God in different ways, we realise that there are a lot of Churches right now which are doing different things, some are overdoing things, some of them are going to pray in traditional sacred places, such as on mountains and rivers, old graveyards and *maguta* (special places for spirit mediums), disturbing spirits who reside there, it is unfortunate...".

He seemed to be putting the blame on some new Churches without buildings to which their members went for Church services, and not his Church which had a building near the business centre. This was one main distinction among the different Churches in Nyamaropa. The Headman responded by saying:

"Yes, some of you go and pray in rivers and on mountains, and you chase our spirits away, they go and live on trees, the big ones you see around here, but you come again and cut down the tree, where do you think the spirit goes after that? It has nowhere to stay, and you will not have rains when you have unhappy spirits".

Nyabasa, one of the Village Heads, then said:

"What we ask for from the Headman is that the laws be stated clearly, be spelt out succinctly for us all to know and keep, such as *chisi*, what is in *chisi*? Why on Fridays?"

As part of the traditional institution himself, this village leader was expected to know what *chisi* was all about since he was involved in enforcing it. He did know apparently, but wanted to discuss it with others in a way to get them to understand each other's views on the issue.

The Headman then told them how, during the war, freedom fighters kept Friday as their sacred day during which they would repair and clean their guns. He explained that the day was said by tradition to be linked to the death of the well known Shona Chief, Chaminuka, who was said to have been killed by a group of Ndebele warriors who raided his territory in the nineteenth century. Friday was the day Chaminuka was said to have been killed, and that was why it was a 'traditional holiday'.

Surprisingly, people in different areas around the country observe *chisi* on different days of the week, which made *chisi* more of a local contextual and cultural construction than a general cultural activity cutting across geographically separate communities. Just when the Headman finished his explanation, one of his elderly

advisors stood up and addressed the gathering, touching on issues of cultural identity and change brought about by the introduction of the irrigation scheme.

"I was born across there in Mozambique in 1914 (pointing towards the Mozambican hills across the river), I have seen this place change, my family came from Mozambique, there were no restrictions on movements. People were united, and they respected their traditional ways, they brewed beer and brought it to the Headman to conduct ceremonies at the end of each traditional month (when the moon goes down, or dies), we would go to school through the scheme (now Block D), and it was very wet, we would go up to the waist in the water, that was in the dambo section. Water was coming from below, even inside huts people would have water coming out from below. There was a school where the irrigation shade now stands, and a White man used to come from up there in Nyanga on horseback to teach us there. The irrigation scheme and irrigators came here and things started to change, they did not respect *chisi*. Six days were supposed to be observed each month, now you only observe Fridays, where is the rain? Hhmm, tell me, where is the rain today? Look at what is happening to the land, Councillors are taking over powers that are not theirs. For example, who said that they should deal with cases of adultery or theft in the area? What do they know about rain-making ceremonies? Why then are they coming back to the Headman about rain problems? When it stops raining, they are not the ones with all the knowledge and all the answers for our problems, are they?"

This was a hard-hitting address, with reference to history and the so-called good old days when water was in abundance, and then reference to the negative changes that were associated with the irrigation project and external development intervention in general. The Headman concurred, saying that all government departments should work together, and pointed out that this was not the case. "How do you come to give someone a stand or piece of land for a garden without the Headman's knowledge and approval?", he asked, directing the question at Village Heads? "What is the role of the Councillor?". Some of the elders said that it was only political because he worked for and was elected on a political party ticket, some thought that he was there for developmental issues since he co-ordinated his work with his juniors, the VIDCO and WADCO members.

One of the elders from the Headman's court took up the issue of 'indiscriminate prayers', and said that people continue to pray all over the place as if they owned the land. The Headman said that those who prayed in traditional sacred places such as mountains and rivers chased away spirits which then lost their places of residence, and could not function well, adding:

"We want our spirits, but now they are gone, where do we find them? They are angry with us for not respecting the land. How then do we get gifts such as rains when we have lost touch with our guardians? It is a crime to evict spirits from their homes".

One of the Church elders responded, sounding upset and frustrated, but still defending his religious beliefs and his values, his cultural identity, and said:

"Maybe you should confront the particular Church that does or did that and correct them, because some of us have special places in the form of Church buildings where we pray. Some Churches have the Holy Spirit which gets into people when they are praying, this clashes with and evicts traditional spirits when they hold their prayers outside or in the bush".

A member of one of the implicitly 'accused' Churches, called Revelation, one of the new Pentecostal Churches in the area⁶, probably feeling the heat of the exchanges, cited cases of places where they went to pray and was at pains to show that they would not be aware that such places would be sacred, saying that sometimes they asked their Village Head, but that was not common. Another Church member stood up and clarified that they did not fight traditional spirits as such, that they just wanted to pray in areas where they did not make noise *for other people*, meaning, that is, for living beings, and not spirits of the dead. This Church, Revelation, was said by some older Church members from the Anglican Church in Nyamaropa to be too liberal in allowing its members to take alcohol and smoke tobacco. Extension Worker Sithole told me that it was becoming popular among irrigators.

The Headman stressed that Village Heads had a task to do, to make sure that in their respective areas there were no preventable crimes such as had been mentioned earlier. He said:

"As Village Heads you should lead the people, tell them not to cut down trees, even government does not allow that, you should arrest them, there are spirits which stay up those trees, especially the big trees, you should make sure that they are not touched. We should all work together to preserve the land for posterity".

The chairman, Alois, then summarised some of the aspects of the discussions and what Village Heads and church leaders were supposed to do:

"... you should keep *chisi*, have police to enforce the law of the land, have properly designated places for prayers, not to pray anywhere and everywhere, keep sacred places sacred, observe rain ceremonies, provide 15 litres of *njera/ imithombo* (one of the ingredients for brewing traditional beer) for beer for ceremonies - Christians have to pay Z\$10 towards ceremonies if they do not attend. We must prepare for ceremonies in August and September, no one should be seen putting on red clothing during the rainy season. There should be ceremonies to ask for rains and to give thanks after harvests".

The Headman was putting on a red hat, and he said then that no one was going to see it on his head as soon as the traditional hour for the rainy season struck. Normally this was in October when the first rains were expected to fall, and people were expected to start observing sacred days and sticking to other related practices such as dress codes and not carrying umbrellas (the idea was that carrying an umbrella to protect oneself from getting wet in the rain meant that one did not like the rain and wished it away!).

At this point, some of the elders were getting impatient with their colleagues for extending the discussions, and kept interjecting saying that they had grasped the point. The chairman continued his summary,

"... do not bury human bodies twice, and do not dig two graves for the same person because if you do so the other grave will claim one of you to fill it up, 'the grave will eat one of you'. Village Heads should arrest people who work when

drums are beaten to announce someone's death. There should be female police to arrest women who bathe in rivers too".

The summary ended, to the relief of some elders, and the meeting moved on to the next issue, that of the changing image of the Headman in the impressions of the different cultural groups in Nyamaropa. The Headman was not regarded as a highly respected person among some irrigators, and this showed in the way they would organise some activities and not invite him, at least in his capacity as a local leader, to attend.

The changing image of the Headman

The VIDCO chairman for Sanyamaropa village, Masunungure, who was also one of the principal aides of the Headman, stood up and addressed the gathering with an air of authority and dignity. He seemed to have more control over his audience than previous speakers, the gathering went dead quiet (they had been talking among themselves while the younger chairman was summarising the issues discussed). After customarily asking elders for permission to speak to them, he said:

"...there are new rules which each one of you here in this land should stick to and respect, it does not matter whether you are in the irrigation scheme or not, a Church member or not, from now on, no one is allowed to shake hands with the Headman if he visits you, you must respect him, and make him very comfortable, give him his rightful place and all due respect, place him separate from the rest of the people. He should not mix with all and sundry, he is a very important person, I hope that is clear to you all".

Most of them agreed that it was clear. There was a buzz of noise with comments among people in the audience, probably on the issue at hand. My first impression was that this was probably a way to try and stave off the threat of having the Headman bewitched by his rivals who did not want him to be officially installed as the ninth Headman Sanyamaropa. Shaking hands was sometimes believed to be risky if the other person's hand was treated with medicinal powers to weaken the other. In another way, it was a construction of the identity and status of the Headman, meant to (re)elevate him, to give more mystery and maybe add dignity to the traditional institution, to his leadership and authority, especially in the face of the onslaught from immigrant irrigation farmers and other outsiders who had gradually eroded those qualities of the Headmanship in the area. Dryland farmers' leaders (such as the last speaker), saw this opportunity to elevate the status of the Headman as closely linked to their own status as dryland villagers identifying themselves, and identified by outsiders, with the Headman. This was a battle of territorial advantage at the symbolic, yet highly politicised level of traditional leadership.

Dilemmas of irrigators and chisi

When everyone seemed to agree, a new discussion started, this time concerning irrigators. There was a heated exchange on the issue of when and how irrigators should observe *chisi*. There were variations in seasonal activities between irrigators

and dryland farmers such that it became difficult for the two groups of farmers to agree on when to keep which days sacred. For drylanders, real *chisi* started in October when the rains came, but irrigators felt that they should be exempted from *chisi* because their activities needed all the time they could get. The argument posed by irrigators was that they were in an active business environment, that there was no need for them to observe *chisi* because the other farming seasons in the irrigation scheme were not rainy seasons in the whole Nyamaropa area. Dryland farmers said that the fact that irrigators grew crops throughout the year meant that they must observe *chisi* throughout the year. Village Head Gondokondo, an immigrant but dryland farmer, said,

"Why don't we do it all together at the same time, why should we have seasonal variations when we are in the same area under the same traditional authority, under the same Chief and the same Headman? These are some of the divisions that make us lose out on marks and respect with *our ancestors*. *Chisi* is about avoiding working the land, up-turning or tilling the soil. We are all under Headman Sanyamaropa and should respect the laws of the land as one group of people".

This was a rather interesting position coming from an immigrant dryland farmer. He identified more with local drylanders and seemed to have adopted local cultural patterns of dealing with change, or of regarding outsiders. He actually used the term *our ancestors*. Common belief in the area was that immigrants left their real ancestors where they came from, but others argued that they held ceremonies where they carried the spirits with them, in some symbolic form or through animals, to relocate them where they were resettled. In this particular case the farmer meant that they, as dryland farmers irrespective of their local/immigrant status, had the same position on irrigators' behaviour, based on their (drylanders') common identity of non-formal irrigators at least.

Church leaders who were irrigators argued that the situation of irrigators was different because they had to achieve certain acceptable levels of production, and to do that they must always be in their plots working. The Headman stressed that irrigators should respect Friday as a non-working day:

"They are only allowed to irrigate and nothing else. When the rainy season starts they should join drylanders in observing the stated number of *chisi* days each month, I hope we understand each other there".

Irrigators nodded and mumbled their consent and seemed satisfied with that final settlement. The meeting ended after eleven, and participants dispersed in groups into different directions, talking about issues that had been raised during the meeting. On our way back to the Agritex office we talked to two Village Heads who said that irrigation and traditional laws of the land were not congruent, adding that at least this was a positive move, in that the Headman was taking the initiative to discuss some of the thorny issues in the area which irrigators would normally ignore.

Later, I learnt that some irrigators had gone against the recommendations agreed upon during the meeting, and worked on *chisi* in their fields as they had repeatedly done before. Some of them got away with it and did not get caught; the few of them who were caught were fined a goat each and Z\$50 (about US\$5 in 1996 exchange rates). During the 1995/1996 rainy season, there was intensified enforcement of

traditional rules on *chisi* by the Headman and his 'policemen' which led to the few arrests mentioned. This was followed by relatively good rains for the season, resulting in good harvests in both the irrigation scheme and its surroundings. Supporters of the Headman and advocates of traditional values attributed that positive development to the strict observance of traditional rules on *chisi* enforced by the Headman. Agritex staff and some immigrant irrigators said that the rains had nothing to do with the Headman and his Rainmaker, but conceded that it would make them enforce their beliefs with more vigour in future, having been made to think that people believed in their powers to help provide rain. What became evident from the ensuing actions of irrigators and traditional leadership was that *chisi* was just one method used by the latter to impose its authority over the rest of the Nyamaropa community.

Some critical issues for discussion

What emerges from the social scene in Nyamaropa is a complex web of constructed relationships, strategies, and contested views of how people living under Headman Sanyamaropa should conduct themselves and the various businesses of their lives, including farming. There were several groups of actors with different cultural identities and reference points involved in the fray, from traditional leaders of the Headman and Village Heads, drylanders (part-time irrigators too) and formal irrigators, to the hazy dichotomy of Christians and non-Christians among irrigators and dryland farmers in the study area. There was no single clear-cut category of farmers, but groups of actors struggling to pursue their various interests using different resources at their disposal. The two broad and general categories I was helped to construct, that is, of locals and immigrants (linked to traditional authority and the Church respectively, but not solidly), were intended for easier analysis. The social categories, although fluid, helped in analysing the different social constructions of the interactions in the lifeworlds and identities of drylanders and irrigators. Attached to the fluid categories were issues such as ethnic affiliation, in this case Barwe and Manyika, themselves non-exclusive categories, which, however, did not confine any one to a particular group or category permanently.

From the previous discussion one can see how the different sides dealt with each other, and tried to establish themselves in relation to or above others. Several points come to the fore from the meeting: first, the Headman and his followers called a meeting to talk about what they regarded as common problems in the area, and most of those 'summoned' to the Headman's court attended, a sign that some irrigators still had some respect for the traditional institution; second, dryland farmers, and local people in general, blamed outsiders, such as immigrant irrigators and their social and economic practices, for some of the ills in the area, including inadequate rainfall; third, irrigators and dryland farmers could openly discuss and attempt to resolve some of their differences ('agreement' on *chisi*, although it might still be regarded as an implicit imposition by the Headman). Whether this was temporary or permanent was something else. The last point is that the way the different parties related to each other centred on struggles over cultural identity and legitimation of leadership or authority. In this particular case the political game was being played on the Headman's homeground as it were, and he was generally (literally) laying down the rules of the game in which he participated and competed as one of the key players too. He was

cheered on by the group of local dryland supporters and Village Heads, and the present Church leaders seemed to yield to the pressure to be submissive, to be dominated for a while.

Although discussions in the meeting were sometimes about the irrigation scheme and irrigators, they did not directly involve Agritex. They were centred on the establishment or re-establishment of the powers and authority of the Headman and traditional institutions in the area. Sometimes the meeting would almost deteriorate into a witch-hunt for the source of problems. Outsiders, including irrigators, took most of the blame. The lack of direct mention or reference to Agritex or other intervening government departments could be seen as a deliberate attempt to avoid confrontation with government, although there was already some disagreement over loss of powers at the local level by the traditional institution to elected representative bodies such as the Village Development Committees (VIDCOs). The contest was about both leadership and authority. Different parties wanted to play leading roles in local affairs through their groups. The groups were sources of legitimation for different claims to authority.

There seemed to be a critical aspect to the concepts of belief and practices which played on the issue of identity and underlay discussions between the two sides in the meeting. The Headman's side believed that the spread of foreign, in this case Christian, values, had progressively eroded the foundations of the traditional belief systems of the local people. The claim was that this had been through the practice of holding prayers in traditional sacred places, thereby directly challenging and finally removing ancestral spirits from their resting places, which subsequently weakened their effect. Christians had pleaded innocent to the alleged crimes, saying that all they wanted was to be free to pray and carry on with their irrigation business. For most drylanders, all irrigators were potentially the same. They shared common ground, the irrigation scheme and its resources, which was believed to be the critical factor in distinguishing them from dryland villagers.

In the perceptions of dryland villagers, irrigators represented one of the clear examples of developments that had weakened traditional institutions, but they had to adapt to some changes as the need arose, which put them in a compromising position (and transitional stage) where they could not afford to be passive or insensitive to what was going on around them. The questions that this debate led to included why were so many dryland villagers involved in part-time irrigation when they seemed to dislike irrigators so much? In fact, dryland villagers seemed rather to be jealous of irrigators for their irrigated plots than to hate them, hence the various attempts to regulate their irrigation lives and practices in a situation where they were trying to distance themselves even from the official managing agency's grasp of their farming lives.

The basis of their cultural identities came out in the discussions. Although relationships were created and shaped by many other factors in farmers' lives, to a large extent they were embedded in land, water, identity and leadership issues. The spiritual realm was carefully exploited by both sides, legitimised by their value systems to serve their livelihood systems. This, however, should not be seen as a dichotomisation of value systems in the area, but an outcome of the temporary and 'processual' way in which people devised ways to deal with particular problems in their lives. In each irrigation farmer's life, for example, could be found more than one value system or form of cultural identification, especially among local irrigators, who sympathised with the

traditional institutions while being members of Churches led mostly by the immigrant irrigators who were accused of destroying local traditions.

On the leadership issue, irrigators were attacked for not observing traditional rules, but they could not defend themselves directly, only as Church leaders. The influential IMC chairman and other members were not invited to the meeting. The agenda was more on spiritual than other aspects of water and rain, a topic which put the traditional institution and dryland farmers in a much stronger position than the other group. For most locals, the land was theirs and they related to the spirits much more closely than the other group ever could, with its detached spiritual past, remoulded around a new cultural and Christian identity, and with the change from traditional to Christian beliefs and values.

A major part of the meeting seemed to be to re-establish the important status of traditional leadership in the area, to revive it among irrigators, and if possible, to impose it on them by putting in place rules to which they were obliged to adhere by virtue of their residence in the area. It seemed like an attempt to force irrigators to take up a new, more localised identity, which they had in so many ways denigrated and despised. There was no reference to social class as such, nor was there any direct link to party politics. Rather the basis of the whole argument on the Headman's side was the re-establishment or reinforcement of the role of the Headman in local affairs, in the context of the threat to his legitimacy posed by Churches and the general spread of Christian values, which tended to gradually over-shadow traditional structures. There were political, ethnic, religious and generally cultural issues at stake, and at the top of that was the sensitive and contentious issue of identity. Local leaders wanted to re-establish the kind of respect that they used to command, which was becoming increasingly difficult with the changes that came with irrigation development, especially as more of them were getting increasingly attached to it as a means of securing their livelihoods.

Behind the exchanges was the implicit but strong feeling of the loss of land by locals to immigrants. This was reflected in the stern measures imposed on irrigators about *chisi*, for example, a factor which, from irrigators' point of view, had little relevance to non-irrigators, but could be a devastating blow to the productivity of full-time irrigators, who needed all the time they could get to do their work throughout the year. This may sound far-fetched, but from the way traditional leaders spoke about their problems, the issue of land, together with that of water, was central to their concerns. The irrigators' alien identity, an identity that they fostered because they derived some benefits from it by being less attached to traditional rules, and therefore able to argue 'irrigation is business', placed them on the opposite side from most locals. It might have been logical for the local Barwe to refer to the immigrant Manyika as 'newcomers', but this did not mean that both sides had strict categories from which their members could not easily escape. There were shifts in people's beliefs, and new constructions of cultural identities, a problem for the leadership that could probably explain why the Headman convened the meeting as he did.

Local dryland farmers and Headman Sanyamaropa

The original Nyamaropa dryland villagers identified more with Sanyamaropa's headship than did immigrant settlers. The former regarded him as their leader in most

dealings with outsiders during the colonial period, and followed him in staying outside the irrigation project when it came into their area. After independence, they witnessed the weakening of the role of their leaders, including Village Heads, when new local government structures were introduced in the form of elected representatives at village and ward levels. They said that it was a new development which some of them were enthusiastic about, and they welcomed it with the hope that they were going to get development projects into their area through the new structures.

Close aides of the Headman and some of the Village Heads said that traditional powers in Nyamaropa had already been eroded by the introduction of the irrigation scheme; Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) only made the situation worse and pushed the old structures further to the sidelines of changes in their own areas.

The concern among dryland farmers who identified with the Headman was that their leaders were not taken seriously any more, especially by most of the irrigators, and that was what had caused general moral and cultural decay in Nyamaropa. This was a social set-up wherein several moral codes co-existed, with a variety of values which institutions wanted to impose, or which they wanted to prevail and be dominant over others. This strategy could not resolve the whole issue of diversity or difference among the different actors in Nyamaropa, which meant that conflict was bound to be there most of the time. Some local irrigators and most dryland villagers contended that everyone in Nyamaropa should recognise and show respect to the Headman, because they agreed to do so when they came into the area and paid *mutete* (tribute). Village Head Gondokondo, for example, who was an immigrant drylander, singled out irrigators as the main culprits who had 'killed' the status of the Headman and Village Heads by generally demeaning them in the way they spoke about them, and by not respecting their orders, or generally not fully recognising their leadership. He said that they were humble and understanding when they arrived to ask for permission to settle in Nyamaropa, but

"... now that they are comfortable and well settled they feel that they can break the rules and no-one will say anything about it... If they feel that the laws of this place are too tough for them then they should go and find a place where they can make their own laws..." (Village Head Gondokondo, March 1996, in a meeting at the Headman's homestead trying a case brought by a dryland farmer whose maize crop had been destroyed by two cows belonging to an immigrant irrigation farmer).

One elderly male dryland villager, Chishiri, upset with the way some immigrant irrigators talked about the behaviour and character of the Headman, said,

"He is our leader, we respect him, and everyone in this area must show him that respect, *we want you to see him as a respectable important person because he is that to us. His position is very important and we all have to respect that.* He drinks a lot I know, and we often buy him beer, but you still have to acknowledge his position of authority" (elder Chishiri).

In his court, the Headman was always acknowledged during proceedings and his word taken seriously. His secretaries were younger and more literate than most of his close aides, but not wiser in the ways of the land, and they worked on creating a good

image and a higher status for the traditional court. There was what passed for a mythification or mystification of his position, such as, for example, the secretary saying that no one was allowed to shake hands with the Headman any more, as from around July 1994 just before his official installation in August of the same year.

The Headman's secretary had a double role in the area. He remained a link between traditional authority and the 'modern' local government body of village committees as shown above, and that gave the Headman a grip of what was happening in the other sometimes rival institution of local government. Although Headmen were paid by government a monthly allowance for their duties such as trying civil cases, some of them still felt that they were being oppressed by the same government, which took away their powers of veto in development issues in their respective areas and put them (powers) in democratically elected bodies parallel to their own much older structures. In Nyamaropa, however, there was some co-operation between the two sides, especially from the Ward Councillor who took the initiative to consult with the Headman on many local development issues such as sinking boreholes for drinking water.

There were mixed feelings among drylanders about the prospect of joining the irrigation scheme through the expansion area which would give new irrigators two acres each. Some of them were enthusiastic about the new development. One drylander, Masunungure, the secretary to the Headman, put across his view: "I am looking forward to the canals coming to our fields, finally we will be able to produce enough to feed our families and sell some, and we will stop renting...". But some of them expressed fears that they might not cope with the labour demands of full-time irrigation, which would give some of the senior members of their community more than a mere *deja vu* feeling about the early days of irrigation scheme development and intervention.

Local irrigators and Sanyamaropa's leadership

Irrigators who joined the irrigation scheme from among the local original villagers in Nyamaropa had differing views about the role of the Headman in community affairs. Their perceptions emerged either from their attachment to new forms of belief and leadership, such as Churches, or from their desire to break with tradition and be seen by other irrigators as modern and progressive. The location of their homesteads also seemed to have an influence on the way they regarded the Headman and the traditional institution in general.

Those who lived closer to the Headman's homestead, although they attended church services and considered themselves Christians, believed that the Headman should play a crucial leadership role in Nyamaropa, and not play the secondary role preferred in the new structures. Most of the locals who had been irrigation farmers from the start of the project, had homesteads in the irrigation compounds, and had joined Churches, said that they saw nothing wrong with doing away with the role of the Headman in leadership or decision making on community issues in Nyamaropa, and emphasised that he should leave irrigators alone.

Local irrigators who became Christians said that God was their leader and they did not want to stop work in their fields on Fridays just because the Headman said so. Some of those who were members of Pentecostal Churches, such as the Apostolic Faith

Mission Church, argued that they would not be forced into observing *chisi* (sacred day) on Fridays. One of the leaders of this Church, Simoyi, who also happened to be the chairman of the Block Committee⁹ in Block D, the first block to organise themselves that way in Nyamaropa, and a local irrigator himself, said:

"I will not stop working on Fridays, or other days the Headman says we should not work. I have to fend for my family. The Bible does not say that I should stop working because the moon is full or dead, I do not worship the moon, I worship the living God. If they want everyone to observe *chisi*, then they should observe our sacred days too. We do not work on Sundays, we go to Church, but we do not ask everyone to stop working on that day, do we? If they want to arrest me, they can go ahead, but they will have to do so until Jesus comes..." (Local irrigation farmer Simoyi, March 1996).

The spread of Christianity seems to have come concurrently with individualisation and a sense of individual entrepreneurship, in line with what Long saw among Jehovah's witnesses and the introduction of the plough in Zambia (Long, 1968). In Nyamaropa the 'business ethic' in the project did not emerge directly from a Christian background as such, but from links with new forms of production requiring strict control of resources compared to dryland farming. In this context, the existence of *chisi* was not a welcome idea to most irrigators aiming to raise the productivity of their irrigation fields. Christian beliefs, however, had a hand in shaping new approaches to farming in that being a Christian was regarded as a sign of being modern, as a kind of progress. That was one reason irrigators looked down upon the drylanders' religious practices of ancestral worship as 'backward', and local irrigators converted to Christianity when they joined the irrigation scheme. Some locals who still believed in ancestral worship did join Churches, in a way combining the two 'sites of identification' to form one that straddled the two poles, thereby diminishing the direct dominance of one over the other.

Some local irrigators had a less radical view of things. Samunda, one of the respected local (irrigation) leaders, said that people should respect traditional institutions because it was where they came from, they should uphold the values and teachings of the old so that their children would know what the past was like. He said that part of the problem of drought and moral decay in the local community emanated from a lack of respect for elders, and from disregarding the teachings of the olden days about land, water, rain and other cultural values. He argued that with the coming of new beliefs and the irrigation scheme, with the money some of them made, many people had been confused and tended to take both sides (like himself!).

His justification for this was that no one knew what was actually effective in, for example, making rains fall as they used to in the 'good old days', hence the need to respect both types of beliefs, that is, both the Christian Church and the traditional beliefs in ancestors' powers to change one's life. He admitted, and lamented, that there was now less respect for traditional values and the institution of the Headman. He was one of the local irrigators who believed that Headman Sanyamaropa should at least get something out of the irrigation scheme since it was in his area, and contended that immigrants had changed things so much that some locals felt they had to be like the immigrants to be given respect and a chance to irrigate. His main bone of contention was that the land issue should have been addressed then and not later, because future generations of the original people of the Nyamaropa valley would have no land to

cultivate, since most arable land had been grabbed by the irrigation scheme and allocated to immigrants.

Samunda's argument was that the Headman, in that regard, should lead his people to claim a portion of the irrigation project. This was one reason why most dryland farmers were excited about the new 70 hectare extension of the irrigation scheme which made them formal irrigators, although local irrigators in the older sections of the scheme argued that the extension was too small. They said that something should be done to give them access to more land, and the Headman was the one with the responsibility of leading that cause. A more critical analysis of the situation could be that the Headman lost control of the people when the irrigation scheme arrived, and the authority of the Headmanship had been gradually declining over the years. He was now using symbols and activities (*chisi* and rainmaking) that used to confer authority on his leadership in order to regain that authority. There was no evidence besides what was said to suggest that the Headman or his supporters really 'believed' in *chisi* and its utility when it comes to rainfall patterns. Whether they believed in it or not, what was apparent was that meetings on *chisi*, rainmaking or other roles of the traditional institution, when resorted to under circumstances such as those in Nyamaropa, were well-constructed mechanisms employed by different groups in local conflicts over resources of one kind or another. The excitement of the dryland farmers and the Headman about the prospect of becoming formal irrigators was perceptively juxtaposed to their strong opposition to irrigators' calls for the relaxation of rules within the irrigation project. My guess is that the idea of strict observance of *chisi* was at risk of completely falling out of favour with most people in the area once the Headman and his main group of supporters joined the irrigation scheme. He might have to find other means of legitimising his authority if irrigation became his 'business' too.

Immigrant irrigators and local traditional leadership

Irrigators came in different groups, most of them individually, when they heard about the opportunity to join irrigation farming from different information sources such as friends, family connections, Church members, and other networks. Some of them recalled that they had had their own leaders but lost touch or identification with them when they joined the irrigation scheme. Within the irrigation scheme they were allocated new villages, and most of them fell under new local Village Heads, few of whom joined the irrigation scheme and lived among the new immigrant irrigators.

Immigrant irrigators' views about traditional leadership were mixed, but the trend was certainly towards a demeaning attitude that preferred less interference from those quarters. The common response among immigrant (mainly Manyika) irrigators was that '*we are in business here*' and the irrigation scheme should remain outside the Headman's jurisdiction since it was a government project. Most of them agreed that they paid tribute to the Headman when they joined, a sign of yielding to his authority, pledging one's allegiance, but they defended their actions as merely a means of gaining access to land for settlement. This was a strategy, or mechanism, by which traditional leaders of the olden days tried to impose their rule on immigrants. The agreement of irrigators to pay this could have been a strategy to gain access, or a genuine recognition of local leadership, which later changed with irrigation prosperity

and the introduction and spread of the Christian values and a new culture of relating to resources and to traditional authority.

Some of the immigrants were quite clear about their preferences, and assumed a radical stance against local traditional leaders. One of the immigrant Manyika irrigation leaders, Mpesa, said that there was nothing wrong with traditional leadership going about its business outside the irrigation scheme. He argued that the irrigation scheme should stand on its own, managed by both the government extension department and the farmers themselves. For him, and others who believed in the same system, the irrigation scheme was on state land, just like dryland, but it was in a special type of designated land because of the Tribal Trust Land (Control of Irrigable Areas) Act (1967) which declared all irrigable areas and their surrounding areas as requiring special attention from administrators.

The majority of irrigators said that they knew that they asked for permission to reside in Sanyamaropa's area, and the area became their home from then, and they had no other place to call home. Mpesa said that they had nowhere else to go, and needed title deeds to own the pieces of land they lived on and those they cultivated. He said that it would be difficult for anyone, including government, to move them from that place now. Over time, the so-called immigrants had come to identify with the area of Nyamaropa as their only home, in the process constructing their own social and cultural identities separate from those of locals; and they felt that they should lead their own lives in the context of irrigation farming.

Traditional leaders, they believed, could work with them on issues such as making rains fall, especially for those among the immigrants who believed in ancestral powers, and in trying civil cases such as witchcraft accusations and other minor issues among both irrigators and dryland farmers. On rainmaking ceremonies, they said that traditional leaders could organise that in the old ways of their ancestors, but as immigrants and Christians they had little knowledge, and still less interest in participating in such ceremonies. What they did, most of them, was to contribute either cash, or bags of grain, towards rainmaking ceremonies which were supposed to be held annually before the onset of the rainy season. Some of them attended out of curiosity. Both contributions and (curiosity-driven) attendance at such ceremonies could be regarded as a way of showing interest, and a form of acknowledging the role being played by the traditional institution in providing for their lives in some mysterious way, and representing their interests to the powers beyond the Headman himself.

There were immigrant irrigators who openly ridiculed the authority of the Headman. The more prominent irrigators, some of them businessmen, argued that they could not, for example, stop their casual labourers from working just because the Headman said so when at the end of the month they expected their full wages. One of them, Manyuchi, when arrested by the Headman's policemen, refused to pay the imposed fine for having workers busy in his fields on a sacred day. This was one of the most successful irrigation farmers and businessmen in the Nyamaropa area. There was the argument that the Headman was bitter that he was not an irrigator himself, jealous of irrigators' comparative prosperity, and wanted to impose his authority all over Nyamaropa. This could pass for one way of dismissing any obligations of respect for the Headman, or if it had some truth, then surely an acre or two could be made available for him and his immediate family, if only as a sign of expressing gratitude for

peacefully living with opposition beliefs in his territory and not asking for drastic measures against those who disobeyed him.

On the whole, the immigrant irrigators, and local irrigators on their side, generally saw the institution of the Headman in Nyamaropa as a threat to their irrigation businesses. However, they could not directly challenge its authority, partly they had themselves exaggerated it, in order to lay strong claims that they were being harassed and therefore seek more freedom and less interference in irrigation matters from the Headman. My view of the Headman's stance was that he was aware of the declining role and influence of his leadership in the irrigation scheme. He however, chose one potentially effective method of making people, mainly in his physical (geographic) and symbolic territory, respect what they associated with his position: *chisi*, land and rainmaking. The strategy of most of the groups of actors who found themselves on the wrong side of the Headman's accusations was not to challenge him openly. Instead, it was to agree with him that something was not in order, and then go on with their business as usual, although in some cases there was more observance of *chisi*, indicating that some irrigators thought it wise not to stand out and be known for disobedience. Another reason why they observed *chisi* was that they actually were not certain what or who really gave them rain. A large number of irrigators sat on the fence and argued that both Christian prayers and traditional rain-making ceremonies played their part because at the end of the day they appealed to the same heavenly authority for assistance, but through different methods.

Irrigators, land, and struggles over differences and identities

The irrigators in Nyamaropa had a representative body of farmers called the Irrigation Management Committee (IMC). This was their main leadership organisation, but there were other informal leaders who also played significant roles in shaping relations among farmers or between farmers and outsiders. Some of these leaders were businessmen, Church leaders, and generally respected members of the irrigation community. The IMC was dominated by immigrant Manyika irrigators, although leadership within the committee, especially the chair, shifted between local irrigators and immigrants. Immigrant irrigators argued that they had to keep close checks on strategies being constantly employed both by local Barwe irrigators who wanted to gain access to more irrigated land, and by the government department, Agritex, who wanted to find easier methods of managing the irrigation scheme.

The centrality of water in people's lives, in irrigation and dryland farming areas in Zimbabwe in general, and in Nyamaropa in this particular study, cannot be overemphasised. Different and divergent cultural practices and identities, and differing perceptions of water as a natural resource and community owned property surfaced repeatedly in Nyamaropa during fieldwork. Gradual decline in rainfall figures in the area, as shown in data from Agritex and the Meteorology office was regarded by some farmers as the main cause of the problem, but some of them blamed it on lack of respect for traditional values related to land and water issues. The effects of water (un)availability on farmers' relationships is one of the central issues in the following section focusing on social dynamics within the irrigation scheme. An important part of the argument here is that *more water meant less social strife, less water led to more conflict*, and a different cultural group, or a group with different cultural

traits, had its own identities of its members linked to their relationship with the irrigation scheme.

Interlocking social relations and struggles over water

"Water is not something you can keep in your hands, nor in your *hari / iqhaga* (calabash, traditional pot or water container made out of clay or a dried shell of a special type of pumpkin) to open and close when you want to. Sooner or later it runs out. Some of it evaporates, some goes into the soil, but the point is that it keeps going no matter how you handle it, so one has to learn to make the best use of the little water that is there when it is there, and remember that it is not always going to be there, just look at how fast our fields dry up after we irrigate..." (Irrigation farmer and IMC Treasurer Madzima, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 12 August 1994).

This declaration serves to highlight, from the start, some of the views irrigation farmers had about one of the most controversial resources they shared and struggled about in the area, the problem of water. This section offers a critical look at different farmers' perceptions of water in Nyamaropa irrigation and dryland farming areas and centres on the parts played, and often strategies employed, by different parties and leaders in negotiating for control over water resources. The main focus was not how water must formally be managed by either Agritex or the Department of Water Development (DWD) in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and its surroundings, but how farmers as irrigation ploholders and water users, and dryland farmers facing droughts and famine, with their own cultural differences, dealt with issues pertaining to water availability, distribution and use in their social, economic and political environments.

The first part of this section examines relations between the Irrigation Management Committee (IMC) and Agritex, and the current (1995) situation as partly shaped by the past. Here there is a comparison of the two winter seasons of 1994 and 1995 and how farmers dealt with the water shortage problem. A second sub-section looks at some specific case studies of water struggles among farmers in everyday life in the irrigation scheme; at farmers 'stealing' water, fighting over water, and some distribution and use(r) wrangles. The cases involve government through Agritex, and farmers' organisations of the Management Committee and Block Committees. The third sub-section is a discussion of issues raised in the main body of the this part, those of the interplay and complexity of leadership, land and water issues in discourses about irrigation and dryland lives in Nyamaropa valley.

The situation before the 1994 squabbles

Farmer's organisational problems

Farmer organisation in Nyamaropa started in the 1960s with the formation of a farmers' co-operative society which purchased inputs and sold farmers' produce. It collapsed during the height of the war in the late 1970s. By 1995, mid-way through the study, there was an Irrigation Management Committee which was supposed to be elected annually (in July) from among farmers themselves, comprising seven members

led by a chairman. The formation of the Irrigation Management Committee was an idea of government, and organised through Agritex.

The first Irrigation Management Committee in Nyamaropa was formed in 1981. As mentioned earlier it was supposed to work with Agritex and represent farmers' interests to the managing agency¹⁰, that is, Agritex. Some irrigators have accused the Irrigation Management Committee of neglecting its role as a farmers' body, and Agritex staff have sometimes complained of members of the Committee dictating to them what should be done and trying to take over the management of the irrigation scheme. At one stage in 1994 the chairman of the Committee, Mpesa, is said by Agritex to have wanted water controllers to report to him at his homestead and not to Agritex¹¹.

Perhaps as a response to this situation, Agritex and some local irrigators formed Block Committees in 1995 as parallel bodies representing farmers in the irrigation scheme. Their argument was that the Committee was making it difficult for them to manage the irrigation scheme in a progressive manner. The Committee, with support from most senior immigrant irrigators, said that Agritex wanted to control everything farmers did in the scheme, and accused the department of using divide and rule tactics to regain full control by forming what they saw as a parallel body to the Committee. They said that Block Committees were not only puppets of Agritex, but also *mafoshoro* (shovels) used by Agritex staff to clean up what the latter would not like to handle themselves. One immigrant farmer, Nyamangodo, said,

"Madumeni arikusaidzira ngetumacommittee twavo utu.../ abalimisi bethusela ngokungamacommittee kwabo lokhu..." (extension workers are using their little committees to threaten people), (field notes, 9 September 1995).

Block Committees were often referred to by Agritex and their unofficial leader Samunda and his supporters as Area Committees, so that irrigators who did not want to hear of the 'block system'¹² would not be too alarmed.

There seemed to be a semantic game being played by Agritex and Block Committees on the minds of irrigators. They believed that if they left out the word 'block', they could win the hearts of some of Mpesa's supporters through their activities which called for more transparency and accountability in the functions of management committees, something farmers had not seen in the main Irrigation Management Committee. The situation of who had more support then was not clear, both sides were claiming that they had the majority of farmers behind them, but neither side was courageous enough to call a meeting where there could be an open challenge to the other's legitimacy.

There were repeated clashes among irrigators concerning who had to distribute water, who had to collect and keep fines paid by those who breached by-laws, and generally on who was representing farmers' interests. Both committees tried to direct the course of events in the project towards their own sectional or group goals. Some immigrant farmers accused Agritex of stirring up ethnic hatred by helping form Block Committees with mainly a local, indigenous Barwe constituency. The latter were not only a minority in the irrigation scheme but had smaller plots compared to newcomer irrigators. The result was a persistent wave of clashes with Agritex staff who said that they 'wanted to be fair to all groups of farmers' (Agricultural Extension Officer, Sikume, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 18 July 1995). This led to a situation where

farmers did not adhere to Agritex recommendations on, for example, cropping programmes and acreage to use per crop per season, especially during water shortages. Farmers generally did not observe by-laws¹³ which they formulated themselves together with Agritex.

Of dry seasons and production levels

There was a noticeable drop in production from 1994 to 1995. Both seasons¹⁴ experienced different rainfall levels, but the crucial thing for farmers was the amount of water available for crop production. Water flow figures from the main weir supplying Nyamaropa indicated a drop from the 1994 to the 1995 season. There was a need to manage available water more efficiently, and the subsequent requirement by farmers to limit crop hectareage for winter seasons gave rise to the argument that strict control and regulation of farming practices by farmers themselves through their own elected representatives could yield positive results. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below show, in their respective ways, water flows into the irrigation scheme for the 1994 and 1995 winter seasons, crop hectareage and expected yields for the same seasons.

Table 3.1: Nyamaropa water flows, winter (dry) seasons¹⁵ of 1990 - 1995

Season	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Flow*, m3/sec	0.409	0.219	0.120	0.411	0.223	0.193
%age flow**	58	31	17	58	31	27

* Design flow for the scheme is 0.710 cubic metres per second.

**This is calculated as per design flow stated above.

Source: Compiled from unpublished Agritex irrigation records, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 1995.

The 1994 winter season had better rainfall than 1995, which was very low, though it did not match the worst drought of the 1992 season where irrigation water flows dropped to an all-time low of 0.120 cubic metres per second, with a percentage flow of only 17%. Water distribution problems mounted during dry seasons, and management strategies by both farmers and Agritex changed from laxity towards stricter control. Table 3 below shows estimates of hectareage and yields for two of the seasons referred to above.

Table 3.2: Hectareage and Expected Yields, winter 1994 and 1995

Season	Crop	Hectareage	Exp Yields (t/ha)
1993/4	wheat	130	3.5
	beans	158	2.4
1994/5	wheat	113	4.5
	beans	50	2.5

Source: Unpublished Agritex records, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 1995.

Hectarage for both wheat and beans was higher in 1994 than in 1995. This was the season in which there was a farmers' self-declared free-for-all in hectarage and water use. Yields for the same season showed a different picture, however, with expected yields for 1995 above those of the previous season. In 1995 Agritex and some farmers decided that stricter control of resources or irrigation practices by farmers' Block Committees would solve the problem of 100 percent¹⁶ cropping, which not only disrupted but also delayed irrigation turns, resulting in poor crops with lower yields than in seasons where there was more control from amongst farmers themselves.

Having given a brief sketch of the background to the irrigation scheme in the two seasons compared, the following section addresses issues raised in this part of the chapter, those of water, its source and leadership. It then looks at the 1994 and 1995 dry winter seasons in Nyamaropa and discusses how the various social actors involved dealt with water shortage. The two seasons' activities are treated as situations for analysis themselves, and are followed by two individual case analyses of farmers dealing with water-related problems in the 1995 winter season in the irrigation scheme. Underlying the whole issue of whose water (or whose land) it is, is the ever-present concept of social difference among the different actors, highlighting their differential perceptions of how they should relate not just to each other, but to the crucial natural resources, land and water.

Agritex's views

On the water or drought issue, Agritex staff took a more general and scientific point of view. They said that the drought was a nationwide problem caused by environmental factors and should not be limited to Nyamaropa alone. It had regional proportions which mocked the *chisi* argument, but they always urged farmers to stick to the rules of the land as prescribed by elders. They believed that water was indeed in short supply, but argued that it could be put to better use if farmers understood how it should be used and stop wasting it by 'one hundred percent cropping'. Some irrigators said that all they had to do was pray for the rains and things would be all right. But still dam levels dropped every season and there was a permanent threat to their levels of production. At the end of the day what mattered to the different parties was to find working ways to secure enough water to maintain farmers' livelihoods.

Some of the advice that Agritex staff gave to farmers was that they should share the little water that there was, but when it came to illegal water abstraction in the catchment area, some of them argued that farmers there should regulate and limit their use of water, and must apply for water rights. Catchment farmers did not want to discuss the water issue with irrigators from Nyamaropa (see details in Chapter 4).

However, Agritex's views differed on specific issues from those of farmers, and there was no consensus on what should be the case with irrigation water use. Within the irrigation scheme, the extension department had been trying to instil a sense of farmer responsibility when it came to water management, the more so because sometimes staff got entangled in farmer-squabbles over water use. Water Controllers, locally known as *nyamvura/ usomanzi, kumbe ophethe ezamanzi* ('the one who deals with water'), worked closely with Agritex and farmers to distribute water within the four blocks. All four of them agreed that they had the toughest and most risky job in the

scheme. They cited cases where they had been threatened with violence by disgruntled farmers. Generally, Agritex staff believed that a less confrontational or less forceful manner of working with farmers was the best way, and they literally let farmers run their own affairs in some situations, within the broader framework of irrigation requirements such as seasonal cropping programmes, and were still able to make even this requirement flexible.

The struggle for control

How did different farmers in specific situations perceive the water resource, and how did this influence how they related to other actors who related to the same source(s) of water in different ways? The following sub-section goes into this aspect. In their fight for leadership positions in the irrigation scheme, different farmers appealed to their ethnic and religious bases and identification for support. Still, access to land and water remained in the centre of their socialised constantly shifting group and cultural identities, not as a determining factor as such, but as having a significant influence in affecting how they related to each other.

The IMC and Agritex: Winter 1994

Agritex believed that the IMC was no longer active in dealing with farmers' problems. They said that Mpesa, the chairman of the IMC, was 'too political to lead farmers in a government scheme' where they had to observe some basic rules. They repeatedly cited an example of a case that took place in 1992, after the severe drought season of 1991 and 1992. Farmers, through their IMC, asked Agritex to exempt them from paying their irrigation fees, and even took their case to the District Administrator's office. Farmers who had not paid their fees were denied water. The committee aired their complaints about Agritex to the area's Member of Parliament (for denying water to farmers with maintenance fee arrears dating back to several seasons beyond 1991). The Member of Parliament came to Nyamaropa and publicly denounced Agritex's actions, threatening the Agritex Officer with "serious punishment" which was not specified. That could have marked the turn of Agritex staff against the IMC, and a shift in support towards a group of farmers (mostly locals) who supported Agritex's campaign for the block system.

The official role of the IMC was not clearly laid out to farmers, and they tended to take on some of Agritex's functions. The Irrigation Policy and Strategy drawn up by the then Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Water Development and the United Nations' (UN) Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in December 1994, proclaimed that,

"...Irrigation Management Committees have no management function such as decision making and planning of development, nor do they have a function in resource mobilisation. Their major functions are centred on communication and co-ordination of activities within the irrigation scheme" (p. 11).

This may be the official view but it certainly did not reflect what was happening in some irrigation schemes. The Irrigation Management Committee in Nyamaropa was expected to play a key role in joint management¹⁷ of the scheme with Agritex. The department's staff said that they provided the technical part in the running of the

project, but preferred to delegate some of the management functions to the committee(s) in the spirit of hoping that farmers will one day run the scheme on their own, in line with proposals to turn over such projects to farmer-management (Rukuni, 1995).

The 1994 winter was dry, and there was a shortage of water in the irrigation scheme. Agritex staff recommended that farmers limit the season's hectareage in order for them to see their crops through to maturing stage, but this was not done formally through an announcement in a general meeting. When irrigation turns became unbearably longer (more than a month in some cases), farmers called for a meeting with Agritex. They accused both Agritex and the IMC of not communicating with them about the critical water problem they were facing. They alleged that formerly they would hold a meeting to tell farmers how much hectareage each farmer was to use for either wheat or beans in winter, but this particular season there had been nothing of the sort. During the meeting, while discussing the causes of their plight, one woman said,

'...the problem is with the people who irrigate their gardens up-stream...let us organise a group of our people to go and talk to those people in Murozi catchment who are stealing our water and tell them to stop...'

The response to that, even before she finished, was a roaring "No!", and someone in the crowd said, '*...zvinhu zvechivanhu zvinonetsa / izinto zesibantu ziyahlupha* (African customs are problematic), adding that, we do not want to get ourselves mixed up in that right now ...'. The discussion came to a head when one elderly irrigator Mautsa (one of the first immigrant irrigation farmers), stood up and directly addressed the IMC chairman who was chairing the meeting, and said,

"...you are being used [by Agritex] repeatedly and you know it, you seem to enjoy it, your whole committee is being used by Agritex to cover up for their lack of commitment and, on their faults (to outbursts of laughter)... you are like a dog which runs after a rabbit and sweats for its owner but gets only the dry bones at the end of the day. *Let us do what we want, let us irrigate everywhere, as much as we want to...*" (my emphasis).

Then another irrigation farmer, a younger man of about 30 years, apparently challenged by the previous statement, stood up and said,

"What are we here for? Are we not the farmers here? And do we not depend on the land and the water for our food? The problem is not with Agritex or the Irrigation Management Committee, it is with us farmers, the people who are irrigating... we must know what we want first... If we all irrigate freely without knowing how much water is available we will cry tomorrow".

There were mixed reactions to the idea of letting water run freely and everyone irrigating as much as they wanted, with some of them saying that they were just going to suffer at the end of the day if they did not listen to Agritex who were more knowledgeable on the different issues pertaining to irrigation farming and water management. *Mai* Mapfurira, wife of one of the earliest irrigators in Nyamaropa and one of the most vocal female irrigators herself (in public meetings), said that the

problem was with the lack of communication between different parties involved in the management of the irrigation scheme. She asked,

"...why was there no agreement between Agritex and the IMC in the first place on what hectareage to grow of winter wheat? What used to happen in other seasons? What has happened to that system of doing things?" (*Mai Mapfurira*, immigrant irrigation farmer).

There was no direct response to her questions, but one member of the audience (an immigrant irrigator) said that there was a major problem which everyone seemed to be conveniently avoiding, that of the invasion of the irrigation scheme by dryland farmers to grow wheat because they had had a bad season with their summer maize and other food crops the previous season. He pointed out that there was no system of regulating the hectareage, especially when people had their own contracts with dryland farmers in which they promised each other pieces of irrigated land in winter. No one could reverse it when the winter season came and they realised that they had little water. He recommended that someone somewhere should devise a method of regulating this. Some irrigators had relatives among dryland farmers, some of them were protected by these relatives during the war when irrigators were accused of being sell-outs to colonial authorities for joining the scheme, and they felt they had an obligation to help their dryland relatives and friends, especially where producing food was concerned.

At the end of the meeting there was no final or binding agreement on what hectareage to grow of winter crops, and it was obviously too late to change that because farmers had already planted in most of their plots, including crops for their dryland counterparts. That season saw poor wheat and beans yields, blamed by Agritex on lack of sufficient water and poor fertiliser application. The following winter season (1995) saw a change in the way farmers and Agritex dealt with the water shortage problem, with a direct focus on farmers' differences.

Block Committees and Agritex: Winter 1995

The talk of introducing a block system type of irrigation management had been going on for a couple of years within Agritex. Nyamaropa farmers had even visited an irrigation scheme which was under block management. Farmers who saw it appreciated the 'neatness' of the system, but said that it was suitable only for farmers who used it as family gardens, while they had large dryland plots as their main fields, and it was not suitable for full-time irrigators like themselves in Nyamaropa. When the Extension Officer temporarily introduced the system in the harsh winter of the 1992 drought by giving each farmer two border strips to grow wheat, farmers marvelled at how much could be harvested from a small piece of land when treated and watered sufficiently. But when the Irrigation Management Committee chairman then, Samunda, a local irrigator, recommended that farmers take up the block system permanently, the former chairman, Mpesa (current chairman during the study period), and most of the immigrants, called a meeting and voted him out of office with the rest of his committee. He has campaigned for the block system with the assistance of Agritex since then, and this culminated in the formation of Block Committees in 1995.

Samunda was a committee member in both the 1995 Irrigation Management Committee led by Mpesa, and in his block's Block Committee, which he formed and

which was emulated by disgruntled farmers in other blocks. He often had the support of Agritex in pursuing his block system objectives. Viewed from another angle, he was enrolled into the block system project or campaign led by Agritex in different small-holder irrigation schemes around the country. Agritex said that he was "approachable" and more democratic in his work than Mpesa who had been accused of being dictatorial and impossible (Magadlela, 1994a: 10).

The functions of Block Committees were similar to those of the IMC, and the latter accused Agritex of undermining their operations. Initially, Block Committees gained a lot of influence and support from what appeared to be a majority of irrigators, especially for their strict adherence to both formal by-laws and their non-formalised and unwritten rules. They insisted that everyone must stick to the agreed one acre per plot for the 1995 winter season in order for the little remaining water to go round. Together with Agritex, they also put in place a system of irrigating sub-block by sub-block which most farmers said significantly quickened irrigation turns. Through Block Committees, some irrigators, mostly locals, called for rules to prohibit sub-leasing, renting and borrowing of plots in the scheme which they said disrupted irrigation turns, affecting their levels of production, and they also voiced strong concern about plotheolders who registered their names, leased out 'their' plots and then went off to work elsewhere, while some dryland families had no one gainfully employed anywhere else and had no irrigated land to make a living from.

However, some of these 'achievements' by the Block Committees were short-lived. After the dry winter season's crops were harvested, farmers started complaining about the over-diligence of Block Committees who were 'arresting' and fining farmers for breaking rules. Some of them were even accusing Agritex of taking advantage of Block Committee members to introduce *their* block system slowly.

A comparison of the two seasons revealed that 1994 was more of a free-for-all situation than 1995 which saw farmers taking the initiative to regulate themselves and each other in order to try and get more out of the little remaining water in the dams. While there were obviously other reasons leading to the formation of Block Committees in 1995, it should be noted that the need to have stricter control had been shown by the previous year's experience of loose controls, which had led to almost a hundred percent cropping of the irrigation scheme, which in turn resulted in longer irrigation turns with the final result of poor yields. Apparently, there were better harvests in 1995 which had stricter control by farmers themselves, through the Block Committee system, but changing management operations to this new system had more implications than just good yields.

In 1995 the Irrigation Management Committee was temporarily threatened with collapse, and Agritex staff were pleased with the prospect, saying that there was no law that could stop them from dissolving Mpesa's Irrigation Management Committee, because the idea of the committee was born out of Agritex's need to have more communication between staff and farmers in the first place, not a farmers' own initiative.

In a meeting of Agritex and Block Committees, about two months after their formation and official Agritex recognition, the irrigation Supervisor and Samunda (Block Committees founder member) said that the chairmen of Block Committees and their deputies would then form a new IMC from among themselves, which would perform all tasks then being carried out by the Irrigation Management Committee. It

was a simple change in names, but what they were doing was actually forming a new Irrigation Management Committee to replace the older one whose leadership they did not like. However, when I mentioned this to Agritex staff, their comment was:

"To understand this better, take it from a Member of Parliament's point of view. An MP is elected by people in his constituency to stand for the people. The same thing happens with the Irrigation Management Committee, it should be formed from [among] Block Committee members to avoid clashes, and because what will be 'chased' at area level will also be 'chased' at top level" (Sikume, Agritex Extension Officer's comments, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 1995).

Agritex were expected to be impartial in deliberating on farmers' issues, but in this case they said that they were trying to restore order and an atmosphere conducive to collaborative work and joint management of the irrigation scheme by farmers and themselves, and needed to intervene a little.

They could disband any committee if they wanted to, but they said that they were human beings too and had friends among irrigators. They needed to maintain good working relations with at least a majority of farmers, hence their stand in support of Samunda because they believed that he had mobilised the majority of irrigators behind him, and behind Block Committees. Agritex, however, said that they were able to work with any farmer who wanted their assistance. For example, in the winter of 1995 they chose Mpesa as the farmer on whose plot they put an experimental wheat crop. This was against the wishes of the Block Committee for block B, who insisted that they could not accept the crop because it was already five days after the block's planting deadline for wheat, and it was going to disrupt their water movement or irrigation scheduling.

In such a context of conflicting interests, Agritex, as the outsider negotiating a way out of the problems surrounding farmer representation and leadership, knew that they had to listen to and see both sides of the story from different farmers for and/or against Block Committees. What mattered to an outsider was the strategies that different groups in the game devised and employed in their quest for a larger say in trying to influence the course of events. For the government department, this was encouragement for the formation of Block Committees and a gradual replacement or displacement of the IMC with a new one. The analysis here required that one see beyond the so-called strategies devised by the different actors in pursuit of their various goals. In some cases, these were just reactions and not conscious strategies. Different cultural and group identities manifested themselves much more clearly during periods of conflict, crisis, or general problems such as the 1991/2 water shortages.

Individual farmer encounters with change

The case presented below shows clashes of different actors over water in the irrigation scheme, mostly between or among farmers, sometimes involving Agritex. It raises the question posed by many farmers in the catchment area: Who has the right, or the authority (or both) to decide on who is to use (or not use) water when? Or who gets how much water for what? An important issue illustrated by the following case concerns wrangles between different groups of actors and how conflicting parties strive to control water distribution or to have a say in it. The case is drawn from the

winter of 1995, to help analyse changes that took place then, and the farmers' strategic responses to a critical water shortage situation. The Chimbetete case was special for its pioneering nature in testing the effectiveness of Block Committees. It was the case that posed the first real challenge for the Block Committee for block B. One immigrant irrigation farmer who supported Block Committees said that that was the initiation ceremony of the committee, to give it a taste of what handling farmers' water-related problems was all about.

The case deals with the specific issue of water and how farmers dealt with those among themselves they found guilty of stealing water. This issue is directly linked to the other critical issues of, first, land in the form of limited acreage per farmer per season, which in itself is a derivative of the second issue of the water shortage problem, which the Headman in the earlier section was dealing with in his meeting with Church leaders.

'Stealing' or 'using' water: the Chimbetete case

Chimbetete had one acre of wheat and four border strips with beans and vegetables. His wife took more water than had been allocated her by agreement in the Block Committee meeting. Each farmer was supposed to irrigate only one acre of wheat or beans, or both during the winter season, but she allegedly went on to irrigate more than that. To make matters worse, she irrigated an acre of a field with *tsaru* (crop waste) which Block Committees and Agritex had strongly warned farmers against irrigating. Another farmer in the same sub-block, Nyabasa, a local irrigator and a *sabhuku* (Village Head), also a member of the Block Committee for Block B, was waiting for his turn to irrigate, and knew approximately how long it would take for someone to irrigate one acre with the particular number of syphons they had in their block.

After a while he checked and saw that she was still irrigating. He went over and found that she was almost through irrigating an extra piece of land (one acre) beyond the one acre agreed by the Block Committee. He picked up the syphons without a word and went over to his plot to irrigate his wheat; she did not protest. Next Chimbetete got summons to the Block Committee to answer charges of stealing water; thus Chimbetete himself became directly involved in the case. Some BC members said that they knew that *he*¹⁸ had always been a trouble-maker as far as water issues were concerned, and promised to deal with *him* severely. In the 'trial' *he* was found guilty of stealing water to irrigate crop waste and was charged Z\$20 per border strip. She had irrigated five strips, so it added up to Z\$100 (US\$10 in 1995). He had to pay up or be denied water by the area committee working in conjunction with the Extension Worker and the Water Controller in his block. It seemed that the acknowledged head of the household had to deal with the case as his when it assumed what one might call 'public proportions'. This was a reflection of the dominance of a patriarchal ideology of male predominance in family matters in the area, which was reflected in the tenure system where the man's name was registered and everything else that followed was identified with him. In this particular case, the woman's identity seemed to be incorporated in her husband's, especially his alleged notoriety which was mentioned by some Block Committee members. Chapter 5 shows how widows, compared

(implicitly) to married women, seemed to enjoy more freedom and an identity of their own within the male dominated irrigation community.

He appealed to Agritex to intervene, alleging victimisation and hatred from some Block Committee members, but Agritex said that the case had to go through the top committee¹⁹ first. Whether Chimbetete talked to the Irrigation Management Committee chairman, Mpesa, about the case or not is not clear, but he refused to pay the fine until the case was heard in front of 'a neutral' body. Days went by and the next irrigation turn came. He devised a plan to get water. He wrote a letter to the Water Controller and said that it came from the Agricultural Extension Supervisor giving him permission to irrigate while his case was being reviewed, so that his crop would not suffer in case he was acquitted of his alleged crime. The Water Controller allowed him to irrigate. When the block committee members heard of this they were furious. They went to Agritex to complain, alleging that Agritex staff were sabotaging their efforts to manage their blocks efficiently. They were told that the Supervisor knew nothing about the letter. The Irrigation Supervisor himself was now in the forefront looking for the farmer, Chimbetete, to clear his name and set the record straight. He sent for him at his work place at the local Cotton Company of Zimbabwe depot, but he did not come to the Agritex office immediately.

In a general meeting convened by the IMC to discuss a project to get water from Gairezi River, Mpesa, the IMC chairman and Chimbetete were seen by some Block Committee members chatting behind a building, and they thought that they were trying to find a way to get Chimbetete off the hook. When the Block Committee finally caught up with him, he admitted having made a mistake, and was fined the previously imposed Z\$100 plus another Z\$100 for stealing water for the second time, and charged an extra Z\$70 for initially denying the case and then implicating a government official in his theft (the fine totalled Z\$270). The outcome of the case was regarded as the first sign of effectiveness by the Block Committee even though it was only the Block Committee for Block B involved, and it certainly gave them confidence and a show of support (from Agritex) that they needed: apparently the Block Committees' coup over the Irrigation Management Committee had begun.

After several months of relative success, block committees lost most of their support. This was a result of repeated allegations of harassment of elderly and women farmers in the irrigation scheme. The old IMC stayed on in power for an indefinite term.

General discussion and conclusions

Water in Nyamaropa was regarded as a finite resource whose conservation and careful utilisation was the *leitmotif* of Agritex and farmers' leaders in meetings in the irrigation scheme. The main water source, the Murozi River catchment, had been a subject of debate among irrigators, and between irrigators and villagers in the catchment area. This raised the crucial question: whose water is it, and who should get priority use? Both sides believed that water came from some higher power somewhere, and that they had to ask these powers-that-be for water when it was short. Between irrigators and non-irrigators in Nyamaropa, there were constant struggles over several symbols of domination in the area. The relations between irrigators and local drylanders with the Headman on their side were often strained, and the crucial cultural identities and distinctions between them included access to the

irrigation scheme and the issue of who had more authority at certain times in the area. The irrigation scheme's water relations were the domain in which different farmers faced each other in contests over life-supporting resources around them. The feeling of the contested nature of their relationships and interactions was somehow always in the air. This was seen (observed and felt) in the meeting convened by the Headman, where new forms of cultural identity and new types of relationships between the immigrant group of irrigators and the Headman or the traditional institution in general were re-negotiated, under the guise of a need to respect traditional rules which in themselves were used to legitimise the predominance of one cultural unit or social group over others. Within the larger field of farming in Nyamaropa, the irrigation arena increasingly became a focus for most groups of actors from within and outside Nyamaropa. There were contests of value focused on water as a natural resource obtainable by relating to certain symbols in a specific way laid out by a certain group that claimed closer symbolic (historical and mythical) links with the powers mentioned.

The legal and spiritual domains of entitlement were invoked to either claim or protect rights to priority usage of water or to claim predominance in local politics. In the irrigation scheme, immigrant irrigators who had dominated farmer organisation from the start seemed to be losing the driving seat to local irrigators soon after the formation of Block Committees by those who preferred to move away from a *laissez faire* type of management towards more strict regulation of farmers' irrigation practices. Strict regulation meant that non-official irrigators such as dryland farmers could find themselves pushed out of their irrigation deals with some of the irrigators. This would dry up the benefits derived from their mutual relationships, and the likely losers could be dryland farmers who relied on the deals for food. Irrigators could still hire casual labour, although expensive, and survive.

Within the irrigation scheme again, the complexity of the situation was intensified by the way farmers' social relations interlocked when it came to giving support either to Agritex or to one of the committees. Drylanders placed the blame for water shortage squarely on the shoulders of immigrant irrigators and their ritual practices in the Christian Church; but irrigators would still not actively participate in what they regarded as heathen rituals even if these were meant for their benefit too. They only donated cash and grain towards the ceremonies, which some of them said was not exactly a way of actively participating in the rituals, but a form of appeasement of the parties behind them. Both sides knew that they had no power over water, and appealed to a higher authority to supply it. They blamed those who did not participate in their respective rituals if there were no substantial results from their ceremonies.

Farmers' committees in the irrigation scheme represented different group interests and identities. There was a temporary shift in power and support from the Irrigation Management Committee, which mostly consisted of immigrant irrigators, to the new Block Committees which were led by local irrigators. Agritex was at the centre of it, and was getting caught up in farmer politics, the more so because the department's support was crucial for the influence either committee could have on farmers' irrigation business. Allying with Agritex was one strategy that either group could use, and the Block Committees had Agritex on their side in this encounter. The IMC, instead of fighting to gain Agritex support directly, devised a counter strategy, that of standing aloof from the centre of action and lying low, counting on the support of a

group of farmers who felt threatened by the increasing influence of Block Committees. The gamble paid off in the end because they remained in office and were not displaced by a new IMC, as hoped for by Agritex and Block Committee supporters, though they did lose some support among some farmers keen on seeing the return of a stricter form of management.

There was a conflict of roles caused by an unclear definition of functions of both Agritex staff and the Irrigation Management Committee. To some elderly farmers, Agritex's role and purpose in the scheme was not clearly laid out. Some were saying that Block Committees and the Irrigation Management Committee were doing all the work for Agritex, and that the latter should pack their belongings and leave farmers to run the project. There were by-laws which were drawn up jointly by Agritex and the Irrigation Management Committee in 1989, but they were rarely invoked when farmers breached them. Agritex said that they were supporting the Block Committees because they were a step towards the department's objectives of one day handing over the irrigation scheme to farmers to run on their own with Agritex staff only playing an administrative and advisory role, and not being managers. By the mid-1990s, however, the irrigation scheme was characterised by a relaxed type of management on the formal part of Agritex, and there was certainly a penchant for nonchalance in the way the project's management went about their duties.

The 'individual' farmer's case of alleged water theft revealed different perceptions of water as a collectively-owned and individually perceived resource. When water was short there was always the pressing need to conserve the little that was available, and to punish anyone who seemed to disregard the common agreement of limited use. Irrigation farmers agreed that stealing water was a common practice in Nyamaropa during all seasons, but quickly added that this should not be done when either the committee or Agritex ruled that farmers should use water sparingly for the next crop, or at least they should do it without getting caught. The two seasons described above presented contrasting views of how farmers related to each other, to their common situation under changing forms of farmer representation and water availability. The temporary acceptance of Block Committee control in their respective blocks in 1995 reflected the urgent need among farmers to regulate their own activities during particular conditions, or a willingness to put checks on each other's irrigation practices. The way this was done offers some important lessons for the move at policy level from farmer-participation *per se* towards flexible farmer-management of smallholder irrigation schemes (Rukuni, 1995).

The Irrigation Management Committee meeting held in 1994 revealed that at the end of the day the problem was with lack of co-ordination between the official managing agency and farmers, including farmers' representatives. It also raised the important point of the purpose of irrigation and how farmers themselves saw their role in it. Another revelation, probably with more significant implications for future management of agency-run schemes, was the way farmers' discussions revolved around several crucial issues, among them the regulation of water use. The role of Agritex and the Irrigation Management Committee, hectareage per farmer per (winter) season, and finding a solution to the problem of water shortage. Farmers were aware of the role and implications of their actions on their overall production levels, and they tried to shape each other's perceptions of the problems they were likely to face if they took one or the other of suggested solutions.

This section set out to discuss the issue of the importance of water in shaping relations between Nyamaropa's local and immigrant irrigators, between irrigators and dryland farmers, and between irrigators and farmers in the catchment area. It was shown that water was a crucial resource to all farmers in their respective areas. When water was abundant, the illegal irrigators on the Murozi river catchment ceased to be a problem for irrigators, but when it was short, they were the first 'culprits to be disciplined' (although they were not), together with the drylanders who maintained irrigation deals with some of the irrigators next in the prosecution line. Among irrigators themselves there were more restrictive measures that were taken to regulate water use, and this led to the creation of conflicting groups. The identities of these groups were constantly shifting as shown especially in meetings and campaigns by rival or competing groups vying for leadership positions. Local political leaders' reliance on these shifting identities shaped their strategies in dealing with political rivals and with practical framing challenges.

The analysis brought out the fact that the social interaction of different actors, and deals of mutual assistance between different actors or groups of actors were always present with or without the shortage of water. The site of struggle here was often water-related, and water could be seen to be the arena in which the battle for a more legitimate claim of use over the claims of others was fought out. The various actors' cultural differences which were related to water issues had latent forms of conflict, which often assumed frictional proportions, and sometimes exploded to open accusations of theft or hoarding during shortages, when one or other party went witch-hunting for the wrong doer. Positions of authority or legitimate use always shifted from one end to the other.

On the whole, there were differing perceptions of whose water it was, who made rains fall, who had the authority and legitimate role to play in water-related issues. Within the irrigation scheme, there were problems of who was entitled to how much of which water and why. Beyond the physical boundaries of the irrigation project the battle for the right way to relate to rain and water issues raged on, replete with mystery and symbols of spiritual powers. The Headman, the Rainmaker, irrigators, Agritex and dryland farmers all believed in one of the two sides of water source and entitlement. The underlying factor was that all farmers wanted water to secure or maintain their livelihoods, and Agritex was keen to ensure that those farmers who they believed were entitled to water had access to it. In this regard, how farmers related to each other was to a large extent influenced by how they related to the most crucial production resources in their lives: water and land.

What the material in this chapter shows is that among different types of social groups in an open field of rural development or of smallholder farming, there are contested domains within which exist ground battles (arenas) such as the water front. Because the irrigation domain is shared by immigrant irrigators, local irrigators, local dryland farmers, Agritex and other outsiders, definitions of the importance of resources such as water, for example, constantly shifted. What was interesting for the analysis of the meeting described in the first part of the chapter is the idea of the two main domains around Nyamaropa coming into contact, and doing this in a conflict situation where one party accuses the other of an alleged specific crime. The accommodations of various identities (local, irrigator, immigrant, Manyika, Barwe) in these settings such as meetings between rival groups raises the analysis onto another

level of theoretical arguments, that of the temporary merging, and in the process, re-constitution of identities and alliances between the various groups. An example here is the conflict among groups of irrigation farmers and their changing identities, especially when some immigrants supported the new Block Committees against the IMC which seemed to have a majority of immigrants as its supporters, and the managing agency Agritex, shifting its support from one group to the other.

Leadership, as a position of influence, takes shape in competition and is always fluid in that, like power and identity, it is *relational*, which means that it is largely reliant on the types of relations that the one(s) seeking it literally play into the hands of their rivals in order to be able to actively negotiate their status in a 'live' situation, as it were. The Headman succeeds, at least on the face of it, when Church leaders agree to his urging that they observe *chisi*, but Agritex and Block Committee advocates fail to turn the rest of the farmers against the temporarily and sectionally unpopular IMC, which goes on to (re)claim, and win, the initiative from the rebellious group and the repentant extension agency. Agritex retained its position of influence largely by virtue of its being an outsider in the active affairs of the irrigation scheme.

The next chapter looks into the nature of water wrangles between irrigators in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and catchment water users upstream. The two parties' use of their identities and their differences are highlighted in their exchanges and legitimations of what entitles them to access water before others.

Notes

- 1.. It was with sadness and regret that after completing fieldwork, and during my write-up in Wageningen, The Netherlands, I learnt of the death (June 1996) of Headman Sanyamaropa, with whom I had worked well during my stay in Nyamaropa.
- 2.. Red clothing and umbrellas were considered taboo during *maenza* (rainy season), they were believed to stop rains from falling.
- 3.. Cheater (1992) says that the early years soon after 1980 were characterised by a 'temporary flirtation' with socialism on the part of the government. This was a period of what she calls an extended independence honeymoon symbolised by excessive government spending on social services. There was an unannounced relaxation of rules and regulations in government irrigation schemes which apparently gave farmers room for a kind of *de facto* control.
- 4.. For a moment I thought maybe he felt threatened by the presence of uninvited guests whom he knew little about and whose mission in the area he understood to be related to investigating all types of situations about life, farming, leadership etc. The doubt had to be removed.
- 5.. Village Heads referred to here were part of the traditional leadership, called '*masabhuku*', an institution from the colonial past, now commonly referred to as part of traditional leadership, not the elected post-independence Village Development Committee members.
- 6.. Although it was Alois doing the talking, it was custom that he spoke on behalf of the Headman, as his 'mouthpiece', having been told what to say at the meeting. This was part of the culture concerning respected leaders, messages had to go through someone first and be explained to them, so that if it was a nasty or tricky question it would not embarrass the leader, but be clarified by the 'speaker'. When the meeting heated up later, the formality somehow vanished, and the Headman took questions directly, and addressed the crowd

himself.

7.. Recent work on new Churches in Zimbabwe by Maxwell (1995), deals with the way the liberation war changed some of the Churches, and has a discussion on how new Churches and traditional authority contest each other's influence on beliefs and values of the same people in their territories.

8.. Details about changes in Christian beliefs and formation of new Churches can be found in the work of Maxwell (1995).

9.. The Nyamaropa irrigation scheme was divided into four blocks (A-D). The divisions were a result of their different development stages during construction. Each block had its own canals that supplied it with water either from the main canal or from the night storage dam. Each block had an average of 150 plottolders, and there was an extension worker responsible for each block. In 1995 Agritex staff initiated the formation of farmer representative committees within each block to try and have a closer-to-the-farmer water monitoring system of management. There were mixed responses to this development as shown in the later part of the chapter.

10.. Pazvakavambwa (in Blackie, 1984: 421) discusses issues pertaining to committees in smallholder irrigation schemes in Zimbabwe.

11.. This could be a result of lack of co-ordination between the two sides, and such expressions may have been attempts to prejudice an openly confrontational and aggressive farmers' leader. His response to my inquiries on the issue was, "Well, I don't know what they think, but... who is supposed to irrigate?" (IMC chairman, Mpesa, commenting on water use issues in the irrigation scheme).

12.. Agritex staff in Nyamaropa said that this was a system whereby each farmer would have one acre of each crop in each of the four blocks per season. The advantage of this system, they said, was that it would make disease and pest control easier and water movement would be easy to monitor.

13.. By-laws were a product of joint negotiation between Agritex and the Irrigation Management Committee, approved by a general meeting of irrigation plottolders. They specifically lay down rules and regulations (together with punitive measures for each offence) governing each irrigator's tenancy conditions, but were not taken seriously by most irrigators. Farmers breached them literally everyday, but they were rarely invoked to make farmers accountable for their actions. Block Committees had no written by-laws, but relied on verbal declarations in meetings of what had to be done, how and by whom, but also in line with the IMC-Agritex by-laws.

14.. Here the focus was on winter seasons which were generally dry periods of the year in Nyamaropa.

15.. The winter season was normally put at between the months of May and September. Flow data given in the table were averages (and average percentages) of the five winter months for each year.

16.. Agritex staff said that 100 percent cropping was a situation whereby almost every farmer used every piece of their irrigation plot regardless of the water situation in the dam, normally resulting in water shortages and low production levels.

17.. At least management in the narrow sense of deciding how to distribute water and how much hectareage per crop per season, especially in winter.

18.. Almost everyone who talked about this case referred to the person who committed the crime as the husband and not the wife who actually irrigated.

19.. This was during the (transitional) early days of the Block Committees, while the IMC still had some significant credibility and respect among farmers. This might have been a temporary situation.

Chapter 4

Whose water right is right? The mobilization of cultural and spatial identities in claims to water use

Introduction

This chapter presents a social analysis of farmers' relationships and perceptions of their situation in relation to accessing water for irrigation in two different cultural and farming contexts. It looks at the situations of two or more groups of farmers who shared the same source of water but had different legal and traditional entitlements to it, hence the conflict among them. The chapter presents views of catchment farmers who used river water without formal (legal) water rights, in the context of accusations of illegal water use by irrigators in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme with a formal water right. There was the argument that catchment farmers had as good a right (a historical traditional right) to use the river's water as the irrigation farmers downstream. Differences in cultural identities, in social and cultural organisation, and in particular, in ways of accessing farming-related resources such as land and water, are central in the analysis. There is a specific interest in analyzing the different ways in which catchment farmers dealt with their farming and livelihood problems in light of the constant accusations by irrigators in a government project that the former stole water meant for the latter.

The argument throughout the chapter is that irrigators and catchment farmers could not find a solution to their respective problems of periodic (almost every winter) water shortages, and a permanent threat of being forced to stop extracting river water to earn a living, by exchanging accusations. They may not resolve their conflict by engaging either legal or traditional institutions in their bids to legitimize entitlement to water use. Their awareness of their social and cultural differences, based on different religious and belief systems, and divergent ways of relating to land and water resources, was highlighted by some of them as one of the main factors influencing either side's resolve to secure permanent access to water for irrigation purposes.

Theoretical arguments developed here include the issue of domains and boundaries, territories, physical and social space in a situation of cultural conflict over claims of identity. Boundaries and territories in this case were contested between catchment farmers and irrigators downstream at various levels such as geographic location, legal entitlement to water use, and catchment farmers' cultural and spiritual validations or legitimation of their claims to use of river water. Throughout the argument runs the concept of cultural identity and difference, between different groups of actors sharing a resource, or forced into a relationship by circumstances beyond their control. There are definitions and constructions of cultural or group identifications, or culturally embedded political capital, which catchment farmers are able to mobilize in struggles over resources with other actors from outside. There is a crucial focus on the clashes between two domains here, that of the catchment villagers and their spiritually-based means of legitimizing their practices, and irrigation farmers in a government project who have to rely on formal official or legal channels to strengthen their claims to the same resource. The mysteriousness of the spiritual

domain in their argument gives the catchment group of farmers what appears to be an unfair edge over others in competition with them, and the story below will illustrate this point even more clearly.

Hopefully, this approach will help technocrats and policy makers to see beyond physical boundaries when drafting crucial laws and regulations guiding natural resource use, and to take cognisance of the interests of different people claiming access to them from different cultural backgrounds, some constructed in the period of interaction between the various groups involved.

The first part of the chapter presents the setting as a brief background, especially to introduce the different actors involved in this water game. Then there is a presentation of irrigation farmers' views of catchment irrigation practices, together with an analysis of a potentially explosive meeting over water sharing between the two parties that took place during the severe drought of 1992. This is followed by a presentation of catchment area farmers' interpretations of their water situation, where their use of river water is contextualised in some aspects of their traditional social organisation, their 'traditional' forms of relating to natural resources, and their contextual socio-cultural practices in the light of irrigation farming specifically, and agricultural production in general.

Some common catchment headaches

In the dry parts of Zimbabwe, water sources in rural areas which supply development projects such as irrigation schemes, were always bound to attract increased human settlement because of poor rainfall patterns. The chances were that water scarcity in irrigation projects would lead to searches for solutions, and in situations where catchment settlers were using part of that water, there was bound to be social tension over sharing practices.

Nyati (1996: 1), from the Regional Water Authority in Zimbabwe, in a paper presented to a Water for Agriculture Workshop in Harare, started with a cold, quite common, and hard, fact, referring mainly to irrigation farming: "[w]ithout proper water management skills, agriculture cannot be successful". Indeed, skills are needed in all aspects of farming, and what planners need are insights into the skills of rural area farmers who have been involved in irrigation-related farming for decades without external intervention. This would be assisted by an attitude that does not demean rural people's water management skills from the outset, complemented by a willingness to share irrigation experiences from different sources.

An interesting proposal on catchment management and its related problems was given by Elias (1996: 1), who suggested that combining land and water management into a set of practices about natural resource management would solve problems of sectoral interests. He added that the concept of an interdependence and not independence between two or more groups of water users ought to be fostered so that all may benefit. He further said,

"[t]hose who cultivate land, on any scale, must accept that land and water are finite resources, that their management must be improved and that for any real progress to be made and maintained we all must learn to work and cooperate with our neighbor" (1996: 2).

Elias's views were derived from his Chimanimani experiences in South Eastern Zimbabwe. This was with regard to the Nyanyadzi river which measures 50 km and which has a catchment area covering 850 square kilometers (Elias, 1996: 2). The river was said to have served the Nyanyadzi irrigation scheme and communal areas along its course for over 60 years (*ibid.*: p.3).

From the same source of catchment problems on the Nyanyadzi, in Chimanimani, Bolding (1996) narrated the story of how Agritex staff and a group of farmers from the Nyanyadzi irrigation scheme marched up the river with picks and shovels on a raid to close down so-called illegal furrows of catchment area farmers taking water from the same river¹. In one of the rare solutions to catchment water problems, Bolding says that Nyanyadzi irrigators and farmers upstream had an agreement brokered by the District Administrator that farmers upstream use water for a week, and then during the following week let it flow to other users downstream in the irrigation scheme (1996: 13). In the same way that Nyamaropa catchment villagers claimed that water belonged to their ancestral spirits and to God, upstream users in Nyanyadzi claimed that water belonged to no one but to God, thereby making themselves legitimate stakeholders in the water game (Magadlela, 1996: 4; Bolding 1996: 15).

In Zimbabwe, the Water Act (1976) governs the use of water in every river in the country. Any need to use water for secondary purposes such as for irrigation requires that one apply for a water right through the Water Court, which not only administers water issues, but also assesses water right applications and grants them. There is a first-apply-first-served condition in cases where several people have water rights for water from the same source, which means that the person whose water right is the oldest gets priority use of water in times of shortage (Matinenga, 1995: 2). Only a person with land, that is, owning a piece of land, can apply for, and be granted, a water right. This means that those farmers who farm land in government irrigation schemes do not have water rights themselves, but the schemes have rights applied for and granted to the Minister of the particular department in charge of the irrigation project. Communal and resettlement area farmers have to apply for water rights through their District Administrators (DAs), who are appointed civil servants.

Bolding (1996: 1) says that a catchment perspective in the management of water resources has always had a particular appeal amongst planners and engineers. He adds that the idea of integrated river planning originated from the Tennessee River Authority in America in the 1930s. In Zimbabwe, moves to have a centralized body dealing with water, catchment management, and related subjects, have resulted in the government instituting the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) which was set to start in 1996. It is the contention of this chapter that such bodies desperately need such information, such as is presented here to make applicable and sustainable policy guidelines on natural resource use.

Another related case is presented by van der Zaag concerning irrigation along the Mumvura river in Chinzara communal land (he gave fictitious names 'to protect' the illegal or rightless water users). He characterized farmers in that catchment as having no formal water rights, but a strong sense of a historical user right to river water for irrigation (van der Zaag, 1996: 2). There was also an absence of a centralized 'main system', or one single main canal, and Village Heads played important mediatory roles in cases of conflicts related to land and/or water.

Van der Zaag further pointed out that water allocation in his catchment study was based on farmers giving each other a chance to irrigate, and added that there was

"need to link up the legal and normative frameworks of natural resource use, especially where this resource is shared among different groups of people [with different cultural backgrounds]. The institutional set-up must relate well to the practical reality on the ground" (1996: 5). A critical suggestion that van der Zaag makes is that many ordinary people in communal areas do not regard the Water Act and the principles upon which it is based as legitimate (*ibid*). Naturally to them, and because of what they are used to in farming, the idea of measuring water for each other, in cupsfuls as it were, is inconceivable to most farmers in rural area.

For illustration, below are two cases of 'cluster gardens' or 'community irrigation schemes'² meant to give a closer view of the catchment side of the story, with specific emphasis on different farmers' perceptions of their farming practices. This may sound, from the outset, as an argument to justify catchment usage of water for irrigation purposes without fulfilling proper legal conditions. Actually, yes, there was an element of that, but the idea from the start was to bring to light the differences in perceptions, based on cultural diversity, and on different views and attitudes concerning accessing river water, and highlighting some dilemmas of the farming lives of catchment farmers as closely as possible from their own perceptions of their situation, while contrasting this with the irrigation scheme with which they share the same water source. The spatial distinctions and ethnic dissimilarities also help shed more light on the differential constructions of the extent of the problem by the various cultural groups in the two areas, based on their own localities and how they relate to them.

A salient feature of this 'water arena' was that whenever there was a public (or private) discussion in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme about water shortage, there was almost always mention of catchment villagers as the main culprits. In this chapter I present the basis for their cultural or social differences in perceiving their similar water-for-a-livelihood situation. Also presented are the interfaces of the two domains, and their symbolic, perceptive, social and cultural boundaries, that often delimited their interaction and sanctioned the different ways in which they related to each other, in each other's presence or absence.

The different actors

In the irrigation scheme, the main social actors dealing with catchment farmers were those with formal irrigation plots. These were mainly immigrants or Manyika irrigators and local Barwe irrigators. The other prominent role-players were extension officials from Agritex and local leadership such as headmen.

The link with the catchment area is that most people in villages around the catchment area were originally Barwe too, like the original inhabitants of the area turned into the irrigation scheme in Nyamaropa. Some of the catchment villagers were also settlers or immigrants like the Manyika group in the irrigation scheme, and this further complicated the whole story of cultural identity and group allegiance within the two groups.

As pointed out in Chapter 2, Manyika settlers came and occupied the Nyamaropa irrigation plots as the majority plotters. A few of them were related to those who settled in the catchment area, and this negatively affected how strongly they pushed for catchment villagers to refrain from using water from the river for irrigation purposes.

In the catchment settlement, villagers continued to cultivate their gardens in clusters along the two rivers. They regarded their irrigation practices as the mainstay of their farming livelihoods. They had their own problems such as who had which plots in which parts of the clusters of gardens. Some of their differences were based on the historical resettlement by the colonial government in the 1940s and 1950s from designated commercial land, of groups of Manyika people in an area originally occupied by groups of Barwe villagers³. In an ironically similar manner as in the development of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, local villagers of the Barwe group were 'displaced' from their original villages and gardens, making way for new Manyika settler immigrants. In their gardens the Barwe grew mainly horticultural crops for household consumption. Again, much as in Nyamaropa, they were regarded by the immigrant Manyika as backward and averse to change and/or development in its various forms and features through intervention.

'Stolen goods': irrigators' views of catchment water use

Social relations between farmers in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and its catchment area were fluid and unpredictable. They ranged from a lack of recognition of the other's needs for water use to heated accusations of careless hoarding of water and cruel selfishness. The main bone of contention was the use of water by farmers in the catchment area, who irrigated what both sides referred to as gardens, but which could be said to be clusters of community irrigation schemes. Among irrigators there was widespread conviction that catchment farmers wasted water, that they should be stopped from using the river water (by Agritex or any other responsible external authority). The reason was that they did not pay anything for it, and that at least they should have their main furrows⁴ concrete-lined and their irrigation practices regulated and controlled. The feeling was that Nyamaropa's irrigation water problems would be over once catchment farmers stopped 'indiscriminate use of water'⁵ in their gardens.

A noticeable trend in Nyamaropa was that catchment farmers' gardens along the Murozi and Nyaurungo rivers were *not always* seen as a problem. Irrigators only seemed to realise that the 'gardens' posed a problem during dry seasons or when water was short⁶. One irrigator said:

"We are here because of the irrigation scheme, because there is water here, otherwise we could be somewhere else" (Mautsa, 19 June 1994).

A widowed irrigator contended that,

"We are in business here, we pay money for being here, we have to see the water that we pay for, those people do not pay a cent, but they have *all* the water to themselves, and *the government is doing nothing about it*" (Mai Hakutangwi, 19 May 1995).

The 'we are in business' argument was always present in irrigators' arguments when they were challenged by situations outside their immediate irrigation domain, such as when they were asked by the Headman in Nyamaropa to observe *chisi*, and in this case when they were faced with the threat of water shortage caused, in their view, by catchment users. Their apparent dependence on the government department (Agritex) to take the initiative was based on their contextualised and changing belief that the irrigation scheme belonged to the government, and since the government constructed

it, it must still protect it and its users from external threats. This changed when they needed something like weak or loose regulations so that they could do what they wanted with irrigation land or water, and then they called the Agritex staff dictators. The situation had to always serve their best interests even if this meant that someone else was disadvantaged. On the same note as the last quotation above, another farmer added,

"I was in the committee that went to Samanyika (reference to the catchment area) to negotiate for a solution to our water problems, those people are not playing games, they can kill you. We were threatened with death there, I am not going back there, never, I would rather use the little water remaining, and we may try getting water from Gairezi⁷ [River]" (Matombo, Nyamaropa irrigation farmer, August 1995).

Agritex staff and irrigation farmers in Nyamaropa explained that the irrigation scheme's problems emanated from excessive illegal water usage upstream. Nyamaropa irrigators, however, felt that Agritex, as the Government department and managing agency for irrigation, should lead them in solving the problem of water 'pirating'. Neither farmers nor Agritex wanted to be seen in the forefront in challenging catchment farmers who were using water upstream to stop the practice. Some of the Agritex staff said that the meeting strategy could not effectively deal with the traditional factors which had been raised by village leaders in the catchment area on the issue in a meeting to try and resolve the problem (story below).

The strategy of the extension department was more complex than the idea of just walking up to the catchment area with an army of general hands and closing up or blocking all water take-offs. The example given by Bolding (1996: 8-10) with reference to the Nyanyadzi irrigation scheme and its catchment problems could not work in this case. There were Agritex Extension Workers working in and living with the same catchment farmers whom the Nyamaropa irrigators wanted stopped. The problem also needed to be addressed within the department and among farmers in both sites, before either party could sanction any form of regulative action separately.

Nyamaropa farmers said that their status as irrigators had changed since catchment farmers started taking more water into their 'ever-expanding gardens'. They compared themselves with dryland farmers who had one crop per season, and this was when they seemed most upset by the fact that catchment villagers were using the same water source. During droughts they said that they sometimes had only two crops instead of three per year because water ran short. They blamed this not on changes in rainfall patterns, but on catchment people's use of 'their' (irrigators') water.

Spirits to the rescue: in defence of a natural right?

The 1992 meeting

The harsh drought of 1992 was one of those seasons that forced Nyamaropa irrigation farmers to hunt for reasons for, and solutions to, their water shortage problems. They resolved to confront the problem by convening a meeting with catchment area farmers, and this was held in the catchment area. From Agritex files, the meeting was on the 26th of March 1992 at Samanyika School, near the weir that diverts water from the river to the irrigation scheme via a control dam. There was a team of

representatives from the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, led by the Agricultural Extension Officer (Soil and Water), representing the District Agricultural Extension Officer in Nyanga. There was also a delegation of farmers from the Nyamaropa Irrigation Management Committee, including the chairman and his deputy, two Extension Workers, and the Irrigation Supervisor.

From the catchment area, there were more than a hundred villagers, keen to defend their irrigation interests, and led by six Village Heads and their Spirit Medium. The latter were traditional leaders who acquired their positions through inheritance. They were normally male members of the community who succeeded their fathers. In some cases spiritual leaders such as mediums could be female, depending on their being said to be possessed by a spirit of someone who used to be a powerful and respected leader of that community or group of villagers.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss efficient use of water within the catchment area, and how to develop water projects such as dams and canal lining, and how to apply for water rights in the area. Water rights were supposed to give a person or group of persons a legal entitlement to water use for specified purposes other than for primary domestic usage.

In his report on the meeting, the Agricultural Extension Officer (AEO) present at the meeting said that the villagers were not interested in applying for water rights. They argued that they did not want to pay fees for water as the farmers in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme were asked or forced to do. The report said:

"It looks like there is real war between dryland (catchment) and irrigation farmers on water. No cement works are permitted in the area, such as dams, weirs and canals. Four of them have water rights, but not the vocal Headman Samanyika" (Agritex files, 26 March 1992).

He then went on to describe in the report the heated ending of the meeting whereby the local *Svikiro* (Spirit Medium), as a representative of the local people, with the spirit of Mhiripiri⁸ (literally meaning chillies), who was one of the great warriors of the original Barwe ethnic group in the catchment area, was suddenly possessed by the spirit and spoke on the issue. The spirit gave what appeared to be a summary verdict on the water wrangle. She said that people should not fight over water, they should try to share it, and emphasized that spirits of the catchment community did not want concrete on their land. The spirit concluded by calling for an end to such water meetings, saying that next time people will not attend,

"What are you trying to do? You want *Nyamubarawanda's family* (people in the catchment area) to starve to death? If you close the canals, all the rivers here will dry up...!" (Reconstructed from interviews with Extension staff, and former IMC members who attended the meeting).

There was also a hidden threat that anyone who disobeyed the spirits would pay for it, and irrigators took this seriously when they reported back to their colleagues (Agritex files, 1992; Agricultural Extension Worker from Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 1994; irrigation farmer Matombo, 12 August 1995; former Irrigation Management Committee chairman, Samunda, 11 August 1995; catchment farmer Dzizangwe, 22 August 1995). One significant aspect of the address of the spirit was that *it* (the spirit as a phenomenon detached from the physical spheres and existence of the people *it* purports to represent, but manifesting its presence nevertheless) referred to the

catchment population using the disputed water resources as one family. This derived from the original ethnic group's clan-based family networks, still evident in their similar names in the catchment area. This aspect stood out clearly as the main distinguishing factor between irrigators and catchment villagers. Irrigators were a mixed group and their common identity lay in their common irrigation status.

The point to note here is that catchment villagers were using a subtle and so far effective strategy of spiritual mystification and power, together with playing on irrigators' fears of the unknown, to achieve their objective of continuing to use water with minimal interference from outsiders, or to defend themselves against what they regarded as a threat of external intervention and regulation posed by outsiders including irrigators. Among the Manyika and the Barwe of Eastern Zimbabwe, belief in the power of spirits to influence rainfall patterns or cause misfortune to those who did not listen to them, when they spoke through their mediums, was quite common and taken seriously.

The following sections describe two of the main gardens in the catchment area, one with a fence provided by the Natural Resources Board (a Government department responsible for monitoring environment issues) and the other without a fence, but one of the oldest with original inhabitants of the area.

Claiming their right to a livelihood: catchment villagers' stories from their gardens

Manyau Market Garden (MMG)

This garden was named after the Headman of the village, whose name the village also bears. The garden covered an area of 6,5 hectares, about 1 800m in perimeter. There were 50 plottolders in it. Garden sizes varied in size depending on when one started irrigating and when one settled in the area. Sizes varied from half an acre to four acres per farmer. The garden had an intricate and 'complicated' system of earthen furrows. Farmers seemed well organized in giving each other irrigation turns, and water was apparently in abundance throughout most parts of the year. There was no committee or form of local organisation to regulate irrigation turns and watering practices. Villagers came together to clean their furrows when they were dirty, and 'garden neighbors' discussed and resolved common problems such as reduced flow resulting from furrow blockages or water hoarding by other farmers above them. There were those irregular misunderstandings and some conflicts now and then, but farmers emphasised that there was generally no major cases of conflict over water or garden land.

The garden situation changed in 1992 when government provided fencing material through the Natural Resources Board. It was argued by the two bodies that fencing, which some villagers were openly skeptical about, would help curb further opening of new land for irrigation by outsiders coming to settle in the area because of its water resources. Additionally, this would also protect their gardens from livestock and save the forests from further depletion through need for thorn bush fencing, that is, the use of tree branches and logs to make fences around the gardens.

Manyau garden farmers formed a committee which was meant to run its members' affairs and represent them where necessary. Farmers here were cautious about what they said when I came with Agritex staff from the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme's because they knew that there had been a long-standing wrangle over their use of the

river's water. But after assurances that I was not working for the government, they seemed to relax and openly discuss the history of their gardening. However, I had to emphasise that the study had nothing to do with the issue of anyone trying to gain information in order to be able to impose any changes on them. I stressed repeatedly that I wanted to understand how they were organising themselves, in spite of their cultural differences, and what they thought about the water resources they got access to throughout the year *vis-a-vis* farmers in the irrigation scheme downstream.

The name Manyau Market Garden (MMG) was given to the cluster of gardens in 1993 when they got the fence from government. People in this village started operating the garden much earlier than the 1950s. Elderly villagers said that the first settlers were a group of Barwe⁹ people. In fact, these were the people the Manyau group found when they were brought into the area in trucks after evictions from higher rainfall areas around Nyanga by European settlers. Manyau people came in two groups. The first group arrived in 1951 comprising mainly four families from Nyamandwe village in Mutasa area, almost 100 km away. The second group of about five families, including that of Dzizangwe¹⁰, arrived in 1957 from an area that later became known as Erin Forest, newly designated for commercial farming (producing pine trees).

One of the immigrants to this area, Sekuru Manyunga¹¹, over 70 years old, who settled in the area around 1948, said that they found a group of people (the Barwe) living there and they were farming along the river using earthen furrows to guide water from the river to their small gardens. He said that the same people constructed the furrow that they were still using (as of 1995). The Barwe were then asked by Demonstrators (as extension staff were referred to) to abandon the gardens they had along the river and make way for the establishment of larger gardens by the Manyika settlers.

Sekuru Manyunja pointed out that they were helped by Extension Workers to peg their gardens, and added, "*we were told that we would be doing gardening along the river*". One woman said that they were "transplanted as they were from Mutasa, as a village, and dumped in the poor area with sandy soils producing nothing". Sekuru Manyunga's wish was that they get sprinklers to use for irrigating. He said although they wanted these sprinklers, they would not tolerate a situation whereby a rearrangement of gardens might be required. He said, "I cannot let someone take part of my garden which I have worked and re-worked for the past forty years". These were some of the stands against particular forms of intervention that catchment 'gardeners' resisted. Some of them said that irrigation farmers in the government project in Nyamaropa thought that they (government irrigators) were better human beings and better farmers just because they lived and farmed in a Government-managed project with full-time extension staff in attendance.

The village Headman, Mbanje's ('*mbanje*' is the local term for '*marijuana*', he was over 80 years old) story was similar to that of Sekuru Manyunga about their resettlement. The Headman's wife also added that "*takaudzwa kuti muchanobatsirwa nemagadheni / satshelwa ukuthi sizancedwa yizivande*" (we were told that we were going to be assisted by gardens). She went on to say that they then started pegging their gardens and fields with the help of Extension Workers whom she remembered as Chabikwa and Kundhlande (these were the same names of Demonstrators who helped construct the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme).

Headman Mbanje said that when they came to the area¹² they found the Barwe doing some farming along the river but these later moved to Chidokori garden where

they opened new furrows and started gardening. He added that many people who came from richer lands in designated European areas found out that the soils were poor and not productive and decided to move to other places such as the irrigation scheme in Nyamaropa. He said when they started gardening they were producing mainly vegetables for their household consumption. Two of the villagers, Dzizangwe and Doto, said that because of poor sandy soils in their allocated fields at a distance from their homesteads, they had poor yields each year. This made them abandon these fields to focus on fencing their yards, which had better soils, so as to utilize them. Most homesteads during the summer (rainy) season had maize crops right round their huts and houses to use all the space available. Shortage of good farming land made gardens more attractive near river banks with richer soils and good water supplies.

Mbuya (grandmother) Doto said that they used to produce a lot of vegetables, especially cabbages, in their gardens. She added, with a feeling of having helped Nyamaropa irrigators set up the project, that during the construction of the irrigation scheme in the 1960's, they used to put their cabbages in sacks and carry them on their backs to the Nyamaropa irrigation project site where they were weighed and the sellers paid according to the weight of each cabbage. They grew maize on a small scale, because "at that time the gardens were still very small", and there was a lot of *muroue* (water logging), but they did master some methods of irrigating with more practice over time.

One of the most notorious problems facing villagers in the catchment area was the poor access routes into the area. There was no good road linking the area with the main tarred road seven kilometers away which served the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. There were dirt tracks which were difficult to pass even with an ox-drawn cart. The problem was exaggerated by river flooding during the rainy season which made it impossible for anyone to cross after heavy rains. Nevertheless, villagers still said that they would not want to live anywhere else, and would not like to have anyone imposing rules of farming or irrigating on them.

There was some resistance in the area against new settlers. But there had been some settlers that same year (1994). One of the latest immigrants said he came to the area in 1993 from Nyadowa, a generally dry and hilly area about thirty kilometers away. He put his main reason for coming to Manyau as that of the idea of gardening, and added, 'Here we are always farming all year round and through that we can easily combat the drought'(sic).

He said that when he came to the area he negotiated with Headman Mbanje who then asked for *mutete*, and he paid Z\$10 (about US\$1, in 1994). A *mutete* is a gift or form of tribute or homage paid to traditional leaders as a sign that one accepts to be their subject and to stick to the particular area's traditional laws.

Dzizangwe, a former primary school teacher and chairman of the garden committee, and quite a popular leader in the area, castigated the Headman for allowing people to settle in the area without other villagers' prior knowledge. He accused him of taking bribes from 'these people', and said that when someone came into an area to stay they should be introduced to 'the people'. They should also have a letter stating where they came from and their reasons for leaving their former area, and why they were choosing that particular village. He said that he was aware that these new people were coming to Manyau gardens because there was water, and asked where they will get space since the whole garden area was full. There was a

sense of wanting to protect their irrigation status and their access to free flowing water and gardens.

There were two main furrows that ran through the garden, and farmers drew their water in turns from them through their own channels that ran through the individual or family gardens. The main weir was normally always open except during wet spells with a lot of rain when they blocked their main furrows. Farmers with larger gardens said that they irrigated at night to give others a chance to irrigate during the day. They seemed to be quite well organized.

Chidokori community garden

There was no stated figure for the size of this garden, but it was much bigger than Manyau Market Garden, and less organized in terms of having a clear committee running farmers' affairs, no formal rules or written bye-laws, and no fence. There were more than a hundred farmers in Chidokori each with a different size of a garden, ranging from half an acre to just above five acres. Most farmers in this garden were of the Barwe ethnic group, from the group that was moved from the village now occupied by Manyau village and garden.

One of the farmers interviewed was one of the first people who started gardens in the whole catchment area, *Sekuru Karera*, who was over 95 years old¹³. He constructed the first furrow in Manyau along Nyaurungo river with his family to grow crops in winter when there were no rains. *Sekuru Karera* went to work in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme during the construction of the main canal to the irrigation project. He said that most of the Chidokori villagers came together and constructed a furrow along Murozi river into their fields and that was how the garden started. Demonstrators, some of whom had been involved in the Nyamaropa project only 20 km away, then came and pegged the gardens for them.

Sekuru Karera was given a provisional water right through the help of a White man linked to the irrigation scheme. He was asked to choose between being given money for his work and the right to use water any time of the year. He chose the chance (or right) to use water, and said that he was given a letter for that. It was not clear if the water right applied to the whole garden area or to him alone, but farmers in the garden used that as a legitimate claim to water and referred to themselves as a large family working together for their children.

His son, in charge of farming in the family garden, asked why irrigators seemed so determined that farmers in the catchment area should not use water: "Is it that they think that their water right which they were given by the government at the start of the irrigation scheme is better than that which we have?". He went on to question the logic behind the argument that catchment farmers should limit their water use and use only as much water as they required. His argument was that it was not the farmers who limited water usage, but the requirements of the crops that they grew and the degree of dryness of the soils.

The example of the old man having, or claiming to have, a water right, served to highlight different levels and forms of legitimation that farmers in the catchment area had, or employed, in order to retain unregulated access to river water. The old man was respected in the social circles of catchment gardeners as representing one of the leaders who could lead and guide them in defence of their right to water use. He said that Nyamaropa irrigators regarded themselves as better people than catchment

villagers mainly because Government put up the scheme for them and they had constant support from Government and other organizations. There was a simmering wave of disapproval of the way Nyamaropa farmers regarded catchment farmers, and the identity and/or status contest of 'irrigator' which centered on water access and use.

Chidokori garden was different from Manyau garden in that it comprised people of several villages. This could have been one reason why there was less unity among gardeners there as compared to those of Manyau garden who came from one village with a few, mainly related, families. However, this did not mean that they were a really disorganised group of farmers in cluster gardens. They had over the years established informal ways of sharing water and giving each other irrigation turns in their shared furrows. This was a system that appeared to have been working well, especially going by the few reported incidents of conflict over water that they cited. They could also mention a few incidents of local clashes in order to give the impression that they were living and sharing water harmoniously, especially compared to irrigation farmers from Nyamaropa.

Most farmers in the two gardens had fish ponds which got water from underground through seepage, a clear sign that the soil was saturated with water. Furrows in the gardens were said by Agritex staff to take approximately 70 per cent of the flow of their rivers, and because of the type of soils (sandy loams), water could easily move through seepage and the gardens could easily be water-logged. There were several gardens where farmers ridged their fields or made high beds for vegetables to avoid constant crop water saturation.

Most farmers in Chidokori gardens said that they would like the furrows to be lined with concrete. The belief in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme was that catchment farmers did not want to line the furrows with concrete just to fix the irrigation scheme. Some irrigators said that the argument not to line them for spiritual reasons was only a strategy to stay clear of external influence. But none of the irrigators seemed keen enough to directly challenge catchment leaders on the issue. Threats of witchcraft seemed to hold them at bay. Among catchment gardeners themselves there was no consensus on the issue of lining the furrows.

In Chidokori garden especially, there was a serious problem of water-logging, seen in some of the stunted yellow or reddish crops in their gardens. Some of the farmers expressed interest in concrete lining of furrows to control seepage from furrows into gardens, and wanted to take that up as a compromise with Nyamaropa irrigators, one which would also work well for them. They added that this would reduce the threat of having irrigation farmers from Nyamaropa demanding the closure of canals when they ran out of water, and would enable them to use less, be able to throw it back into the river if not used, and close the furrows during the rain season. They said that then they could all share it peacefully because it was all theirs from God and the spirits.

Traditional ceremonies: a sense of community or cultural identity?

Unlike irrigation farmers in Nyamaropa who were a more mixed group and tended to mind their own business as individuals, catchment villagers had occasions where almost everyone convened to participate in ceremonies that they regarded as a form of collective or community identity. One of the traditional ceremonies which they held together was *Maqanzvo* (rain making ceremony). *Mbuya* Chapoterera, who was in her late seventies, said that each village brewed its beer and an assigned date in October

was agreed upon before the onset of summer rains. The beer was then taken by a few selected people to the Headman's place. When the beer got to the chosen place in the morning there were people who were supposed to handle the pots of beer and put them in the hut near the *chikuwa* (normally this is a sacred place in the kitchen, where elders would kneel and talk to ancestral spirits).

Villagers called each other to the ceremony by beating drums. The following day people would drink beer and dance, and the spirits of the ancestors would speak to them about anything concerning rain and other issues in their lives. The spirits, through their chosen ones living in the village (normally called *svikiro*, meaning through whom they arrive) would also call out any other misbehaviour of people which might stop rains from falling, such as climbing the sacred mountain nearby (see Map 4.1). People seemed to agree that this was the way things had to be done for them to get what they wanted from their ancestors and the land.

The Headman of Chidokori village said that they always brewed beer for *Maganzoo* (rain-making ceremony) and told their ancestors that they were about to start tilling their ancestors' land, and therefore could they be so kind as to give them some rain to make that venture possible and profitable. Villagers also asked the spirits during these ceremonies to protect their fields from wild animals who tended to invade them. The Headman added that a contingent of elderly people would be sent with some calabashes of beer to the graves of great fathers of the original Barwe ethnic group, Nyamubarawanda (also the name of the ward or area in general and the name of the sacred mountain) and Mhiripiri, where further rituals would be performed in their honour in secret.

None of this traditional celebration of links with the dead and protection of natural resources as part of a culture of a group of people was evident among Nyamaropa irrigators, although there were ethnic links with some catchment farmers. Nyamaropa irrigation farmers actually regarded traditional ceremonies with disdain, after the missionary and Christian teachings in the Bible that condemned ancestral worship as heathen practices. Although some catchment villagers did go to some Churches, they still considered their ancestors to be playing crucial roles in their lives, roles that could not be discarded easily even in the face of intervention onslaught. If some of them did not directly or seriously believe in the powers of their ancestors to affect their lives, at least they chose to use these beliefs to their benefit in water wrangles with rival users of the same water source.

A critical aspect of the analysis of cultural identity and difference and resource accessing was that although they had different religious beliefs among themselves, catchment farmers regarded their gardens as their common responsibility. There was evidently more co-operation among catchment farmers on traditional ceremonial activities than among irrigators in the government project on, for example, water distribution between plotters. One of the main distinguishing factors was that catchment farmers were villagers who shared more than just a common geographical area and the same water sources for their gardens, but also had closer kinship and familial relations than 'formal' irrigators downstream. They could also easily mobilize themselves as an entity with common or collective responsibilities such as cleaning of canals and observing strict traditional rites. This was evident in the way they shared water with no formal rules and regulations from outside, and with limited technical assistance on irrigation practices. Besides being an indication of the success of community-managed irrigation schemes, the example of catchment farmers' common

(community) practices reveals the complexity of social relations and cultural identity centered on livelihood practices. It brings to the fore how far rural dwellers facing challenges in their quest to earn a living through farming can go in their defence of their natural right to access natural resources.

Chisi, informal rules and catchment identity

Catchment farmers said that anyone who worked on *chisi* (resting day) got punished some day. Any misfortune that befell that person later was seen as some form of punishment for their offences. The shortage of water in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme was interpreted by some of the catchment villagers as due reward for their disregard for traditional values. They said that joining the government project had made some irrigation farmers feel powerful and self-important, or arrogant and complacent, and the spirits were not happy with their attitude to natural resources and to other people using them. The expression used was, "*chisi hachieri musu wacharimwa*" (a resting day is not sacred/taboo only on the day of the offence, meaning that if one worked on the sacred day their punishment would not be immediate, it might be seasons or months later).

One elderly woman cited the example of the Headman's wife *Mbuya* Mbanje, who used to work secretly on *chisi* day. One day baboons came down from the sacred Nyamubarawanda mountain, followed the Nyaurungo river where the garden's water came from, ran past other farmers' gardens and got into the offender's garden. They ate and destroyed her maize crop, and then they took off on the same route back up the mountain without touching anybody else's fields.

Dzizangwe, the Manyau Market Garden's chairman, said that Mlambo, one of the new settlers in the village, used to disregard *chisi* and would do some work such as weeding in his maize while hiding in the crops. He was shocked to see that only his maize was being eaten by baboons. He stopped the practice and they stopped too! Dzizangwe himself one day decided to trap these baboons, caught one of them and killed it for his dogs, but was amazed when baboons came down the mountain and invaded his field. They believed that if they did not kill wild animals in the area, did not work on *chisi*, and showed respect for each other, especially their elders, and worked together, they would get almost all the blessings they asked for, including good rains, thick forests and good harvests every year.

Of course another explanation to the baboon invasion of particular fields could be that they were located where wild animals could easily access them with little disturbance from human beings. What mattered, however, was not baboons invading villager X's fields *per se*, but the meaning that others in the community attached to the incident, and how it was related to their ways of life in relation to utilising natural resources.

Even Christians did not work on *chisi* days (Wednesdays) in the catchment area. There were Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics and ZAOGA members in the area. One member of the Apostolic Faith sect said, "*we have to give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, so we do not work on Wednesdays but we also keep the day of the Sabbath*". The way farmers in these catchment villages related to *chisi* was different from that of farmers in the irrigation scheme who did not like it. Catchment villagers respected it and ascribed water availability in *their* rivers to their loyalty to and respect for their ancestors. They argued that they should be left alone not only to use the water, but also to worship

their ancestors who gave them that water. They argued with a stronger social and cultural voice than their counterparts in the irrigation scheme.

There were more signs of collective group activity besides rain making ceremonies and observing *chisi*. Manyau villagers had what they called *majana* (collective cattle herding where they gave each other turns as families to tend cattle). During the fencing of the gardens they worked together closely as a unit, and almost everyone cooperated to the extent that it was completed on schedule. Those who did not participate in each day's activities during fencing were fined nominal sums of money ranging from Z\$2 to Z\$6, mainly seen as their contribution to the project.

In Chidokori garden, they came together to clean furrows when the need arose, such as after heavy rains washed dirt into them. They all took part in the exercise because they knew that they would benefit from it. Ironically, this was not the case in the government irrigation scheme in Nyamaropa downstream; farmers did not clean canals, which they left to government workers from Agritex, and were sometimes too busy to attend their own meetings.

Water squabbles and other problems

However, the situation in the gardens was not always as rosy as the cases above portrayed. There had been clashes over water among some farmers. Some villagers said that others held on to water for too long even when their gardens were saturated. Sekuru Manyunga gave his story about this one time when he spent the whole day waiting for water to irrigate his garden, he paid several visits to the farmer who was taking the water and found the ground wet, but the farmer would not release water. Another case was of one farmer who had to forcefully close water being 'over-used' by someone else just to be able to irrigate his own garden for an hour. Gardens were of different sizes and there was no regulation that stipulated the amount of time one had to take to irrigate their garden, they had to regulate each other, and this often spelt conflict among different farmers.

Like farmers in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, some villagers in the catchment gardens leased part of their irrigated plots to outsiders, locally referred to as *maloja* ('lodgers'), and this was said to create water-sharing problems, especially by those who opposed the practice. Some of them said that they had to get their relatives who wanted to grow food crops (especially wheat) during droughts to do the work for themselves since there was water, rather than work and then give them food. In Manyau garden's written down rules and regulations, there was one rule (rule number 14) that said, '*thou shalt not lease a garden on a temporary basis to people from other villages*'. Ironically, it was written in the Biblical way (use of 'thou shalt', possibly to emphasize the power and sacredness of the rules). This was one example of the underlying value of having access to a garden and the eagerness to defend it at every opportunity available, from any (would-be) intruders.

There were serious marketing problems faced by farmers from the catchment gardens. They claimed that if they had a reliable market they would be wealthy. A lot of their vegetables could be seen rotting in their fields, and the only partly viable market was the local Regina Coeli Mission school and hospital, which was often flooded with produce from both catchment gardens and the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. However, there were people who came from other areas afar to buy green

mealies (which were often earlier than in other areas because catchment farmers always had water), vegetables, and sometimes fruit such as mango and banana.

Some elderly people from the catchment area expressed concern about members of the Apostolic Faith sect and other new Churches who went to pray in sacred places such as mountains, rivers and under sacred trees. They said that this was what led to more droughts, to wild animals destroying crops and the creation of social strife in general, like dryland farmers in Nyamaropa. They said that such places should be made known to all visitors or settlers who needed to be told where not to go and what not to do in the area. This compared well with the case in Nyamaropa where the Headman convened a meeting with all the Church leaders in his area and castigated them for disrupting spiritual harmony and upsetting the spirits, leading to poor rainfall (see Magadlela, 1994: 8, and Chapter 3 above).

Crop rotations

Farmers rotated maize in summer, beans in mid-summer, and wheat in winter, with a variety of vegetables scattered throughout the season. They said that their main fields were around their homesteads for security against livestock, and as noted above, the soils in the fields they were allocated were too poor and sandy to waste time cultivating. Maize from the gardens provided most of the food for the catchment people as a staple. Beans and wheat, together with vegetables, were major supplements. Agritex played a significant role in assisting farmers run their gardens and improve their production and farming practices. There were a lot of *madhumbé* (yams) which were a popular crop and thrived in abundant water.

In the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, farmers usually grew maize, tobacco and cotton in summer, beans in late-summer, and wheat in winter, with a variety of other horticultural crops throughout the year. Their winter irrigation had repeatedly been faced with water shortage problems which they attributed not to poor or inadequate storage facilities, but to illegal abstraction upstream by catchment villagers. Catchment villagers believed that irrigators in the government project were jealous of their freedom to grow what they wanted, without an imposed official cropping programme that Agritex as the managing government department subjected irrigators to every season.

Catchment villagers also claimed that Nyamaropa irrigators could not stomach the idea that catchment farmers' crops were always grown (and matured) earlier than those of irrigators, and that they grew almost anything they wanted. One irrigator from Nyamaropa said,

"Those people have all the crops that we grow here (in the irrigation scheme) in their gardens, they irrigate at will, they have government extension workers helping them, and still they do not pay a cent for the water... we pay hundreds of dollars every year and still have to wait and beg them to release water for us... *kupenga uku/ yikuhlanya lokhu* (this is madness)".

Some of the irrigators with relatives in the catchment area brought fresh mealies for their families when they visited, and this was evidence that farmers in the catchment area were doing well for themselves. Still, the role of government personnel in the area remained controversial to irrigators, who could not understand why extension staff

could not stop or at least regulate catchment water usage to give irrigators in the government project first priority based on their 1960 water right.

Discussion

When someone said 'catchment management', the first image that this phrase conjured up in my mind was of a team of technical land planning experts drawing up strategies of how to ensure that the source of water for a particular agricultural project could be secured against intrusion and 'illegal' tampering with its water by pirates of one type or another. This chapter, on the contrary, did not look at technical issues surrounding the catchment debate as such, but focused on some sociological areas of differing perceptions of river water use setting catchment villagers apart from irrigation farmers in a government managed irrigation project.

The chapter presented what can easily pass for different actors' perceptions of what irrigators thought of catchment farmers' livelihood strategies, laced with feelings of jealousy towards catchment use of water 'for free', and some stories about catchment farmers' lives in general. It also looked into how catchment villagers viewed their own situation *vis-a-vis* that of irrigators, especially from a farmers' historical constructivist point of view. Each group of farmers' point of view was based on their respective situations with respect to water and land, an area where most cultural identities, and varied perceptions were embedded.

The first important point of discussion in the chapter is the clash between two livelihood contexts. That of historical traditional entitlement to a natural resource where the right to access water was predicated on one's very existence and residence in a village and having a plot in the area of local gardens. The second critical issue was that of a government irrigation scheme with a formal right to use the river's water for farming purposes under government administration, and irrigation farmers' apparent anger at the free use of the same water by catchment villagers. The two highlights of the chapter expose the contradictions surrounding official formal rules regulating natural resource use in rural areas. This is a critical aspect of policy, especially crucial for people who rely on land and water resources to earn a living with no legal claims to that water. By granting irrigators priority rights over water use, the Water (Amendment No.2) Act (1984) stratified the needs of rural people and placed a formal commercial value on water. The people on which it was applied barely understand why, and used their own basis to (re)claim what they regarded as their rightful entitlement to water use. Apparently, irrigators needed the same water to survive, and appealing to government extension staff to resolve the problem appeared to be the only feasible channel to follow. The cultural differences and identities of these two groups, which were continuously being reconstructed during processes of interaction, negotiation and discussions of their common problems, played significant roles in their respective arguments for entitlement to water. In the meeting between the two parties, the 'we are in business' culture of formal irrigators lost against the 'we are a family' cultural identity of catchment villagers. The two domains were bound to remain in contact and in conflict over the years unless Nyamaropa farmers got alternative sources of water or drastic measure were taken to regulate catchment usage of river water.

A major aspect of perceptive difference between catchment villagers and Nyamaropa irrigators was not just to the water they shared, but to their spiritual

authorities. Villagers in the catchment area showed that they took their beliefs in ancestral spirits to provide for them more seriously than their irrigation counterparts took their Churches' ability to answer their calls for more water. Most irrigators were members of one or the other of the dozen or so Churches in the Nyamaropa area, but they ran to the government department to ask for more water. There was evidence of some irrigators making efforts to remove themselves from anything to do with traditional beliefs and traditional ceremonies, such as the rain-making ceremony attended only by leaders and elders of the area. They openly protested against observing *chisi* (the traditional resting day) every Friday (in Nyamaropa), citing time wastage and that they were in business in the irrigation scheme (Magadlela, 1995: 14).

Irrigators argued that because the irrigation scheme had a water right which it was given when it started operating in 1960, and all catchment farmers (except two) had no water rights, they were therefore illegal users. Catchment farmers, however, contended that they did not need a piece of paper with a government official's signature to give them permission to use water that their ancestors and God gave them for free every year, and they would not be cheated into paying for it by someone who either brought a fence, lined their furrows or did some changes in their gardens. The strength of their belief in supernatural powers to provide for them was illustrated by the way they observed and strictly followed traditional rules and rites such as *chisi* (resting day), *Maganzvo* (rain-making ceremony), and how well they treated nature's blessings such as wild animals, trees and rivers. These 'things' represented a strong sense of cultural identity among catchment farmers, taken up at that particular time of external threats even by those who might not have strongly believed in those powers' potential to influence their lives. These beliefs were encapsulating different tenets of an evolving culture of working together and defending a common community resource. The cultural mobilisation of the catchment domain, the way the cultural arsenal was assembled in the examples given above, presents one of the interesting responses of local communities to external intervention. The agency and strategic character of catchment actors, in spite of their own internal differences or diversities religiously and ethnically, illustrates the usefulness of looking at social actors' lives and activities as part of changing processes in their efforts to improve or change their lives.

Water law in Zimbabwe was governed by the Water Act, No. 41 of 1976, now with the Water (Amendment No.2) Act of 1984. The English version of the law said that there was a "riparian right whereby one had the right to use a portion of the flow of a water course that arose by virtue of ownership of land bordering a stream". They had what were called primary water rights whereby they had rights to use of water in a river by virtue of their residence close to it, but the right entitled them to use river water only for domestic and basic subsistence household purposes, and not for commercial ventures such as irrigating a tomato crop for sale in town. That would be illegal, but they did it anyway.

Catchment farmers did not 'own' any land in the strict commercial sense, but only had user rights to all 'their' land, which in turn meant that they did not have permanent water rights. However, under the use of traditional tenure systems, they did have what passed as 'communal land ownership' (see Rukuni, 1995). The underlying point, though, was that villagers in the catchment area did not see themselves as in a position to be asking someone in the first place for the right to use free-flowing water to earn a living. They saw their use of the river's water as their basic fundamental and natural right to life. Besides that, mere observation pointed to the

fact that they depended on the small gardens which they cultivated every season for their subsistence, especially during drought seasons when their homestead plots did not produce enough food to survive on: the gardens had become their life-line, and they all knew that.

The application of Roman Dutch law which governed water use through appropriative rights showed that rights in this case were not dependent on ownership of riparian land, but on the application of water to a beneficial use (Matinenga, 1995: 1). Catchment farmers could not be drawn to apply for water rights because they said that it was a way of getting them to pay for the water and they were not going to have it. They did not see themselves as using stolen property at all, but a right to a living which no one should take it upon themselves to allocate or deny another. The meeting they held, with representatives from government and irrigation farmers from Nyamaropa, showed how they enrolled myth or supernatural powers to defend their rights to water and to their livelihoods. On this basis, the two groups relied on different social and legal bases for claims to water use. The catchment use of river water seemed to partly go against some official recommendations from a legal point of view. Matinenga, in a paper presented at a ZFU workshop in 1995, said,

"There is need to preserve water flow,...serious thought must be given to stopping, by legislation, any application to abstract from river flow. The legislation could accommodate minor abstractions to a maximum of...three litres per second" (1995: 6).

What this did not tell the ordinary communal area smallholder farmer (and even a very discerning one at that), was how much land they could cultivate with how much water if it was going to be measured in cupfuls for them.

Agronomically, there seemed to be not much difference between the gardens and the irrigation scheme, except that there were no rules on paying fees, fertiliser application, rotations, clearing of land, and several other formal regulations that irrigators were subjected to. Irrigators produced much more of each crop because of their larger plots and the intensive and competitive environment in the irrigation scheme where Extension Workers saw to it that they raised their production performances all the time.

Catchment farmers said that there were generally very few quarrels among them over water because it was always in abundance. Some of them laughed off the fact that irrigators wanted them to stop using their water. They said that if irrigators wanted *their* water, then where was the water that they, in the catchment area, were also given by God and their spirits who wanted everyone of them to survive?

It was apparent that the two groups were arguing from two parallel sides which seemed almost irreconcilable. Exchanging accusations might not solve their problems, and meetings with assumptions that the other side had a more legitimate claim backed by formal legal water rights would not yield fruitful results because the other side also strongly believed in its own basis for accessing the same water. Individual farmers on both sides had expressed concern for the other's need to survive, and that could be encouraged to foster more non-confrontational dialogue. Both sides had their own versions of what they saw as legitimate right to claim use of the same water, and saw the other's right as full of loop holes. Another point which I chose not to go into for lack of relevant detail was that some of them were related, and did not want to deny each other a chance to earn a living.

Agritex staff in the irrigation scheme did not recommend closing the illegal extraction points as such, but called for efficient use of water, and lining of furrows. Agritex staff in the catchment area who worked with the 'illegal' water users said that they had to continue to teach them improved methods of farming, and did not dwell much on irrigation or drainage issues apart from encouraging farmers to drain excess water to reduce lodging.

On the whole, it seemed that there was no water right which was more important than the other between the two sides of the water story. A right to water use seemed to be inherently a right to make a living. In the same way, a denial of that right either from a legal or traditional point of view was denying people the ability or capacity to provide basic food requirements for themselves and their families.

More anthropological and sociological studies of catchment areas and their relationships with downstream farming, such as irrigation schemes, will help focus more attention on how viable some of these projects can be over time. This can be assisted by detailed studies of projects' life histories and, if possible, projections of (increased) probable human settlements in catchment areas because of water availability. A dearth of knowledge on this part may mean that more intensified settlements in catchment areas may result in hardly any water flowing down to the larger formal projects, and lead to searches for alternative sources of irrigation water, or to intense conflicts and social discord between groups of people in the same area. Worse situations of irrigation schemes being turned into summer only schemes are unfathomable, but catchments are there, they can be protected at a price, but their water resources will remain attractive to an increasing number of people.

This chapter has showed that geographical location, ethnic differences, social and cultural identities and differences, religious, traditional and political inclinations, have significant bearings on how different groups of rural communities strategise in sharing the same water resources on whose availability their very livelihoods depend. It also showed how they can use these particular differences to lay claim on, and compete for, priority access to, or use of, similar resources. There is an underlying questioning of the applicability of national laws governing resource utilisation. The Water Act, although currently (and rightly so) being reviewed, comes under the spotlight. There is need for a new paradigm of whole catchment area management with a new framework that takes into account the different interests of all stakeholders. This policy move should recognize the basis of each party's claims and not ignore what may be termed the cultural idiosyncracies of catchment farmers. The various actors' physical and cultural or symbolic boundaries, which influenced and continuously reshaped their beliefs and subsequent practices, should not be ignored either.

Notes

1. There were parallels between the Nyamaropa and Nyanyadzi irrigation schemes and their catchment areas. The Nyanyadzi irrigation scheme, although started earlier, in 1932 (Nyamaropa in 1960), had a command area of 414 hectares, and Nyamaropa 500 hectares (442 developed); both were government projects and managed by Agritex. Both used surface canal irrigation systems and took water from rivers whose water had long been used by other people upstream whom irrigators in the government projects believed should be stopped from doing so. Both schemes had seasonal water shortages when rainfalls were low, and this was when they initiated moves to have catchment users

either stopped or controlled (Magadlela, 1996; Bolding, 1996).

2.. Map 4.1 shows roughly the layout of the catchment area from a catchment farmers' own drawing. Farmers in both the irrigation scheme and the catchment area generally referred to the small irrigated plots as *gardens*. My impression from talking to both sides was that catchment farmers called them gardens to give an impression of smallness, thereby claiming that the gardens' water needs had insignificant effects on river flows, while irrigators called them gardens either because catchment farmers called them that, or because this gave them the image of stream-bank cultivation which was illegal.

3.. I use the term 'villagers' here because it carries with it a more neutral meaning than, for example, 'peasants', 'farmers' or 'producers', which have all been found controversial when used in some contexts. These 'villagers' can also be referred to as 'farmers' in the sense that they did a lot of farming for their own consumption and for local marketing. The Barwe lived in villages which they could still identify by location and totemic relations, but were displaced by the Manyika who were settled in the area from the 1940s. They still shared the rivers and the garden lands along the same rivers.

4.. Some of the villagers referred to the water courses as '*makanali*' (canals), while others simply called them '*migero*', the plural for '*mugero*' (which translates as canal or furrow).

5.. Irrigators believed that catchment farmers did not know how to use water *efficiently*, but catchment farmers said that they used water carefully, although some parts of their gardens were almost always water logged. They said that they still did not consider themselves to be *wasting* water, but rather saw themselves as *using* it differently from irrigators.

6.. In related findings from catchment studies, Bolding (1996: 5), and van der Zaag (1996: 2), both found that water-related conflicts between formal or government-managed irrigation scheme farmers and catchment or informal irrigators, escalated during periods of water shortages or when rains fell short, sometimes worsening during the normally dry winter seasons.

7.. This was a big perennial river bordering Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and was much closer to the irrigation scheme than the catchment area, although the latter had been chosen for its manageable topographic to get water to Nyamaropa. The problem was that it would take pumping engines and pipes to draw water from there, and farmers were not exactly willing to pay the price for it just yet.

8.. It was not very clear who really got possessed and by whose spirit. The *svikiro* (medium) herself, *Mbuya* Kamimira, did not say, but her relatives, and many other people in the area, said that she was the one who spoke and warned outsiders that if they harassed Nyamubarawanda's children (meaning the local people), all rivers in the area would run dry, a threat which was taken seriously by their visitors.

9.. In Nyamaropa, and in the catchment area, the Barwe were generally regarded as a backward group of people who were resistant to change. But these were the people who were said to have initially constructed irrigation furrows in the catchment area. In both areas, I was warned not to use the term 'Barwe' since it was considered derogatory and insulting.

10.. Dzizangwe was a former teacher and one of the local leaders among catchment farmers. He was chairman of the fenced Manyau Market Garden and was said by outsiders, especially extension staff, to be more approachable than most local villagers who were always skeptical about the intentions of people who visited the catchment area.

11.. The term *Sekuru* here was used in a respectful sense referring to elderly males in the community, or when referring to one's grandfather. It could also be used to refer to one's mother's brothers.

12.. This was during the time when European farmers were buying farms or being given land after the Second World War. Part of the resettlements were effects of the Land Apportionment Act (1931).

13.. Many people in the village believed that Taundi Jiri Karera and Night Tendesai Nyagomo, his brother-in-law, also over 95 years old, did some magical trick with their lives so that they would not die, and that was believed to be why they were still alive at that age. Local legend had it that they were over a hundred years old.

14. In the two gardens, *chisi* day fell on Wednesdays. In Nyamaropa it was on Fridays, and irrigators had always resisted and tried to disobey traditional leaders who tried to enforce it. There was more agreement on, and respect for, traditional rules in the catchment area than in the irrigation scheme.

15. A crucial factor in the case of Nyamaropa irrigators was that the chairman of the Irrigation Management Committee (for three successive one-year terms), which represented farmers in all for a,

had lived in the area before joining the irrigation scheme. His younger brother left the irrigation scheme to go and live there with his family and had two gardens in which he produced most of his food. The former could thus not be expected to lead irrigators into the catchment area to close the furrows in the same irrigation farmers as Agritex staff in Nyanyadzi did (Bolding, 1996).

PART THREE: A Shared Lifeworld

Chapter 5: Gendered identities in irrigated livelihoods

Introduction

This chapter is about identities, mainly gendered ones, in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme and its immediate surrounding dryland areas. A focus on women's and men's relations in many contexts is often clouded with normative issues of who ought to do what and why. Sometimes it is full of questions on the validity of the information one gets from a situation where one group is already disadvantaged even in its ability to express itself on problems that it faces. The context of the present analysis was in a development, cultural and social situation where men generally dominated in most spheres of life, both in the public and household domains. There were exceptions of course, but the predominance of a patriarchal culture was evident in the roles both men and women played in those of their various activities that called for interaction between the two parties.

Looking into gender identities in the irrigation scheme was bound to be problematic on several fronts: first, the majority of irrigators were on the elderly side of their lives. My own prejudices told me that they were bound to be a little more conservative in their views about gender roles in their lives or the lives of their children. Secondly, there was a large number of widows in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, dating back to its early days (Table 3, in Chapter 2). This was a phenomenon which, besides some suspicious comments by some members of the community about a male researcher (outsider) frequenting widows' homesteads, meant that one had to try and deconstruct local perceptions of widowhood, of women farmers, and of why men and women had the types of cultural identities they carried around or gave to each other.

Some common or typical situations of households in Nyamaropa were the presence of a woman as the main farmer, or an elderly couple as plotters, with one or two casual or permanent workers, or sometimes they would live with one or two relatives. For most households of widows, there was either a relative or an employee living with them to help out with daily tasks. In some cases there were no workers and widows got together to help each other out. In what extension staff sometimes referred to as 'normal' households, those households with a man and a woman living and working together in the irrigation scheme, the couple would go to the field together, then a relative or child, or the woman, would prepare food to take to them in the fields. Some families spent the whole day in their fields if they had someone to cook for them and bring them food. In most cases of 'normal' households, the woman would go home earlier to cook for the family in the afternoon or evening, while the man did other tasks or went for a beer drink. The cultural construction of gender identities was what became part of the central thesis in this chapter, as issues of manipulation and struggles for status elevation exposed some of the so-called traditionally sanctioned and almost sacred male-empowering roles.

The first part of this chapter looks at issues of women in agriculture in Zimbabwe, and this is followed by a consideration of gender issues in irrigation situations in Zimbabwe, followed by case studies of women and widows around the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. The material is so presented here that the various ways in which men and women regard each others' identities comes out first. It is the shaping of

identities influenced by a male-dominating ideology that is interesting in the analysis. At the end of the chapter, in the discussion, I try to show how the case studies bring out the different ways in which cultural identities influence practices, and how these change in the daily lives of people who interact with others and thus change their whole lives, or their views of it. The irrigation scheme as an open field of social relations here saw clashes of what can be termed gender domains. Within these domains are found arenas of conflict and contestations of identities among groups of farmers, based on gendered definitions of roles deemed suitable for either men or women.

Women in Agriculture in Zimbabwe

Women in Zimbabwe's communal area agriculture play leading roles in the production to processing of most of the crops. They generally do most of the farming work, they are the farmers in most communal and resettlement areas (Cheater, 1987; Callear, 1988; Muchena, 1994). Demands on female labour and women's management of their farming enterprises present some of the crucial areas of analysis in studies of gender and agriculture in developing regions. The way men and women regard each other's work in rural areas around Zimbabwe is influenced by the way they relate to each other, and this is shaped by the cultural framework in which their relationships are embedded or from which they emerge.

Some of the crucial reasons why women have not been able to significantly influence policy are historical, attitudinal and ideological (Muchena, 1994: 348). In most cases in Zimbabwe, especially in rural areas, gender relations are characterised by male domination where men play dominant managerial roles in household activities. In cases where men have migrated to seek wage employment in mines, commercial farms or urban areas, women take over managerial roles of their households and become *de facto* household heads. There are cases, however, where women do play leading roles in the presence of their male counterparts, especially under irrigation conditions (Vijfhuizen, 1994), but so far these are not well known cases, they are unique cases needing more investigation.

Traditional forms of relating to land in most parts of Zimbabwe where farmers have usufruct rights to land saw most women playing the role of workers on their family farms. Spirits, Spirit Mediums and Chiefs were perceived as the custodians of land. Both men and women regarded land as the ultimate resource on which their livelihood depended, but in most situations men were generally regarded as the ones in charge of appropriating family or clan land. They were normally the ones who were allocated land by the Village Head, the Headman or Chief. Muchena says that although women had no usufruct rights in the husband's village, the household field was referred to as hers since she did most of the cultivation (1994: 350). Sometimes women's status was related to their reproductive capacities. The more children she had, the more respect she gained among the husband's relatives, but these are all past trends. Currently, a woman's diligence and ability to provide for her family measures her status and respect, and formal education has become one of the characteristic features placing one in any social position.

Sub-Saharan Africa is known as a region of female farming *par excellence* (Boserup, 1970, in Muchena, 1994: 348). This could be because women in some of these countries such as Zambia, South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe with a related or similar history

of colonisation and land expropriation, stayed at home while men went out to town in search of wage labour in urban areas under changing economic conditions. Weinrich (1979: 13) says that women among the Shona since the colonial period carried out most of the regular agricultural work and so produced the largest component of household food. Muchena (1994: 348) highlights that the extent of women's involvement depended on the type of crops, the tasks involved and labour requirements. African farming during the colonial period was characterised by male out-migration. Muchena adds that in some areas more than 50 percent of the male labour moved out into European areas for wage employment. This meant that women, girls, children and the elderly did most of the farm work, and were the main food producers (1994: 351).

Table 5.1 Zimbabwe: Characteristics of Women in Agriculture by Historical Period

Characteristics	Pre-colonial	Colonial	Post-independence
Perception of Women's Role in agriculture	Food Producer	Invisible subsistence producers	Limited official recognition of women as food producers
Nature of involvement	Labour force	De facto farm manager and labour force	De facto farm manager and labour force
Access to land	Indirect (usufruct rights)	Indirect	Indirect except for widows and heads of hshlds in resettlement areas
Access to farm inputs	Indirect	Indirect	Limited direct access
Relations with officialdom	Indirect	Marginal	Limited involvement
Development agenda (locally or internationally influenced)	None	Non-agricultural-oriented (Homecraft clubs)	Increase in extension activities; income generating projects (mostly non-agricultural)

Source: Muchena (1994: 349).

The above table shows how over time women's roles in their farming activities were marginalised especially in development efforts that had a formal bearing on these activities. The irony of the general situation was that in specific situations women were found to be the strength behind the food security of their households (see, for example, Vijfhuizen, 1995). Although the table does not show the exact tasks that women performed, nor the various specific ways in which their lives were affected by specific changes around them, it does indicate and show the general picture of gender statuses that was created around their lives in the different periods of political and economic transformation. In the table, the section on women's access to land is particularly interesting in that it shows the unchanged status of women: still with indirect access to land after and before independence from colonialism and its discriminatory policies. What the section does not reveal, however, is that the land access problem in irrigation schemes is not the same as in dryland farming in communal areas. In irrigated

farming, women, especially widows, managed to gain access to land on their own, and those without male partners such as widows were given direct access. But in some cases they were not given the same amount of land as men, or as so-called 'normal' households, they were given only half the amount. In Nyamaropa family men were being given four acres per family, while widows were given two acres. The idea then was that widows could not manage four acres without a man to help them out. Basically this was based on the idea that women were physically weaker than men as farmers, which has been proven incorrect by numerous studies of farming households in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Women in smallholder irrigation farming in Zimbabwe

Literature on irrigation development in Zimbabwe presents women as generally dominant in so-called 'less empowering' roles or in disadvantageous positions within their households. Some irrigation situations in smallholder projects enable women to play leading roles in their farming enterprises, ahead of their male counterparts. The work of Chimedza (1988) showed that women in irrigation schemes did most of the work, but when it came to appropriation of incomes from family plots, men took over leading roles. Mvududu (1993) indicated that within the national extension agency, Agritex, women's role was not taken seriously as regards their actual contributions to household labour requirements. This led to situations where extension staff paid more attention to male than female farmers in their working areas.

Vijfhuizen's (1995) preliminary findings from her study of women's lives in a smallholder irrigation scheme in South-Eastern Zimbabwe showed that in some so-called male headed-households, women played leading roles and made important decisions even in the presence of their male counterparts (Vijfhuizen, 1995: 3). Madondo (1996) in a refreshingly different view from within Agritex, showed that women in smallholder irrigation schemes played increasingly crucial roles in keeping irrigation schemes operative, and added that they provided most of the labour in their family plots. He further contended that existing irrigation projects had failed to account for the roles played by women in the production and disposal of farm produce (1996: 2). In a study that included resource allocation between members of households in an irrigation scheme in Eastern Zimbabwe, Mate (1995) found that women played decisive roles in production and distribution within their households' enterprises. She also found that single women made a comfortable living out of their own farming and marketing initiatives without male support and often in competition with men.

Irrigation development presented situations where production was not seen as a largely subsistence undertaking, but more as a commercial venture. Chimedza says that irrigation farming meant more work for women generally as there were now more farming seasons than the previous one season per year. There was more work compared to dryland farming which they were used to (Chimedza, 1989: 9), especially in the fact that they had only one farming season in rainfed agriculture. Their labour was now required for three farming seasons each year, and they had to work throughout the year without breaks. Chimedza (1989: 10) adds that more moisture in the soil also meant that there were more weeds in irrigation fields, and weeding was generally regarded as a women's task. Irrigation farming was thus more intensive than what they were used to. The increased workload meant that women's decision making

powers also increased, especially since they had to run the farms and other household activities without their male counterparts.

Although Bourdillon (1987) suggests that women in Shona society generally have more say than is normally assumed, it would need more work like that of Vijffhuizen (1995) to uncover some of the intricate decision-making processes within households in irrigation schemes. As Case 1 below will illustrate, the introduction of irrigation farming shifts traditionally sanctioned ways of relating to each other between men and women from more male control towards a situation where women increasingly gain more autonomy than they had before. Widowed women were even freer than their married colleagues to do what they wanted and to make all decisions uninhibited or with little consultation. Their freedom lay in not needing to consult with what would, in the cultural context, most likely be a dominating or imposing male partner in the cultural context, on most decision they made about farm production, marketing and income distribution. The dominating characteristic ascribed to men by cultural or traditional expectations did not, however, mean that women accepted it as it was passed down. Households themselves were arenas of contested identities where spouses fought out their own battles to have their decisions or sides of the stories heard. This suggests that what might be exhibited in the male-dominant public realm as a male decision was likely to be a negotiated outcome and not a direct imposition of an individual, and this would invariably occur even in situations where there was no open contestation, but 'smooth' negotiations.

Madondo (1996: 1) says that the development of irrigation schemes has been a major focus of the Zimbabwean government since 1980. One of the changes, he adds, has been in increasing the size of allocated irrigated plots from 0.4 hectares to one hectare, a 250 percent increase; technical improvements and investments have not resulted in improved performance either. Recommended cropping packages have not been followed. Generally, greater emphasis placed on technical developments has been at the expense of crucial social factors such as the gender division of labour.

Before 1980, failure to adopt cropping packages in irrigation schemes resulted in some evictions. Problems that have emerged include: increased production of other crops; difficulties in procuring or affording farming inputs; more men have moved into off-farm wage employment in urban and other areas, meaning that more women than men are found working on the plots. Some of the old traditional beliefs regarding land ownership, especially inheritance, were found by Bourdillon and Madzudzo (1994) to be changing within small-holder irrigation schemes. Although formally women can register for their own irrigation plots, it was not common that a plot would be inherited by a woman in the case of the man passing away. Bourdillon and Madzudzo's study identified cases where wives and daughters were mentioned by men as heirs to their land (1994: 16), a sign that the situation regarding some of the customary or cultural ways of relating to household assets or resources was different or changing in irrigation schemes.

However, what these studies on smallholder irrigation schemes lack are detailed analyses of daily lives, struggles, negotiations, and changing identifications, that characterise various social relations of men and women in such situations. Indeed it is useful to know that women need more acknowledgement for the increasing role that they play in household economics and in irrigation farming in general. But this requires detailed case analyses that look at specific issues such as the basis for farming, men's assumptions that women's farming is not good enough, that a women's project

is not expected to succeed, and that within some households, the products of women's labour are controlled by men. A critical aspect of this view of the situation starts from an analysis of cultural changes encouraged by irrigation development which, in this case, is closely linked up to gender difference and gender identity, also within irrigation intervention contexts.

The way some women pool their resources together in the irrigation scheme so that they can produce good crops shows just how enterprising they can be under tough conditions. Although he does not specifically mention widows and women in his study, Smith (1984), looks at the issue of migration and formation of confederations of households in Peruvian city and country. The study shows that household members helped each other out by looking after each other's land and livestock, and securing favours in cities. This highlights the fact that a single source of support is normally regarded as insecure, hence women, especially widows, prefer to keep close ties with other women in more or less the same situation so that they can rely on each other during tough periods.

Within irrigation schemes, there are different interest groups of farmers, and individual farmers with their own motives separate from others. There is need, therefore, to look at and treat development projects such as irrigation schemes as composed of active agents with their own motives and projects too. In a study in Benin, Bierschenck (1988) interprets projects among the Fulani cattle-herders as arenas of differing interests and rationalities of action clashing with each other in a heterogeneous field of action (1988: 152). In this case, differences that matter for gender analysis in irrigation schemes are those between men and women, and between women who can be said to be partly detached from the traditional institution of marriage and those still in it.

In the case of irrigation schemes where men generally dominate, women's attempts to gain more political clout can be seen as one of their own projects, not to unseat men, but to be able to create space for themselves to make a living. In the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme there were 119 widows with irrigation plots as of January 1996. During the same period, there were 12 widowers, 23 single parent households, and six separated couples. The high incidence of 119 widows out of a total of 450 irrigators (26 percent) was attributed to the war of independence, and men's allegedly irresponsible drinking habits that led to their early deaths. A hidden element among reasons for this high incidence was that some women registered for plots as widows in order to gain access to land when in fact their husbands were in urban wage employment.

Men in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme said that in both traditional and other social settings women should follow what their husbands or men told them to do. There were some men who said that women needed to be given space to do what they liked with other women, but still believed that such women should not think that they were the bosses in their homes. There was a feeling that a man who let a woman decide what was to be done was weak. This was sometimes reflected in public gatherings such as irrigation farmers' meetings where women's contributions to debates were not taken seriously (except for a few prominent ones). Women actually sat on the floor or on the ground, and men sat on benches, chairs or logs, always in higher, elevated positions. This was the normal 'traditional or cultural way' of doing things, and it was projected to public settings from their homes. It signified their differential identity positions in social and political circles with men as dominant. This chapter, and the four cases presented in it, should be read in this context.

Case 1: Looking through a widow's window: Mai Hakutangwi's irrigation enterprise

This is a case of a widow's life in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Her story was not a unique one as such, but she was different because she was recognised as one of the good farmers in the irrigation scheme, even though she acknowledged what she called her personal limitation of being a widow with only six girls for children, and she had to hire male labour whenever she needed extra hands. Mai Hakutangwi's late husband was an Anglican priest, and before she started irrigation farming as a full-time venture she used to live with him where-ever he was working around the Manicaland Province. She said that she had to answer her own 'calling' as it were, and make a living through farming.

Her story illustrates that women on their own and from their own points of view can and do make a successful business out of farming. They achieve this in spite of the negative talk and labelling they get from both their male and female colleagues whom they outdo in their farming enterprises. *Mai Hakutangwi* portrayed her life as a constant struggle, both with farming itself and with social obstacles such as allegations that she used magic in her fields. At times she openly said that she wished that she were dead and at peace, away from all the troubles of the farming world and widowhood. She often mentioned that it would have been better for the children if she had gone and not him; that he could take care of the children better and maybe remarry.

Mai Hakutangwi's property included a plough, a cultivator, a scotch-cart, a new tobacco baling box, five head of cattle, nine goats, a seven-roomed brick house with asbestos roofing and solar panels, a store-room and a kitchen. She had a black and white television set and a Chesterfield radio (both solar-energy powered). By local standards, she was one of the most successful farmers in the area. She had six acres of land, of which four were under irrigation. The other two acres were at the edge of the irrigation scheme where the slope was not sufficient for water to reach.

Mai Hakutangwi's family

As a widow with six daughters, Mai Hakutangwi sometimes found labour supply a major problem. She normally worked with her eldest daughter (Helen) who was at home and had two small children. The Shona marital custom of the woman leaving her home to join that of her husband meant that if her children married they would leave her alone. The eldest daughter said that she was not going to get married, but was going to stay at home, help out with all the work and look after her mother. She was given two acres by her mother and registered her name with the managing agency. Three of her daughters were married, although one of them had been widowed. The two youngest daughters were still at home. The second last born, at 24 years old, was looking for a job outside farming with encouragement from her mother who said that farming was not good for a young woman, stressing that she would age fast before she even found a man to marry her and have children. The last born was twelve years old, and still at primary school. Mai Hakutangwi had ten grand children.

Mai Hakutangwi's maternal relatives were not active in her life in general, or in her farming. Some of them lived in Tombo, about 30 km away. She had assistance from

her sister-in-law, a nurse in a hospital in Harare, who advised her not to take any more financial loans or credit from financial institutions, but buy all her inputs for cash instead, if she could afford them. She took the advice seriously and paid off all the loans, and said that it felt good not to be owing the credit company anything. One reason why her husband's relatives did not play any significant part in her immediate family's life was because her husband had indicated in his will that she should not be forced into marrying any of his relatives against her will¹. This apparently upset some of them.

Some common farming and household tasks

Mai Hakutangwi's family did most of the work in the fields together as a unit and engaged hired labour periodically when there was need to perform specific tasks such as weeding and harvesting. They yoked their own oxen, did their own ploughing, harrowing and planting. In the generally good season of 1995, there was a lot of rain which saw weeds covering most of the fields. Mai Hakutangwi had problems with labour supply to solve the weeding problem. She hired two women from around Nyamaropa to assist her family and the two boys that worked for her. Before weeding with hand hoes, they used an ox-drawn cultivator to dig the weeds up. Her daughter led the oxen. The family could work on two acres a day if she had a large number of people helping her out, but she said that she did not like the idea of hiring too many people for weeding because they did not do the job well, she was said to be a hard working woman together with her family. They would carry their breakfast and lunch with them in a large basket to the fields because they did not like to waste time going back home. Sometimes they would go to the field as early as six in the morning, and go back home after five in the evening.

The family organised their tasks in such a way that they had someone who stayed behind at home to take care of their goats in the village when they are in the fields. Helen, Mai Hakutangwi's first born daughter, said that she wanted to work on Fridays, *chisi* day, hiding in the maize so that no one would see her. She said that she had to do something about the weeds that were threatening to outgrow the crops. This would not go down well with the local Headman or the Village Head, and she would have to pay a big fine if caught in the act. Still, some irrigation farmers boasted that they worked on *chisi* and had no regrets about it.

Mai Hakutangwi was locally known to other farmers in the irrigation scheme to be a good tobacco farmer. She said that she hired a young man who worked for her for eight years, and this was during the most profitable years of her farming life. He left when he asked for more money that she could not afford to pay him. She still hired him temporarily, especially to handle the ridge plough for tobacco that she borrowed from her Anglican Church colleague, Mautsa, for free every year. After ridging with the plough they would then follow up with hand hoes removing weeds and adding fertiliser, they covered the fertiliser with soil so that it would not be washed away by rain. She said that she planned her work ahead of time every year, and bought her fertiliser in cash after selling her produce after every season. Due to pressure of work, she planned to concentrate on one cash crop, either tobacco or cotton, to lighten up on labour and input demand. She paid her two 'helpers', as she called them, Z\$70 a month each.

A widow's perceptions of irrigation farming

Mai Hakutangwi's impression of irrigation farming was that it was a full-time business venture in which she had to be fully involved personally at every level to avoid costly mistakes such as poor seed rate when planting, or inadequate fertiliser application if she left it all to her children. She was a hands-on manager of her farming enterprise, and preferred to supervise the workers and her children while working with them. She said that as part of her plans, she had decided to use the Christian Care² tractor, but the tractor people were saying that there were very few irrigation farmers who had registered to use the tractor so they might just take it to the next village where there were more farmers needing the service. In this case she said she would stick to her more reliable span of oxen.

She said that non-irrigators should not interfere with the management of the irrigation project, and irrigation farmers themselves should have more control and have the final say in how to run their business. As far as extension service provision was concerned, she said that EWs were providing an essential service, but they would do better to listen more to what farmers had to say than always telling them what to do, some of which was simply impossible. Her example here was the amount of fertiliser per unit area that Agritex recommended; she said that it was too high and too expensive for most farmers to afford.

Mai Hakutangwi said that although she often opposed the idea of outsiders - mainly drylanders - coming into the irrigation scheme to use rented pieces of irrigation land in fulfilment of what she referred to as dubious deals with some 'old and/or lazy' irrigators, she did realise that during severe drought they needed food to survive, and irrigation farming offered that chance. She added that another side of the equation was that dryland farmers were flooding the irrigation scheme to save irrigators who could not afford irrigation fees or manage their plots well. This was not a one sided issue because farmers agreed on specific terms of their deals. She said that some irrigators had gone over two years in payment arrears for their fields, and getting desperate. They then leased out their plots to dryland farmers or businessmen who could afford to pay up for them. The lessees took over the plots on a person to person arrangement outside official Agritex regulations. She added that this had its negative effects on other irrigators who were not involved in it, who might be doing well on their own. Her idea was that some dryland farmers either did not have the general knowledge of irrigating or did not care how they did it as long as at the end of the day they harvested what they planted to their satisfaction. The problem, she argued, was that they tended to waste water and damage the canal embankment during water application. Sometimes dryland farmers would be accused of not applying enough fertiliser and pesticides in rented fields in the irrigation scheme, and bad crops spoiled the image of the irrigation scheme (visually), and pests and diseases spread to other farmers' fields. This resentment, however, could have been an idea based on a general disapproval of outsiders entering the irrigation scheme to benefit from it without the rest of the obligations that formal plottolders had.

Mai Hakutangwi said that a good farmer should have all the required tools for farming, but when one did not have it all, they at least should have friends or someone to help out. She had just bought veterinary medicines to dose her livestock even though they were not sick. She argued that she just had to try and secure her own draught power to avoid asking for help from someone when the need arose to do

some work with oxen. She added that some people worked hard but did not seem to have anything to show for their hard labour. In her case, she said that she made it a point that she bought something after every sale of tobacco. This particular season (1995) she bought a radio for her family, and they were all excited when she got home with it. She told them that for all the hard work they put into it. That was the present she had brought them.

On *chisi* days Mai Hakutangwi did most of her household chores. She also worked on her tobacco in the barn on this day during the season. Her diligence was portrayed in the way she led her family to work hard. During one of my visits to her homestead, I found that she was still in the field after sunset, and I was told that she was waiting for water to irrigate by night. I decided to go and investigate, and observe. I found her sitting on the damp ground in the cotton field, complaining of a headache and about water that she said was moving too slowly for her liking. She said that it was always easier to irrigate during moonlight than when it was very dark. She had her supper in the field by moonlight that day.

She told me what had happened earlier when she was irrigating around 4pm. She realised that there was less and less water coming through to her plot, so she knew something was wrong somewhere up the canal, someone was stealing the water. So she followed the canal up, and found that a young man was stealing 'her' water. She reported the matter to the Water Controller, closed the stealing place and got back to her plot to continue irrigating. After some time it slowed down again, so she again suspected that someone else was stealing it, but it was too late and dark now to retrace her steps up the canal. She just waited there and hoped that it would pick up momentum again. That was just one example showing some of the practical problems, that single women or female irrigators and widows faced in the irrigation scheme.

When one needed to irrigate urgently they could ask the Water Controller to open water for them at night, which meant that they had to tell other farmers in the block (or sub-block) to come and get the water after they were through with it, otherwise there would be a major loss of water through the night. Some of her plot neighbours knew that she had asked for some water and came later to irrigate. The slope in her plot was bad, and water moved very slowly, so she finally decided to leave it until the following day. She pointed out that it was a bad habit to irrigate at night, but a convenient one. This point was reinforced by some of the Extension Workers and farmers who said that if there was no night irrigation there could be irrigation turns of more than a month in most sections of the irrigation scheme. That would make it impossible to make a profit out of irrigation farming.

On farmer organisation

Mai Hakutangwi did not like the idea of forming Committees in each irrigation block as a form of farmer organisation that was being spread around by other plotters. She believed that this would not solve the water distribution problems, but that those in the committees would just go on giving themselves more water to the detriment of the rest of the farmers. Based on her experience, she said that one of the main problems among farmers was that they wasted a lot of the water when irrigating, especially those who employed workers to do the irrigating. She also felt that there was favouritism in water distribution in the scheme, and gave an example of one of

the Water Controllers in her block, who always gave water to some farmers because they were related.

She believed that some Manyika people (the majority ethnic group in the irrigation scheme) were too jealous and could hurt someone for their hard work. She cited the example of Makunura, one of the good farmers in the irrigation scheme who let Agritex host a Field Day in his irrigation plot, (protesting though that people were going to kill him for it). This is a day when Agritex staff and farmers have a meeting at one specially selected farmer's field with good crops for that season. The farmer explains to other farmers how he grew the crops from day one to maturity stage, and Agritex staff use this as one of their extension methods that help farmers share information and experiences among themselves. The host farmer here died within six months after the show, and blamed that day for it during his illness. The belief that people will bewitch you when you do well was strong and affected how people did their work. *Mai* Hakutangwi said that some farmers planned ahead, and got the right results from their marketing. She said that sometimes the way marketing of produce was done affected production patterns. For example, it was not a good idea generally for farmers to know what each one of their colleagues got from their sales because they talked about it when they got home. Normally this would incite feelings of jealousy among other farmers, leading to hostility³ and resentment. Because *Mai* Hakutangwi was a good tobacco producer, some farmers claimed that she was being favoured by those who bought tobacco.

Her involvement in community activities was hampered by comments she got from some of the farmers in the irrigation scheme. One time she suggested to other farmers that they start some kind of insurance policy or retirement fund on their own for old-age security, where they would pay about Z\$100 (about US\$10 in 1995) per year per farmer. But other farmers accused her of showing off her earnings from her farming and from her husband's pension. She said that there was a major problem of age and insecurity in the irrigation scheme and no one seemed to think that it was anyone's problem. She had some friends in the Church and in a farmers' Burial Society that she joined. Two of her friends were widows, one a younger woman whose husband had been a local businessman, and the other an elderly irrigator with most of her children in urban employment. Although the younger widow was enterprising in different and more diverse ways beyond farming, (such as making 'business trips' to buy goods in South Africa to sell locally), they would still meet and talk about some common social problems affecting women, widows and single mothers within the irrigation community. Among these challenges were accusations of trying to steal other women's husbands.

Sometimes there were family squabbles. At one time there was friction between *Mai* Hakutangwi and her eldest daughter. She said that her daughter was telling her sisters that their mother was only using her daughter's name to grow more crops for her own benefit and did not give her enough control over her plot to show that it was hers. *Mai* Hakutangwi said that she would leave her to run the plot on her own and see if she could manage it. *Mai* Hakutangwi had already bought her fertilisers, and her daughter might not be able to do all that with the money she expected to earn from her few bales of cotton from the previous season. Her mother said that she should just have apologised and they would have forgotten about it, but she had to learn the hard way that one had to be humble and grateful. There seemed to be a lot of family friction going on at that time, but they joked, laughed, worked and played together. This was

soon after they had finished selling their tobacco, and grossed about Z\$19 000 from the auction sales, and about Z\$17 000 net after taxes. She bought fertilisers through some private deals. A bag that was normally sold at Z\$120, she got for only Z\$75, but felt that such deals could easily land her in trouble if caught. She put most of the money in the bank, after buying a radio for her family.

Mai Hakutangwi gave Z\$150 to the Anglican Church to thank the Lord for taking care of her and her family. She said that she wanted to thank God for helping her manage all the work that she had. Her neighbours and friends came to see her radio and gave a prayer to thank God for what they said was a gift from above. This was a group of women from Church who would visit her now and then, and they would meet at Church, sing together, and go to the Burial Society meetings together. She said that they still had a lot of respect for her, part of it from her husband's status as he was one of the leaders of the Church. Part of it emanated from the fact that she had remained in the Church and had not done anything to discredit his name or the Church, and was known to be among the best farmers in the irrigation scheme. As an immigrant Manyika herself, married to a local Barwe man who had done well for himself to become a priest, she still joked with her children about their ethnicity. She could also laugh at them for being who they were (Barwe), and saying that she did them well by marrying their father out of love and not ethnic identity. Sometimes some farmers referred to her and other women in her situation as having a double outsider identity in that she was married into the area, and was also a Manyika which was not a local group, but the main group of immigrants.

On widows' identities and other problems

Besides the regular accusation that widows got favours from outsiders and extension staff, and that they were waiting to grab other women's husbands, widows sometimes had reason to worry about social stigmas attached to their widowhood. On some of the problems that widows encountered, *Mai Hakutangwi* said that she had trouble with cattle that were invading her wheat fields in the winter of 1996 and destroying her crop. Although such problems did not select widows only, she insisted that they were worse on widows than on other families. One time a herd of cows got into her field, she locked them up in the irrigation 'cage' (pound) where the owner was supposed to pay a fine before releasing them. A woman irrigator, married and living with her husband, was sent to negotiate with *Mai Hakutangwi* for the release of the cattle, and the two had a heated exchange. *Mai Hakutangwi* said that many irrigation farmers released their cattle onto her field on purpose because they thought that as a widow she could not stand up to them. She threatened to have her family pay a heavy fine, but later forgave them and wrote a note to the IMC and Agritex to allow them to free the animals.

One day she spoke to me about widowhood and inheritance problems, arguing that some aspects of custom were insensitive to the plight of women left by their husbands, especially regarding family property, inheritance and widows' rights and entitlements to their own lives. She said that she did not feel secure with her children all over the place and not happy in their marriages,

"What will happen to my children if I die today? My husband's relatives are waiting to grab my property, my children will be left with nothing and the family will just tell them to go and get married somewhere. If I had died and left my

husband, they probably would be better off one way or the other in terms of security. Why did God punish me like this, I should have died first, *it is hard for a woman to manage on her own*, and I cannot re-marry at this age with all the talk that would go round, and his relatives would demand that I leave their relative's property because even if I worked for it, they believe that it is still theirs, part of their family wealth. I cannot do that, I am staying here with my children and I will write a will that I will leave with them, they can live here and take care of each other. I am not going to use their money (referring to her husband's pension) for anything except to educate *their child*, (the little girl who is still at primary school). Sometimes farming is so tough I wish I could just leave this place and go to sell vegetables in the market in town, just to spend the whole day seated, receiving cash from other people" (Mai Hakutangwi, 18 August, 1995).

This was a moving view of a widow's account of problems of life in the irrigation scheme, highlighting some of the insecurities that come with the identity of widowhood and some introspective insights on a widow's life. The threat of losing personal possessions, and of being unable to provide for the children was a real one for her, and she admitted that it made her work even harder in the fields so that she would leave her children with something to remember her with. She was already making plans for the time after her own death by planning to write a will to secure her property for her children. She had problems with oxen. She had two working ones, but one of them was not trained well enough, so she had to exchange it for a better-trained one with someone in the area who knew how to train it. She told me that she hated the idea that she had to do all this as a woman alone. She said that *she saw herself as both a woman and a man*. She would sometimes mourn about her situation: "If my husband was around, or if only I had a son, if only I was a man, I would not have all these problems, I wish I was dead...". This idea of a dual identity seemed to characterise some women who lived alone or some widows who worked as groups around the irrigation scheme. Seeing herself as a man and a woman gave Mai Hakutangwi the strength and self-belief that she could do what they would do together if her husband was around.

It gave her the self-belief that she needed to carry on in spite of some disparaging and discouraging comments from some of her rivals.

One of the problems Mai Hakutangwi had was with the different crops that she grew every season. She said that she needed crops such as beans, tomatoes, and other vegetables all year round for her family, and they need water all the time. When water was short, she said that she sometimes took it without permission. One day she stole water to irrigate her tomatoes and beans, she was caught in the act by the Water Controller. She claimed that the crops were wilting and desperately needed water. Actually she went to the gate that opened to her sub-block and was shown, by one of the women from the dryland who wash their clothes in the canals, how to open the gate, and she did it. She thought that the Water Controller had gone since it was late in the afternoon. He came back to find her irrigating. He ordered her to go and report herself to Block Committee members. She went to one of the committee members, Samunda, who was in his field nearby at the time. He said that the committee would deal with the case later. It was almost two weeks later when I inquired about the issue and learnt that it had not been discussed. Other farmers with fields near hers were saying that she should accept the usual fine of being denied water once and get it over

with, but she said that if they denied her an irrigation turn she would steal it again. She insisted that they should let her pay the fine in cash and then go on to irrigate. I realised that Samunda, who had been behind the formation of Block Committees especially to ensure strict adherence to irrigation rules, was not being harsh with her. Apparently, they shared the same totem, *Dziva/Siziba* (deep or big pool), and he called her *tete* (aunt). She got away with the offence! Her explanation was that God was looking out for her as a woman and a widow with a family to feed, and no partner to share her troubles with.

Compared to widows in dryland areas, Mai Hakutangwi's problems were not enormous. For example *Mai Nyika* was a 38 year old widow who lived in the adjacent dryland area. She had three acres of land which she cultivated every summer, and said that it was not enough to meet all her food and cash needs with her five children, four of them still at school. She bought fertiliser on credit from the Cotton Company which she could hardly afford and she grew mainly cotton, maize, and sunflowers which failed in most seasons because of poor rainfall. She did not hire labour, she did most of the work with her children. She had her own oxen to use for all the work. She said that what made her survive was that she rented irrigation plots almost every winter season to grow wheat for food only. She also had a vegetable garden along the nearby river where she used plastic buckets carried on her back to irrigate. By local standards she seemed very enterprising, but struggling, and was hoping that one day she would get an irrigation plot of her own and improve her standard of living. Unlike Mai Hakutangwi, she had no savings in any bank, and always complained of lack of support from her husband's relatives who were going to benefit in terms of bride-wealth when her daughters got married because, customarily, the rules of patrilineage dictated that they belonged to her husband's family. She acknowledged government support in food hand-outs and was thankful for the irrigation opportunities that her friends gave her to grow food. She said that sometimes she envied irrigation widows because they were "rich and happy with money to spend on themselves and their children". In general terms, her social and economic situations were harder than that of Mai Hakutangwi.

Discussion

Mai Hakutangwi regarded her farming enterprise as her only source of livelihood, and indeed she had no other viable alternative. The decisions she made about which crops to grow and how much fertiliser to buy, together with the way she mobilised her family and casual or hired labour, showed that she was a shrewd farmer, and her production figures and earnings spoke for her (see Appendix 5.1). There were other women in the irrigation scheme who envied her for the hard work and the returns she got from her plot. However, some of them thought that she used magic to earn more money or to get more than they did from her efforts.

Although she regretted the absence of a male partner to assist her in her farming life, there was little that showed a lack of farming skills in the way she managed her tasks. What sometimes crushed her spirits and the drive to achieve more were the discouraging comments she got from some of the farmers around her. This was made worse by people who thought that by suggesting programmes such as insurance for farmers' old age, she was trying to show off how much money she had. This linked up with the fact that those who knew when she had sold her tobacco and came asking for

money always thought that she was stingy. Although she explained that she had put the money in the bank or bought farming inputs for the next season, this was seen as an excuse to deny them. Such forms of social pressure to yield to demands of this nature led her to believe that she could be better off in a place with fewer social obligations to assist others. She thought that this would be the case in an urban area, where she would sell vegetables with other women, on the streets or in a market place.

Her strength lay in a strong sense of self-belief and a drive to succeed in spite of her family conditions. Although other farmers thought that she was worse-off compared to them by not having a man in the house to do 'manly' tasks. She laughed this off saying that she could do better than the men on her own, and she had all the proof for it; but there were often unhappy swings from a celebration of freedom and independence to make one's own decisions, to loneliness and dejection. Widowhood seemed to be an important drive that pushed women to produce more and change their lives. The dryland widow, although in a more insecure position with rainfed agriculture and rented irrigation fields, still managed to scrounge around and provide for her children. The deals she struck with irrigators to exchange irrigated plots for her oxen kept her family's food supplies secure, again illustrating the capability of widows to rise above the odds pitted against them by fate and circumstances beyond their control.

Analytical arguments surrounding such a case include a look at individual and household strategies to overcome, in this particular case, two main obstacles: first, the social pressures put by the social and cultural environments that regard a widow's household as not fit for or not capable of farming success. The central point here is the social difference that a widow's household has as its identity compared to households with both parents present. This concerns the fact that a woman alone with her children is regarded as less able to run the family enterprise successfully, especially under irrigated farming conditions that require careful planning and management. This belief seems to be based on the fact that the absence of a man not just from the field, but from the family's life, should lead to a decline in farm productivity and result in the family seeking assistance from other households for labour, and sometimes for food. When this does not happen, explanations of use of powers that surpass human strength (magic), or of favouritism of some kind, are used. The capability or ability of the individual widow to take initiative and succeed in her endeavours is underestimated and misunderstood.

The second issue to be overcome by a widowed household concerns practical farming problems such as the shortage of labour. Again there is an element of social expectations of how such a woman's household (widowed) *should* perform in farming activities. Mai Hakutangwi's generally outstanding farming performance was not treated as substantial proof of hard work and commitment to provide for her family. To some farmers, a widow's success in spite of labour shortages, poor water distribution, and rising input costs ought to have more to it than just hard work.

Although cows invaded her field, and people took water while she was irrigating, and others accused her of using magical powers, Mai Hakutangwi still persevered. Her case proved that a woman may be biologically different from a man, but the (permanent) absence of a full-time male partner in her farming activities will not deter her from striving to reach higher goals in her farming life. The myth of reliance on absentee heads of households in both irrigated and rainfed farming was exposed, and more so in the more demanding irrigation scheme where there were no seasonal

breaks to farming activities. While we may not celebrate death and its consequences in such instances, in a weird sense, widowhood seemed to free some women to make independent decisions and rely on their own capabilities to sustain their livelihoods, removed from paternal influences.

The concept of power raises further issues of specific 'social and political' relations with other actors in an irrigation setting. Villarreal (1992, 1994) discusses in detail the way power relations are shaped around social relations. The relational nature of power in this case is a central feature that helps one see that no one particular actor *has* power, that power does not come in packages for one *to have or not to have it*. Widows may have more space (than married women) in which to negotiate their power relationships with other social actors in daily interaction without the obligation of accountability to another person who might be affected by the types of interactions, relations or decisions she makes. This space for manoeuvre is one feature of social and cultural or gender identity (and difference), between widows and other women, and between different actors in the same irrigation domain.

Case 2: A confederation of widowed households

Mai Matwara was a widow who lived with her granddaughter, and they had been living together for the last couple of years. They did almost all the work together, with the help of their neighbour and relative, *Mai Mandipaza*, younger than *Mai Matwara*, and also a widow, and her family. They also worked with another younger widow, *Mai Musiyarira*. *Mai Matwara* and her neighbour did not have oxen, they helped each other with sourcing for draught power during peak periods such as ploughing and harvesting. *Mai Musiyarira* had a span of oxen and almost every piece of equipment that a small-scale irrigation farmer needed, except enough labour.

During ploughing, weeding, and harvesting, especially cotton picking, and sometimes processing of crops such as wheat thrashing with sticks, these widows worked together as a team. They said that they preferred to rotate among each other in assistance so that they would have equal opportunities to utilise each other's labour. They told me that their advantage was that they planned ahead of other people because they did not have all the resources and were often short of labour during peak periods.

The eldest of the widows, *Mai Matwara*, said that sometimes things were difficult especially when they needed to use the oxen at the same time to avoid lagging behind others in their other activities. This is when they had to think of other plans. She said that in such situations she looked for alternative sources of draught power, and had often been helped by people she knew from the dryland area, especially from her former village, who were not in the irrigation scheme. She said that she did not like to do that because they then expected to be given bags of wheat or maize without having directly worked for it. Agritex extension staff referred to her as the 'iron lady'. This was because they believed she was tough physically by working alone and carrying the spraying equipment on her back at that age (62). She did not hire casual labour as most people did, and spoke out her mind in meetings so strongly that others would always take her point seriously.

The three widows said that they helped each other to keep their fields productive by rotating in each other's fields until they did the full circle. Two of them were related, *Mai Matwara* and *Mai Mandipaza*. *Mai Mandipaza* had been married to *Mai Matwara's* brother. *Mai Matwara* had three children, two boys and a girl, all married

and living elsewhere with their families, but they would visit now and then. Mai Mandipaza was living with her four children who were not married. Mai Musiyarira, who had more farming equipment, had no children of her own, but she lived with her niece, who was still a small child at primary school. She did not like the idea of hiring casual labour. She believed that workers would steal from her, and get away with it since she would not be able to chase after them as a woman living alone. What this section tells us is how women in disadvantaged situation strive to beat the odds staked against them by their marital and family circumstances. It is a story of initiative and strategies to survive in trying conditions.

Wheat thrashing: a gendered task?

There seemed to be a common feature in Nyamaropa concerning wheat production and processing. Women seemed to be the only ones busy harvesting wheat while men were either ploughing, working on something else at home, or in bars. Both men and women said that the main reason for this was that locally wheat was basically a food crop, that there was no good price for it even if they tried to sell it. Women made bread and prepared thick porridge from it.

A walk through the fields during harvest revealed the full story of the efforts women put into household food provision. They cleared pieces of flat ground and then either poured water on its own, or smeared the ground with mud. Some of them used cow dung mixed with mud to harden the surface. This clearing was locally called *mbuwa*. Then they used sticks to literally beat the wheat from its husks on these surfaces. The cutting of the wheat was done with sickles, and required hours of bending one's back to cut it right, pile it up, and carry the stalks to the clearing at the edge of the field for threshing.

Many farmers hired friends and relatives from dryland areas near the irrigation scheme, or engaged casual labour from around the irrigation scheme, to assist them in the cutting and threshing, for a price. Some of the dryland farmers would be threshing their own wheat that they planted in land-for-labour deals with formal irrigators. Children and women played a leading role at this stage of production. They could be seen throughout the irrigation scheme at the edges of wheat fields working on their heaps of dry wheat.

A group of women I spoke to on the issue said that wheat production in Nyamaropa was mainly for food, and women were traditionally supposed to make sure that there was food in the pot at home. They said that they took pleasure in cooking for their families and they were respected for that. Three young women who were threshing wheat at the same spot revealed that they were daughters-in-law threshing their mother-in-law's wheat, but they were guaranteed a bucket or bag each after the work was complete. They said that they helped each other as a family, and explained that they were not a working group of different families as such (*jangano* or *nhimbe / ilima*), but they were a *gumwe*, a family working together. This was similar to the group of widows who often called each other sisters while working together, to strengthen the bond of collaboration.

Still, few men could be seen working on wheat, except for the conspicuous odd tractor driver who was using the tractor to thresh wheat for farmers. This was a faster but more expensive threshing. The tractor would run round in circles over the pile of wheat until the farmer was satisfied that it was ready. This was the scenario that was

seen by a Swiss couple who introduced the idea of a bakery to women in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme in *Case 3* below.

Case 3: Kushinga Bakery Co-operative⁴

"My wife makes better bread anyway...it will never get anywhere, it is a failure...leave it, you can't stay there, you have to come with me to the field...its a waste of time..." (Farmer Morosi, to his wife, a founder member of the Kushinga Bakery co-operative).

The Nyamaropa irrigation scheme could be said to be generally male dominated in the sense that in every public gathering men played leading roles and dominated in most committees. In the irrigation scheme they were the majority plottolders and everyone in the area saw irrigation farming as the central activity in their lives providing them with food and income. The introduction of an activity that took time and labour away from irrigation farming would inevitably raise concerns among some of the farmers. This could either be because they felt left out of the new venture, or because an old social order was threatened. The protection of territories and 'colonised spaces' is part of the highlight of this section and the chapter as a whole. In this particular section, a women-only project was labelled a failure from the start, and did not get men's support. Some men felt that it helped women stay away from more productive activities such as farming, and was therefore a waste of time because it did not bring in large profits, and they could not directly tap into its benefits.

This case is meant to highlight some of the social attitudes towards an initiative that was mainly female-driven, towards projects that had a female identity, and towards women as enterprising individuals trying to get into business. Some men either felt threatened by the project, or were plain jealous for not being a part of it. It is an example of some perceptions of cultural identities and localised views of gender identities and roles. In this case it showed more of male (gender) perceptions than cultural definitions of a community as a whole, with men's implicit objective seemingly to keep women in subservient positions in the irrigation community.

Kushinga literally means 'to persevere or to endure something, to be strong, to hang on under pressure'. Kushinga bakery was a co-operative of about 16 women from the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme community who started the venture in 1985 and supplied local shops with freshly baked bread. The business began in 1985 as an idea from a Swiss couple, Lizzy and Philip⁵, who saw a lot of wheat being grown in the irrigation scheme and asked farmers what they did with it. Farmers pointed out that they used the wheat for making bread and porridge.

The story is that men referred the foreign couple to women for answers about what wheat was used for. The couple is said to have asked some women to mobilise themselves into a co-operative to start a bakery. Women say that there was a clear message from the interveners to the women that "when you organise yourselves, make sure you do not involve men at all". The women got together and started making bricks for building the structure. The Swiss couple kept checking the progress of the women, and promised to bring in the money once the bricks were ready. In a similar manner to that in which men regarded a group of women's bee-keeping project in Villarreal's study in Mexico (1992: 259), 'women's work' was not taken seriously. Some men actually thought that they should stick to their irrigation fields and stop wasting valuable time 'gossiping' under the excuse of the co-operative.

The group of women approached the ward Councillor to ask for a stand to put up the structure. They got the stand and started baking bread from the homestead of one of their members before putting up the bakery building. This was now a year later, in 1986. They used wheat meal which was processed in the local hammer mills. In 1987 construction of the bakery building started and was completed two years later in 1989. Meanwhile, in 1988 they received Z\$12 000 as the Swiss couple had promised, but this soon ran out during the construction stage. They approached a local Provincial Non-Governmental Organisation called Manicaland Development Association (MDA) through their Councillor Mpesa, an irrigation farmer (and leader) working as a development worker, and whose wife was one of the original members of the group. He had worked in the NGO and he used his connections there to seek for support. Later they got a donation of up to Z\$10 000, and some bags of flour, and the bakery was officially opened on 5th of December, 1990. Some men were interested in knowing how the project ran, and seemed to be encouraging the members during the initial stages, but generally there were mixed feelings about the prospects of the project succeeding and a rising sense of curiosity especially among men in the irrigation scheme.

At one point the membership figure was 25, but others dropped out and the group's membership remained 19 during brick-making. They were all irrigation women, which made it easier to organise or mobilise each other than when there would be others from outside or from afar. The figure dropped to 16 after a few months. Others just got fed up, and concentrated on their farming. Some of them were persuaded to leave the project and get back to their irrigation fields by their husbands. This was said to be because they expected to see immediate profits from the bread sales. Instead, there was just enough money to continue production at the same rate, with very little to share as profit, and sometimes bread was not bought, which meant that they had to endure losses.

Then an official from an NGO called the Manicaland Development Association (a woman) came to see them and taught them a new system of operating, and 'how to bake good bread'. They also got uniforms from the same NGO and started full capacity production trying to keep up with orders that were now flowing in. The NGO official told them to split into two groups of eight each because there was insufficient work for everyone any one time. Each group worked for a week. They had elected a committee that ran the formal aspects of the business and co-ordinated operations. Flour of good quality from large urban millers proved expensive and sometimes scarce, making the whole business look less profitable than they had thought it would be. They began to have cash flow problems and approached MDA again for assistance. They looked for funds and got help from a Canadian donor, whose officers came down to see the co-operative. They asked the members what problems they had, and were told that they had flour and profitability problems, that they needed a security fence around the yard, a refrigerator, and hardly had any furniture inside the building. They were given a grant of Z\$100 000, and made a quotation of equipment needed. After this the place was refurbished with new equipment including a whole set of new ovens. They hired two local girls who kept records and progress reports for them. They were given this task because they were children of some of the members, and were better educated than the rest of them. They presented their case to the donor that included, among other things, lack of a clear plan or policy on investments or disposal of profits.

They shared some money after a few months (about Z\$200 each in three months), but it was still not clearly laid down how they should pay themselves and then re-invest their earnings. There were only a few fringe benefits, like having tea with bread while on duty; members bought bread too. Some local shops bought their bread, but not all of them. They had to compete with long established dealers from outside who had contracts with local shopkeepers to supply them with bread. To make matters worse, they had no delivery vehicle, and only used a bicycle for local orders. However, they did export bread to Mozambique by way of villagers from across the border coming to buy their bread, which was slightly cheaper than that from afar. The business centre and the irrigation scheme are located on the border with Mozambique, and border crossing for local residents was often easy and relaxed for those who wanted to go across whenever they wished. This was different from the situation during the war period when security was tight.

Their first impression at the beginning of the project was that they would operate like a club, and bake once a week, but demand for bread turned out to be higher than they had thought it would be. There were comments on the quality of their bread, with some shopkeepers saying that it got stale too quickly, and others saying that it had a 'home-made' smell. Ironically, home-made was not a selling idea to use around Nyamaropa not on goods like bread. Buyers said that if it was as good as the bread their women made for them at home, then there was no point in spending money on it. This was a particularly fascinating aspect on development, cultural identity, modernization and locality. Bread made in an urban bakery in the cities of Mutare or Harare, or in any of the larger towns, which was brought, for example, by a visitor or relative, was somehow valued more than the local bread from the local bakery. Sometimes it was preferred over the home-made richer and heavy bread. This had something to do with the exotic element attached to goods from the big city, a sign of being in touch with, or linking up to, a form of advancement, something to do with being developed, being modern. Nutritionally, home-made bread was richer than the light loaf from town. But it lacked the exotic identity of the urban loaf with plastic packaging. The bakery suffered from too much local identity. Local bread had a local identity that did not sell well among irrigators. It did better among drylanders who could be said to have been at the bottom end of the social scale, at least from the point of view of some of the extension staff.

The co-operative women knew that they had to convince a lot of people that they had something to sell, and a business to run. One of their leaders said,

"We have had to prove ourselves to some people who think that we did not put any effort into setting this place up. They [especially some men] say that we were freely given the building, but no, we built it ourselves, yes, we got a lot of assistance, but we did most of the work ourselves. We built this place, we organised ourselves, picked up the stones, we made the bricks ourselves, and set it all up. The White couple gave us a good start with the idea and the money, but *we did everything ourselves*, and they all know that. The irrigation management helped us a lot with the Agritex officer offering the irrigation tractor to carry some stones, we appreciate that. *People just want to put us down, and most of it is just being jealous, because they are not part of it, so they want us to fail and they will say it was bound to fail from the start, because its a women-only undertaking.* We have heard the gossip in the villages and we are listening... We will make it succeed, you will see. Some of us have attended training courses in book keeping, in

baking and in managing a place like this. We went to Hlekweni near Bulawayo for training. In 1993 a man from MDA advised us to split again from two into four groups since there was less work to do and we now know what exactly needs to be done. Now the four groups of about four women each alternate in the operation, about once each month. This means that we have more time to attend to our irrigation fields, a problem that made some of the original members leave because their husbands were complaining that they were wasting time on something that did not pay them..." (Mai Ndiza, Kushinga Bakery Co-operative member, May 1995).

As an exclusively women's project, Kushinga Bakery Co-operative went a long way towards deconstructing and questioning existing local beliefs that women's place was in the domestic spheres and the field. Although there were unique cases where some men gave assistance to the project, most developments pointed to the fact that there was a contest of values, competition for space and a duel over identity and other forms of symbolic territory as a result of the introduction of the project. If the bakery succeeded, women would prove that they were capable of good business management, and men had nothing to show for their own acclaimed prowess except legend handed down to them by their fathers, and a culture defining gender relations through men's conceptualisation, and placing them in charge of their households from the start, with minimum contestation from women in the public realm. If this order was threatened by a group of women playing with flour to make bread, the male ego was going to be severely deflated, even with no direct link to the project.

Case 4: Family politics and the struggle for control

This case analyses a household almost split by an internal struggle for control of the family's irrigated field and its output. The struggle was between the husband and his wife especially over how to distribute the income from the plot. Trouble started when the husband was alleged to be spending almost all the family's income on his own with his friends in drinking sprees around local bars. This case visits issues raised elsewhere about territories, space and identity. Crucial aspects here included the different ways in which the husband and wife involved in the plot wrangle tried to gain control of their sources of livelihood. The resources and reference bases they used to claim legitimate entitlement to proceeds from the family field, or to gain support from other players in the irrigation arena who had various levels of influence on the matter.

Irrigation farmer Nyakuchena had a fight with his wife over money he had taken after selling cotton and used to drink beer with his friends. That bit of information gave me the entry point I needed, just when something 'hot' was going on. I went out looking for him to get his side of the story. Part of this story was that the couple had been through a lot of fights over disposal of their farm income, to the point that they decided to split up the four-acre plot into two. It was the wife who initiated the idea after several seasons when she would hardly get anything from the crop sales. She approached Agritex staff and narrated her ordeal. They were understanding and sympathetic enough, and decided to officially allocate her two acres from the family plot in her own name, and leave the other in the husband's name. This immediately changed the meaning of household and family plot, as it was known to the rest of the

farmers in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, especially near their plot. However, she still paid irrigation fees for both plots. Then the husband was again accused by his wife of taking produce from her plot to sell and use the money for his usual drink. She turned to Agritex again for help, and Agritex staff said that they could not control or correct the situation any longer, claiming that it had always been a domestic affair which made it difficult for them to intervene.

My attempts at finding the irrigation managing agency's official standpoint brought the following argument from one Extension Worker who added that otherwise they would have to go into marriage counselling which they were not trained for!

"What if the husband comes to us and says that we should stay out of his family affairs, would you not be embarrassed? You can say that his children will starve, but he can still tell you that they are not your children, and what can you do about it? There is a limit to which we can interfere as government officials. The husband should be referred to his uncles and brothers for advice, and this is the wife's problem, so she has to take the case to the relatives because that is the way such cases are normally resolved from a traditional point of view. The wife should approach his sisters, or the aunts for guidance, or appeal to the community courts. If the husband takes something from the *hozi / isiphala* (grain/storage room, or barn) in his home, for example, how can I, a government employee, tell him to stop, or that he should consult with his wife before he does so? Who am I to tell him that? It is produce from a plot that bears his name through his wife's married name, it is on his premises, at his homestead, what do I say if he asks me who I am, or how do I fit into the whole thing? Its their domestic matter, let them fix it, I cannot get into that one. Maybe if they had separate homes there could be a case, and the police may be called in to intervene and solve the case, maybe arrest him for theft or burglary; but not when they live together, when you go back to your office, you will leave them together. They cook, eat and sleep together, who knows, they still love each other, you do not want to be seen by farmers as a home-breaker. We are here for extension of farming knowledge and not marriage guidance. The wife came to us to try and find a solution to a problem relating to farming and we did all we could. We tried to be very understanding, but they still live together, they are still one household, so we are better off keeping out of that one" (Extension Worker Sithole, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, September 1995).

Well said and well argued, I thought, realising that the extension department had a strong moral argument in support of their stand on the issue. Apparently they had to draw the boundary of their own involvement and avoid venturing into private territory. A more detailed account of the two parties' stories could shed more light into the strategic actions of members of this household, and on how they struggle for control of household resources. The other side of the story was that Agritex still wanted to work well with the new committees and with the old IMC in spite of the apparent rift between the different groups of farmers. Taking a passive role could be the easy way out, which certainly did not serve the interests of the woman affected in this particular case, but it did serve the agency well for the time being.

I went looking for, and found, Nyakuchena, on the 18th of September 1995. When we met and greeted each other, there was a tense few minutes, and I was not sure if he was going to allow a discussion of his domestic affairs. He was dismissive at first, and

asked me what I wanted him for, he said that he had heard that I was looking for him, and was anxious to know why. We found some space in the shade of a tree nearby and talked. His department was threatening at first, like trying to size me up for our meeting, to try and figure out whose side I was on. I had to explain that I just wanted to know his side of the story that was going round, that I needed him to help me clarify the facts, that I did not want to rely on rumours and that was why I had sought to speak to him. He acknowledged the quick spread of rumours and started telling me his side of the story. He said that he had been a policeman in Harare, and that he spoke a bit of English, and wanted to use it to make sure that I understood everything. He told me that he came to start irrigating in 1980 on 2 acres of land, and got 2 extra acres in 1983, all through applications to Agritex. He said that he had 8 children with his wife. Then he asked me where I got his name from, and why I chose to talk to him. I told him that I had heard people talk about his case with his wife of plot sub-division. He asked if this was from Agritex or from the new Block Committees, and I told him it came to me from the grapevine, and from both parties he had mentioned. He laughed and said that Agritex agreed to give his wife a plot of her own after being convinced that she had a problem. He added:

"I am paying maintenance or support money to my family through that plot, it's like social welfare. That woman does not want to be ruled by a man, she is her own man, the Block Committees are jealous (meaning area Block Committee members). There would be no problem if water was enough around here and everyone irrigating as they wanted, but now it's different, they will be on your throat. They want us to farm together but she wants to be on her own, so let her be on her own [he wanted her to have her plot so that during periods of restricted acreage per household, such as that year's 1 acre per family to conserve water, they would have access to two acres as two different farmers]. Yes we live together, she is my wife, I have not rejected her, she has her two acres, but if the Block Committees win, and Agritex give in to their pressure, then she can decide if she wants to stay on with me or move off either to a place of her own or go back to her parents' home. I want my land back, no one is going to take it away from me, it is my plot. It is the maintenance I am paying, so if they stop the present arrangement, I will have to get my land back and we can still live together [here I thought that he was afraid that the whole plot might assume his wife's name]. Yes I drink a lot, and I get really drunk, but I also educate my children, this is why I am wearing these worn out shoes, I have to pay school fees. I do not blame Agritex, they are doing a fine job, they are trained for it. This is one irrigation scheme, and I think we should have one farmers' committee running our affairs. If we must have more, then we must have one that oversees activities of others and they report to it. If you are a *sabhuku* (Village Head) and work under a *sadunhu* (Headman) you cannot all of a sudden start claiming that because you were given room to rule over a place or village then you are now your own boss. As for my wife, if she finds the going tough, she is free to go back to her home, but we are not divorced yet, I just want my land back, the Block Committee knows that because I told them. These women can be a problem sometimes, are you married...?" (Farmer Nyakuchena, September 1995).

His statements seemed to suggest that he was against the new Block Committees that had been expressing opposition to the idea of his wife getting two acres out of their

family plot. He stressed that he was living with his wife and they had no problems with that, except that it was up to her to decide if she wanted to stay on with him. What he did not particularly like was the insinuated threat of losing his land if he did not comply with some of the requirements of the new committees such as one acre per household per season. His idea that the land was his placed in its context the conflict with his wife, especially based on the fact that he thought that he could do almost anything with the family income on his own because, as a man in customary Manyika society, he was the head and leader of the household, able to make executive decisions. But of course situations differed within each household as women exerted different forms of pressure and influence, sometimes taking over the initiative from their husbands or male colleagues.

Later, I told him that I would like to know what his wife thought of their situation, and he told me that I could find her at home. Then on a hot Thursday afternoon I went to the Nyakuchena homestead. The field near the home was partly eaten up by deep gullies as a result of soil erosion, quite common in the area. There were three dilapidated huts, one of them made of bricks, standing on a slope, with one old tree standing at the centre of the clearing between the kitchen and the main house. A cattle kraal stood near the toilet at the bottom of the field. I was hoping that Nyakuchena himself would not be at home, there was no sign of any one at first, so I called out in the normal way of announcing one's approach (*gogoyi! gogogoyi! / ekuhle!*), and Mai Nyakuchena answered from the kitchen, and emerged with a mat. She asked me to take a seat, but I chose to have her sit on the mat while I sat down on a rock under the tree, just in front of the kitchen. After the formal greetings and acknowledgement of our previous meetings, we went straight into the matter at hand. She told me that her husband had left early that day for a drink with some friends.

She then told me in detail how much suffering she had gone through with the children while her husband was drinking himself happy with money from the family's work. She said,

"I am trying to build a life for myself and educate my children here, but its not easy under such circumstances. I am currently trying to raise money to build a house. Agritex and the Block Committees are not co-ordinating their activities and discussions. I told Agritex staff that *this man* uses up all our money on beer with friends, and our children were starving. So I asked for my own plot where I could have some control, and they understood. Now these Block Committees are saying that if I want to keep my own plot I should leave this home and build my own on the side, then they will recognise my right to own my own plot and take care of my own affairs. I think some of them are mad. No-one leaves their crazy partner alone, *hapana munhu anosiya benzi rake ba, unongogara uyinaro / akulamuntu otshiya ilema lakhe uyahlala nalo kuphela* (no one leaves their partner because their are crazy, you stay on with him/her). I want to stay here and educate my children. I met Simoyi (Block Committee chairman) who saw me irrigating and went to report this to the committee which then said that I should go back to my parents if I wanted to keep the plot. *This plot is my maintenance/support* (the husband used the same argument) and it is my whole means of earning a livelihood. This man is not responsible. When I fell ill a couple of years ago, he sold almost everything sellable here, from cattle to our blankets, he sold my tomatoes, wheat and beans. Block Committee members are saying that they do not care what he does. They say that it is a domestic problem, they just want us to use the

same plot, together as one household. They are jealous of what I am doing with it. I went to the police too and they told me the same story, that it's a domestic issue, and Agritex are under pressure to give back the plot to the Block Committee or my husband. Where do I go from here then? The truth is that everybody knows my situation. I want to farm, when I harvest my produce, I make sure that I sell some and keep the other part for home use. From his plot we rarely get anything at all, he actually lives off the two acres I have, he usually leases out the whole plot to his friends from the dryland with whom he drinks. People are jealous, they all know my problem, but are jealous when they see me doing well and taking care of my family, because *musoro wacho hausi kudonsa zvakakanaka/ ikhanda lakhona kalidonsi kahle*, (the head is not pulling well, meaning that the husband, as the traditional head of the household, was not performing his duties well). I have no arrears in maintenance fees, the problem is with the Block Committee. If it was the government making all the arrangements I am sure I would be okay, if he was working somewhere and behaving that way, would I not be earning maintenance or up-keep from his workplace? Here the irrigation plot is our workplace, it is the job that provides us with all we require to take care of our needs, but what do I get from it? At one point a Block Committee member sent his wife to Agritex to try and split their plot so that she would get her own like me, but Agritex refused saying that the couple did not have serious domestic problems like me. Then he got upset by that, and now wants to make sure that they cancel our arrangement. I could be a better person in terms of personal wealth if my husband was not destroying everything. I am glad that I bought goats, cattle, and chickens from the plot. He just is helpless when it comes to beer. But if you see him sober, you may not believe that he can do all the things he has done, he seems a very good person, but when he drinks and comes home, I have to try and protect myself, he says that I want to run his home, that I want to rule him or run his life, that I am selfish and do not give him anything. When there is enough water in the irrigation scheme, there are no such problems as the Block Committee demanding that we use one plot. Everyone knows my problem around here, if we took a vote, the Block Committee would lose like they did last time in the block's general meeting, people's support gives me strength to stay on and fight, they say that if I go my kids will suffer, so I am going to fight on..." (*Mai Nyakuchena, Nyamaropa farmer*).

Highlights of our discussion at this stage included some pointers to the type of relationship that they had, or that she wanted me to see. She called him *this man*, a sign of a form of 'alienation' or dissociation from him. This changed, however, when she was talking about another subject, and she referred to him as *the head*, although as one that was not thinking straight. She took the initiative to change her life and that of her children by going to Agritex to claim her own share of the irrigation field and its resources. The way the Block Committee responded to her problem was against her wishes, and they were afraid of setting a precedent whereby they were regarded as condoning plot sub-division, a situation in Nyamaropa which the original founders of Block Committees were opposed to from the start. As a woman, and an immigrant in a block full of local irrigators, she was an enterprising woman, and quite bold at that, enough to challenge both her husband and the committee, and to take on the managing agency and win.

Later I met the Head of Agritex in the irrigation project and tried to get his views about such a case. He said that it presented them with a major dilemma, adding, "This is a domestic affair and we have to find a suitable way of getting involved, the police cannot deal with it too for the same reason that it is a domestic matter. My suggestion is that those who go to Church should approach the elders of their Church and talk about it at that level. They will probably get valuable counselling there. Those who follow the traditional ways should ask their aunts and uncles to intervene. If this fails then they can take the matter to the local village council, to be sorted out by the village leaders in a proper way" (Irrigation Officer Sikume, Nyamaropa Irrigation Scheme, 1995).

The Extension Worker responsible for the area of the block in the irrigation scheme in which the family's field was located said that if they must keep the plot split, then they must also accept the compromise of using the designated size per household because they still lived together. He said that was only fair to other water users who paid the same water rates as the Nyakuchena household per unit area.

This case raises issues of territoriality, and creation of boundaries, and questions the notion of culturally accepted gender identity. There is actually more of attempts to maintain or defend a particular order than of mapping frameworks within which one party has to be restricted. Barring the possibility that the couple may be together in a nicely hatched plan to cheat both Agritex and other farmers into having more land used in times of water shortage and limited acreage per household per season, this could pass for a typical case of a man in a male dominated community, claiming a culturally-sanctioned right to control his household's income. But the analysis should not end there. Where the actor-oriented approach becomes especially useful is in providing us with analytical tools to delve into issues of, for example, how the apparently oppressed and 'powerless' woman finds ways to gain access to the products of her labour. She takes the initiative to devise strategies to cross the boundary her husband and the irrigation community (which seems to condone his actions) have set for her, and enrolls Agritex into her project to gain control of part of the products of her family's labour. She distinguished herself from other farmers by claiming that her situation was *different* because of her husband's drinking habits. There were other cases in the irrigation scheme where husbands were accused of misusing family earnings from crops sales, but few of them, if any, ever got such public attention, and none of the women mentioned took as bold a move as Mai Nyakuchena did, which makes her case particularly unusual. Some of the women used other means, referred by some of them as 'smooth bribery', whereby they would tell their relatives about what their husbands were doing, which was quite embarrassing and would force them to share the income more generously, or at least fairly.

In the case of the example of Nyakuchena and his wife, the question was whether the problem was one of too much drinking alone, or there was more to do with control of family resources, or beer drinking was used as part of the excuse for enforcing personal authority within the household. The husband's aim could have been that he wanted her to remain subservient to him, hence he could achieve this by controlling the only means of livelihood she had, the irrigation field.

The wife's story made Agritex and other farmers sympathise with her. She had six of her children with her at home to feed and clothe, and an irrigation plot to farm. She seemed to want freedom to work and her rights to have a say in the way her earnings

were distributed. The irrigation plot was the only source of her freedom and personal achievement. She felt that she had the capability to take care of everything in her care through the plot. She wanted to have decision-making powers over the results of her labour, and the only impediment was her own husband. She acknowledged his 'headship', if only as part of a cultural definition of husband-and-wife relations, but wanted to have powers of deciding how to dispose of the family income. Mai Nyakuchena wanted to extend her boundaries beyond the limits set for her by her husband and the culture of male domination.

Other irrigators felt cheated, the Nyakuchena family could not claim to be different, and other farmers wanted the same treatment. The family was indeed benefiting from the new arrangement, and one could not rule out the possibility of them having planned the whole thing. Agritex staff's side of the story was another interesting part of the puzzle. They had the mandate to run the irrigation scheme and solve management-related problems such as this one. In this particular case they made the mistake of splitting the plot in the first place, which was initially a wise move to solve Mai Nyakuchena's livelihood problem. When the problem got tough, they then started arguing that it was a domestic matter out of their jurisdiction. Hence the domesticity of the problem freed them from the responsibility of solving it, and the same thing applied with the police. They had already involved themselves in the domestic domain of the conflict and tried to extract themselves by calling it a domestic affair outside their powers. It was not quite clear where to draw the line between domesticity and the managerial nature of the problem. This left Mai Nyakuchena in a vulnerable position against her husband and those who wanted the situation to remain in his favour, like their own. One solution would have been to strike a compromise, that the family use half an acre each if the irrigation rule for that season was that each family must use only one acre, but they wanted to have it both ways. So far, they were indeed having it both ways.

General Discussion

This chapter has presented case analyses that cut across a range of issues and topics on women in the irrigation domain in the Nyamaropa. Generally, the introduction of irrigation development brings with it prospects for improved levels of production and higher incomes for families involved. It also carries with it more intensive labour demands and creates problems for those families that do not have all the farming resources. In situations where men are culturally or traditionally regarded as leaders in public and within their households, it becomes increasingly problematic for women to challenge the status quo in public and seek to achieve goals higher than those set for them by a predominantly male discourse. When they do challenge the existing order in practice, such as in high production levels by the comparatively more successful Mai Hakutangwi, setting up a bakery co-operative by a group of women, or Mai Nyakuchena initiating a move, and managing, to sub-divide her family plot to her benefit, there is resistance from those benefitting from the status quo. An implicit factor in this development is that cultural definitions of gender roles, and gender identity and difference, are not only creations of one group, and a manipulable aspect of social relations, but they are also useful tools to keep checks and controls on some groups of actors. Control may be a strong term here, but culturally shaped, and

manipulable gender differences are used in attempts to regulate the behaviour and practices of others.

The concept of culturally constructed gender identities and differences, used here partly as a tool for analysis of social relations, opens up avenues of interpreting the daily activities of social actors involved in contests over resources that provide livelihoods for their families. Gender identities, some of which are culturally or traditionally constructed or sanctioned, such as the issue that a widow may not necessarily do better than other farmers in production, or that a group of women's project may not succeed, are sustained by those members of a community who derive benefits from them. Where men are the bosses, and women are treated as subordinates, the latter's demands for recognition and self-determination may be met with resistance. Whitehead (1984) says that,

"a woman's capacity to 'own' things depends on the extent to which she is legally and actually separable from other people... the issue raised is the extent to which forms of conjugal, familial and kinship relations allow her an independent existence so that she can assert rights as an individual against individuals" (Whitehead, 1984: 198-90, in Moore, 1988: 72).

Most widows in Nyamaropa seemed to have achieved a level of independent existence that gave them space to shape their own lives without immediate reference to another party, or direct obligation to consult or seek approval before executing their decisions.

The assumed cultural links that attached men to women, even in the temporary absence of the former (in migrant labour), in a way that obligated women to consult with men, were broken where the man was no longer available for consultation. When this happened, a widowed woman stood alone as an individual much more clearly than did a married woman. This was the premise of her *gender identity and difference* from others which placed her in a unique position under farming conditions such as were found in smallholder irrigation schemes. She stood out and was more susceptible to social scrutiny than other women. Some of this added attention spurred some widows on to higher levels of performance in their farming activities.

The anthropological argument that women are powerless because they are associated with the 'domestic' (Moore, 1988: 72) suggests that they can only be powerful when they rid themselves of the domestic identity tag they carry around with them. Yet we find that the domesticity of women's tasks in Nyamaropa did not necessarily *give* or *deny* them power to decide on their own lives as such. Linking 'domesticity' and 'powerlessness' is a rather simplistic way of interpreting women's positions in various contexts. It might restrict them to roles that were commonly *regarded* as less important, but equally important in ensuring the survival and continued sustenance of the household. Because power, as a manipulable resource, is fluid and unfixed, negotiated in action, some widows, and some oppressed married women, were able to mobilise certain resources that helped them gain more influence in their own social and economic lives. It was within the domesticated tasks that some women exerted a lot of influence (Bourdillon, 1987; Vijfhuizen, 1995). The case of Mai Nyakuchena above illustrates part of the point that women in comparatively weak domestic and social positions found effective ways to free themselves, to create space for themselves and their activities.

The sociological argument that 'the family is the site of women's oppression' needs looking into (Moore, 1988: 72). In the case of the widow Mai Hakutangwi, the family

was actually a site of freedom, freer than the social pressures outside in the public domain that prescribed certain behaviour for widows, and did not expect them to challenge men, even in farming practice. The case of the bold and daring wife, Mai Nyakuchena, however, clearly agreed with and confirmed the fact that the family could be the site of oppression and struggle. But the story goes beyond that. The oppressed may, and have room to, devise strategies to 'get out' and free themselves while still living there. The site of oppression and its boundaries might appear invincible to others, but there are several ways out of the virtual cultural trap, as Mai Nyakuchena proved to other women in her position by going to the managing agency to find a way to free that part of herself that she can.

Villarreal (1992) in her study of a group of female beekeepers in Mexico, found that in the reconstruction of their social worlds, creating room for manoeuvre involved a degree of independence in certain spheres and a degree of dependence in others. It implied enrolment of other people in one's own projects, which involved imposing upon others images useful for one's own purposes: power, negotiation and consent.

Where widows were concerned, this situation of domesticity and family oppression seemed to change slightly. Widows did not have a 'powerful' male member of the family to directly recognise and 'empower' as their 'head' in the family as Mai Nyakuchena did. In Villarreal's terms, widows did not have to 'yield' power to a man, and they did not have a man who 'wielded' power in their homes (Villarreal, 1994). The way widows manipulated social relations around them to their advantage might be different from the way married women did it both because of their social and family standing, and because of the continued existence or persistence of cultural tenets that discouraged women's enterprise and suppressed them under the guise of being customarily weaker than men and submissive. There were situations where some men were 'free riders' in relation to women's efforts and the fruits of their hard labour. What is interesting is that women almost always let them. Changes at the social and cultural levels in irrigated agriculture might make one believe that there are mini-revolutions taking place in the sphere of gender relations and gender identities between men and women. Changes were indeed taking place in Nyamaropa, with more women gaining more influence and a large share of decision making within their households. However, the resistance and strength in some cases, of the dominating identity of the male definition of gender relations, always threatened to upset the move towards more open and less culturally justified subordination of women.

Notes

1. This practice of "taking over" a deceased man's wife in Shona tradition was called *kugara nhaka*, or *ukungena* in Ndebele. It was meant to keep the married woman within the family at the death of her husband especially if she was still of child-bearing age. Part of the belief behind the practice was that the family paid *lobola* (bridewealth) for her, so she should continue to bear children for them even when the one she married was dead. However, the practice has declined over the years as women gain more independence and claim their right to choose what they want to do with their lives when widowed.
2. This was a charitable Christian NGO with a programme for tilling land for farmers in Communal Areas. They charged a nominal fee for both dryland and irrigated areas, but cheaper for the former because dryland farmers were believed to have less money, to be poorer than irrigators.

3. Sometimes when Mai Hakutangwi came back from selling her tobacco, she would find that many people asked her for money, and when she turned them down, refusing to lend them even a cent, they would tell her that they knew that she had earned a lot of money from tobacco and was being selfish.
4. The different versions of the story about the co-operative were taken from different members of the group who were met at the premises of the bakery. Some of them called each other for group interviews, 'to help each other get the story right'. Access to some of the records was not made possible, it was considered a sensitive part. For those who were interviewed in their homesteads, some of the husbands would interject now and then and point out that if there was no profit, there was no need to stay on. Only a few were encouraging.
5. Philip and Lizzy were the names that the co-operative women gave me. What mattered in this context was that they were outsiders who introduced the co-operative idea of the bakery to the women, and foreigners too, giving the project an external link from the start, but at least the women made it look local by doing most of the work themselves.

Chapter 6

Farmer-extensionist encounters Changing views of bitter-sweet relationships

Introduction

On agency-farmer relations

Working relations between farmers and Agritex staff in some rural situations in Zimbabwe have been characterized by a spirit of patronage on the part of the national extension agency. Smallholder irrigation schemes and their farmers are often treated as government 'babies' that need pampering and tending before they can stand on their own, without relying on government subsidies. The problem is that the babies do not seem to 'grow up'. There are sometimes stark differences between Agritex objectives and what farmers would rather do. For example, Agritex in Nyamaropa wanted farmers to regard their tenancy in the irrigation project as a privilege that they had to utilize effectively in order to make their fortune before they grew old and were incapable of working. Farmers, however, saw their stay in the irrigation scheme as a life-long right, and regarded the place as their permanent home from which not even the poorest production levels could lead to their eviction, and they added that they had nowhere else to go.

As early as 1962, the then Secretary for Agriculture, on smallholder agriculture in Zimbabwe, declared that one of the imperatives of the government was to "transform agriculture in the African sector from a subsistence to a cash economy, and to do this with all speed" (Ministry of Agriculture Annual Report, Salisbury, 1962). This spirit was carried forward by successive governments, and was still influential in official practices in 1996. The latest Agritex Mission Statement declared that one of the central objectives of the department was:

"To maintain a process of transforming rural farm families from subsistence into commercial agriculture, hence ensuring healthy farm families that have a sound base for economic growth" (Agritex, 1992).

Some of the mechanics of the practical implementation of this strategy did attempt to address the finer aspects of the diversity of smallholder irrigation and dryland farmers in communal areas. But there was still need to fully understand the sociological and micro-interactive processes of farmers' daily lives in order to grasp the process by which they made a living among each other and in interactions with outsiders.

Admittedly, Agritex has done a discernible job in teaching farmers to raise their production levels in Communal Areas around the country. Extension methods carry clear messages about how to be a better farmer, a Master Farmer¹. Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) teach farmers about the use of improved and tested seed varieties, crop rotations, soil fertility and maintenance. The social (labour), economic (input prices), and cultural (*chisi*) environments of farmers do not allow them to observe and practise all that they are taught by extension agents as freely as they would wish, and sometimes there are what are often called serious cultural impediments to the adoption of some of the techniques taught by Agritex.

This chapter is about encounters between farmers and extension staff in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. It shows how farmers perceived the role of Agritex (the national extension service), and how Agritex staff were caught between administrative and advisory roles. Cases presented below were used to analyze farmer-extensionist relations as they changed and shifted in daily interactions between the two main parties. The main argument put forward here is that farmers enrolled extension staff into their own projects in order to gain leverage in their group conflicts, and extension staff took advantage of farmers' divisions or differences in attempts to enforce or impose their extension 'packages' (such as the block system). Another salient aspect of the chapter is the element of formulating strategies by both Agritex and farmers in attempts to influence what was happening in the irrigation scheme either in management in general, or in water distribution and acreage per crop per season in particular. The chapter is not about irrigation management *per se*, but about relationships and identities among different social and cultural groups in the irrigation scheme.

The first part of the chapter presents a specific case analysis of encounters within or among Agritex staff, and between Agritex and farmers in general. This was in 1994 when Agritex chose to take a less active role in the way farmers dealt with their conflicts and water-use problems. This section on Agritex includes a brief look at some pertinent aspects of the extension department's operations on the ground and up the hierarchy as seen by ground staff. The second part looks at the 1995 season where Agritex decided to take the initiative to influence the character of change by forming Block Committees parallel to the long-existing Irrigation Management Committee (sometimes referred to as the Management Committee). Here there is also a section on particular (and peculiar) encounters between farmers and Agritex, especially concerned with how they treat each other in specific interface situations.

A third part is a presentation of a potentially explosive encounter between irrigation farmers and the Irrigation Supervisor (Runganga) whereby the latter ordered the closure of water to all farmers who had not paid their fees for that 1995 season (before the deadline lapsed), and crops were suffering. This culminated in a showdown between farmer representatives and the supervisor. This is followed by a look at farmers' perceptions of Agritex and extension services, more like a verdict passed by farmers on current performances of the department as compared to extension staff of the pre-independence era. Throughout the chapter there are selected cases of encounters between Agritex and farmers which are meant to bring out the dynamism of their relationships. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications and meanings of the various encounters, and some conclusions.

The argument throughout the chapter is that people manipulate their relationships, and they often rationally and consciously strategise in their dealings or in encounters and relations with other actors in their social worlds mainly serve their own interests. Different farmers use their ethnic, kinship, political, cultural and other usable resources (including mere differences based on ethnicity or type of relationship with external agencies) to gain influence and have a say in irrigation management, or to upstage their opponents in their various contests or conflicts in the irrigation scheme. A central part of the argument is that different actors' social differences, roles in irrigation management, and ethnic diversities, can(not) be overlooked in pursuit of influential positions in social organisation. In this sense, social difference becomes fluid, flexible and manipulable.

The Setting

As shown in Chapter 2, during the period of study (1993-6) there were over 450 plottolders³, one Agricultural Extension Officer (AEO, Irrigation), one Agricultural Extension Supervisor (AES) (both responsible for the irrigation and its surrounding dryland areas), four Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) and one Water Controller (WC) for each of the four Blocks making up the scheme. The four Water Controllers had one foreman, making up a team of five in charge of water distribution. There were about 20 General Hands who helped maintain irrigation infrastructure. The most senior of the Agritex staff in the irrigation scheme was the Extension Officer, followed by the Supervisor, Extension Workers, Water Controllers and General Hands⁴. There were only two women among the Agritex staff in the irrigation scheme, one an Extension Worker, and the other the station's clerk. The rest of the setting is presented in Chapter 2.

Extension Workers' operations were monitored by the Supervisor who was in his sixties and was more experienced in extension-related work than the rest of the staff. The Supervisor said that there was need for both EWs and Water Controllers to tighten up the way they worked with farmers and to be strict. Extension Workers said that the Supervisor was sometimes too harsh with them (and farmers) and ordered them around, even in front of farmers. The Irrigation Officer, who was much younger than the Supervisor (in his thirties), was more reserved and preferred to carry out his duties quietly⁵.

A cocktail of social, kinship and political relationships

The social situation among farmers in Nyamaropa presented a cocktail of relationships that characterized the heterogeneous nature of the population, derived, partly, from the nature of the project as a settlement scheme (also in Reynolds, 1969; Magadla and Hebinck, 1995). Some of the social relations in Nyamaropa traversed the commonly cited differences between the various groups based on ethnicity and origins before joining the irrigation scheme. The ethnic dimension was one of the strongest and yet hidden issues of distinction, at least in the sense that it was not a subject you could bring up in a public gathering. Still, it came out when the need to make critical decisions such as elections for local leadership in the political party or in the IMC came up.

The fact that most of the local irrigators managed to get smaller plots (an average size of two acres each as opposed to an average of four acres for those who joined earlier), and in parts of the scheme with *vlei* soils, made most of them look towards new ways of gaining access to larger pieces of land somehow. The Irrigation Management Committee had a large Manyika (immigrant) following, and Block Committees were backed mostly by local Barwe irrigators⁶. Block Committees were formed in 1995 as a result of Agritex's dissatisfaction with the IMC together with other farmers' dislike of the IMC leadership. In a way, they were the left, and the IMC was the right, because the latter was the accepted, formerly government recognized farmers' representative body.

There was a common belief among farmers in the irrigation scheme that Agritex staff initiated the idea of forming Block Committees and sold it to Samunda, a political rival of the chairman of the Irrigation Management Committee, Mpesa. The former

informally led Block Committees since their formation. Block Committee members gave the impression that they brought up the idea themselves, but official records in Agritex offices indicated that the idea was introduced to them by extension staff as a way of ensuring more participation by farmers in their respective blocks and to try and curb the alleged arrogance of the IMC.

There were several reasons explaining the basis for the disenchantment among the three parties. They included the displacement of locals from their land when the irrigation scheme started (they refused to join the project); the fact that local Barwe farmers who joined later got smaller plots; alleged lack of respect for traditional values by immigrant Manyika irrigators, and Agritex's resentment of the IMC's influence among irrigators, most of whom were from the Manyika ethnic group. Agritex staff purported to be neutral in dealing with all farmers, but sometimes got entangled in farmer's political wrangles.

Some farmers in conflicting groups were related⁷ to some Agritex staff. Many of the farmers were related to each other in one way or the other. Relating to someone could sometimes be a creation of two people out of friendship, not linked to 'blood' relations, but more of an identity construction meant to serve certain political, economic or social objectives. Among farmers, those who were 'related' to some Agritex staff included the IMC chairman, who was said to be a distant relative of the irrigation Supervisor, or at least they acknowledged that. The Supervisor was politically on the side of the local irrigators' group that was pushing for the dissolution of the IMC. The leader of Block Committees, Samunda, shared the same *mutupo*⁸ (totem) with the chairman of the Irrigation Management Committee, who actually initiated his (Samunda's) ejection from the same position of chairman in 1992 when Samunda openly advocated block system management in Nyamaropa in support of Agritex.

To give it another twist, Samunda was a committee member in both the IMC and the new Block Committee for block D. The Extension Worker for block B, Sithole, was a son-in-law of the Block Committee chairman of that block, and had sometimes clashed with the IMC chairman because he had this (marriage) link with the IMC chairman's rival in his block (B). But the IMC chairman had to work with them all since his main fields were in block B where his rivals had gained significant influence. The webs of relationships were not openly talked about, but they were known to those involved, and acknowledged as a pacifying factor when everything seemed amicable between the different parties. What became crucial was the way in which the various parties at different times used the relationships, constructed and reconstructed them, to achieve certain specific goals.

Agritex's 'undercover' strategy⁹

The 1994 winter season was one of the dry ones in the Nyamaropa area, and this affected both irrigators' and dryland farmers' crop production in such a way that they had to look to the little irrigation water left to see them through to the next season's harvests. There had been talk of water being misused or stolen by some farmers in some blocks in the irrigation scheme. The Supervisor said that he would call a meeting with Water Controllers to thrash out once and for all the issue of how some farmers who had not paid up their fees after the June 30 deadline were allegedly being given water.

"You make us look evil...": clashes within Agritex, and between Agritex and the IMC.

The meeting was attended by the four Extension Workers and the four Water Controllers. It was held at the Agritex offices in their 'conference room' which had a row of benches, a table, and a chair in front for the chairperson of the meeting. The four Water Controllers sat on benches, and the Supervisor, who had called the meeting, sat at the table in front, while the only two Extension Workers attending sat on the front benches near the Supervisor. The situation was tense (there were no farmers). The Supervisor went straight into the issue at stake, addressing Water Controllers,

"Gentlemen, I am disappointed with the work you are doing. Cows are all over the irrigation scheme, you do not do anything about it, they are walking all over the canals, and nobody has filed a report, some of you want to be too nice, why? We never see you in the scheme, why? I don't want any comment from you. I am shifting you around... You have names of people who are not supposed to be given water, but you went ahead and gave them in other areas, how come? Why are you so supportive of farmers? You are selling us out, if I see this again, you will lose your jobs. You make us look evil and you look good. Why is it that people irrigate at will without anyone to monitor them? This is why so much water is lost. If you think you cannot manage any more, then leave. You are paid Government money to do this job, but you neglect it. You mess up your work and then ask for some days off. What is wrong with you?"

When no response came from the Water Controllers, EW Sithole, who was one of the senior Extension Workers there, came in with a question; "How did some farmers get water when they had not paid up their fees as required?". One of the Water Controllers pointed out that some farmers had proved to them that they had finished paying by showing them their receipts. One of the farmers in question, and one who was said by Agritex to be a constant trouble-maker, had irrigated his crop and said that he was going to pay later, but the standing Agritex rule was that farmers in such situations should not be given water at all until they had paid up all they owed.

The Supervisor told Water Controllers to check with the irrigation clerk before giving water to anyone who was on the list of defaulters. He emphasized that if they opened water for a farmer they would have to wait until the farmer was through with irrigating, they must monitor farmers' irrigation or water application practices to avoid losses and theft of water. The Water Controllers took all the criticisms quietly and left the talking to their superiors. Extension Worker Sithole then gave them some advice on farmers' trickery. He said,

"Some farmers are very clever, you have to try and beat them in their attempts to beat you and your system, you have to join hands the four of you and work closely together. Every now and then you have to check with each other which farmers appear in the other's papers so that you do not give the wrong farmer water when you are not supposed to".

They acknowledged the piece of advice which they later admitted to me was nothing new since, they argued, they worked closer with farmers and under more risky conditions than Extension Workers. One of them, Samunda, a local dryland farmer, said that extension staff did not want to get into tough situations directly relating to farmers, such as cutting off water use or regulating and scheduling irrigation turns. He

said, "they leave all the dirty work to Water Controllers who are always at the point of friction with farmers, while they sit in their offices".

Then there was mention of the problem of farmers having plots in two or three different blocks. Farmers used this strategy to avoid paying all the fees at once, or to evade punishment for not paying on time. When their names appeared on the list of those to be denied water, they acted as if it was only for one plot in one block, and continued to use the other one as if nothing had happened. Some of them actually rented other farmers' plots without arrears and continued to irrigate. Agritex did not confront this situation directly, and quite rightly so I thought. After observing and listening to their problems, I came to realise and believe that there was a critical link between staff and farmers which sometimes made it impossible for staff to directly confront farmers who blatantly, yet often strategically, flouted irrigation regulations and rules to keep production of one or two of their crops promising during harsh periods of water shortage. The Irrigation Officer had told me several times that they were humans too and not blind and unfeeling enforcers of regulations. They were aware that they were an inherent part of the situation in Nyamaropa, and their lives were interlocked with farmers' own, hence they needed to find the middle ground where they would work better together without regular clashes.

Later, on their own, Extension Workers said that farmers had to be fined for stealing water because they knew that they were not supposed to irrigate at all before paying up arrears. Then the crunch point came which really upset the Supervisor: Water Controllers seemed to be aware of all this and apparently played an important (but not well-defined) role in promoting water piracy. After one of the EWs had said that Water Controllers were sabotaging the work of extension staff, the Supervisor said,

"These Water Controllers are undermining us, they are weakening us in the eyes of farmers by working against our resolutions and the laws that we have put up. They are supposed to be promoting or supporting what we recommended and agreed upon, but they undermine it. They should be taught a good lesson too. What we need to do now is to work on them very carefully. What do we do now?"

He went on to say,

"Let us shift them around, they have stayed too long in the same place and are feeling too warm. This may make them a bit tougher on farmers who demand favours. If they continue to flout the regulations as they have been doing, then they will have to join the General Hands or leave".

The four Water Controllers were subsequently shifted around, but not before a little debate on which block and which EW was going to get which Water Controller. There was one who was not much liked by any of them. He was said to be harsh with some farmers, while being too friendly with others, and was an irrigation farmer himself. The shifting around of WCs could easily be regarded as one not-so-inactive role that Agritex played in the irrigation scheme to try to resolve the problem of farmers stealing water, but as far as confronting farmers themselves with the water distribution issue was concerned, there was more (or was it less!) to come. After being shifted, Water Controllers continued doing their work in their new blocks. Initially there were some complaints from some farmers about the 'new' Water Controllers not

knowing which farmers got water first. Later, after a couple of weeks, it seemed farmers came to accept Water Controllers in their blocks and worked with them.

Since the 1994 winter was a dry one farmers wanted to know how much water was available, and how much acreage for winter crops was recommended by Agritex for the season in light of the available water. But no meetings were held early enough either by Agritex or the IMC (or both as had been the case in previous seasons), to discuss the matter with farmers and possibly decide what acreage each farmer was to plant with winter wheat and July beans. When water levels dropped, and irrigation turns' average in turn dropped, from 14 days to plus 25 days, farmers demanded a meeting with both Agritex and the Management Committee.

Agritex alleged that Management Committee members too, like WCs, were undermining them. Previously, they would hold closed meetings with the IMC before a general meeting with farmers, and agree on how to handle or present certain cases or issues to farmers. But during some of the meetings the IMC had changed what was agreed upon in the closed meeting to present to farmers a different picture altogether, thereby leaving Agritex staff in difficult positions. Agritex staff declared that they were not going to have any more meetings with the IMC prior to a general meeting, they were not going to convene or organize any meetings with or for farmers themselves since that was the task of the committee (unless it was extremely necessary), and they were not going to sit in front of the audience with the IMC during meetings any more. They were going to sit with the rest of the audience as mere observers. Finally, an 'active' move from the extension agents.

When the meeting to discuss the water situation was held, only three out of six Agritex extension staff were present, and for the first time in a general meeting of irrigation farmers, they sat in the audience among farmers and listened. By the end of the meeting, however, only one of them was left, the other two had gone back to their offices. The one left had to answer the question of how much water was left in the dam, and was asked by farmers to go and measure it with his colleagues and give feedback to farmers. This was done within the following week and the message was given to farmers who subsequently (and predictably) went on to use more land per farmer than recommended by Agritex. There was nothing new in this show of defiance. It was an indication of farmers' own freedom to make their own choices and take risks in their farming outside the Agritex realm of control or regulation, which they had been doing for several previous seasons.

Agritex, committees and mutual enrolment

The divide and rule strategy

Enrolment here is discussed with regards to Agritex enrolling local irrigators in their efforts to introduce the block system type of management in Nyamaropa. In the same manner, local irrigators enroll Agritex in their own attempts to gain access to more irrigated land. Other farmers opposed to the IMC enrol Agritex to try and turn other farmers against the IMC. In February 1995 there was talk within Agritex circles of the IMC not working well with the extension department.

As shown above, extension staff had initiated the formation of Block Committees with some local farmers who were not happy with the IMC. In an internal meeting of

extension staff, the Supervisor and the Irrigation Officer were trying to sell the idea to the rest of their staff, and the Supervisor said,

"Block Committees are strong, the Irrigation Management Committee wants to hinder their progress. They have to form their top committee (IMC). Mpesa (the IMC chairman) is using other farmers as weapons in his fight with Block Committees, but it will not be long before the present Management Committee loses its power. Its members are not attending Block Committee meetings. They say they want to see how the new structure works before becoming part of it. They (the IMC chairman and his followers) have this misguided impression that they are legally entitled to their position. They think that no one here can dislodge them, they think it is their gazetted right to be there. But there is no irrigation policy that says they should be there, they think that they can go up the ladder and have higher politicians to deal with the issue on their behalf. We have to show them that they are wrong".

There was general agreement among extension staff that there was reason to change the present IMC which was not co-operative. This, it seemed to them, had to start by addressing the very foundations of farmer organisation in a way that would not necessarily spoil relations between extension staff and the rest, or majority, of the irrigation scheme's farming community. Promotion of self-management of the irrigation projects through IMCs and other committees did not reduce the high levels of control that extension staff in specific situations wanted to exercise over farmers' activities. Lack of co-operation between the two parties was often interpreted as stubbornness on the part of farmers' committees. When Agritex staff spoke openly against farmers' representative organisation, this tended to divide the farming community.

Information as political capital: Mpesa's strategy to retain influence

There was the '*jatropha* issue' which was spreading in Nyamaropa and giving farmers hope that their water shortage problems might be solved for good. This concerned a water project in the irrigation area sponsored by the American Rockefeller Foundation and German GTZ through a local NGO called Biomas Users' Network (BUN) based in Harare. The main objective of the project was to get farmers to grow a type of plant called *jatropha* whose seed was said to produce oil. The oil would be pressed and refined for use in running an engine that would pump water from the nearby perennial Gairezi River into the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. This project would finally lay to rest Nyamaropa irrigation farmers' chronic water shortage problems. Any farmer who saw this prospect was likely to put his weight behind the project, and many of them did, giving those among them in charge of organising the initiative some local political clout. The IMC chairman, Mpesa, had been in the forefront of the project from the start. This became the chairman's political capital. Keeping most of the information about the project to himself put him in an influential position, especially with the dry spell continuing and farmers looking up to any chance of getting water from any source with high hopes.

Mpesa was negotiating with the Harare-based NGO to abstract water from the Gairezi river by pumping, and the NGO required farmers to grow the *jatropha* plant all over the place to maximize oil seed production. It seemed Block Committees did not

want to have much to do with it. They said that they did not know what was happening about it, claiming that IMC members hoarded information on progress in the project. My own interpretation of the situation, backed up later by views of some Block Committee members and some farmers, was that the IMC leadership was using the project as a political tool to remain in office. Block Committee members did not oppose the project, they resented the way the IMC kept close control of it. The informal leader of Block Committees, Samunda, said that he did not like the idea of the IMC leadership giving farmers the impression that water would be flowing within a short period of time, which he saw as a misrepresentation of facts. This was about the same time that Block Committees were enjoying more support in the irrigation scheme. This was confirmed by the number of farmers who were interviewed and expressed their support for them, but this would later change.

Struggles for recognition: Of committees and commitment

About a month after the formation of Block Committees in three of the blocks in the irrigation scheme, I joined a discussion among EWs outside their offices on general and current issues in the irrigation scheme and the surrounding areas. There were three EWs and the Supervisor. EW Sithole gave us his interpretation of the situation regarding farmer organisation in Nyamaropa. He said that the IMC could not be allowed to just stand as popular figures without working for the development of the farming community and the irrigation scheme. He pointed out that Block Committees would work on getting more water from the catchment area with the guidance of Agritex. Sithole then added that, "we are aware that the Management Committee wants to disrupt their progress, it is good that we are now working well with the Block Committees, and they appear to be working well with most farmers". The Supervisor asked his juniors when the next Management Committee elections would be held, and no one seemed to know exactly. Sithole said that it should be around the middle of the year. Then the Supervisor added,

"We want to form a new Management Committee based on the present Block Committee members so that we can talk the same language [a language of stricter controls and regulations]. Right now there are two or more language. As Agritex we have to support the new Block Committees because they seem to have a better grasp of the situation we are in today, and they are supported by the majority of farmers".

The different languages had clear links to different, quite identifiable, groups of farmers attached to them. Agritex staff had chosen their side of the wrangle, they were also aware of the IMC's stronger position deriving from their control of the promising *jatropa* project, a winning ticket among most farmers in the irrigation scheme. A vigorous campaign to discredit Mpesa and the IMC leadership in general could backfire, especially because it could be seen as a direct attack on one active member of the IMC, the chairman. The other IMC members were generally quiet, and went along with Mpesa in most decisions.

Extension Worker Sithole then pointed out that the Irrigation Management Committee had to be told that for the *jatropa* project to succeed, it had to involve farmers from the start. Otherwise if the chairman of the committee kept most of the information as political capital for his personal gain, then they might as well forget

about its success. Then in a different tone, the EW, as if feeling pity for farmers, said, "We have to tell the IMC that things work out better if people participate in their own project". And the Supervisor added, "We have to tell them that we are here for their own good, for their interests, let us write a letter about our views to them".

There was no letter written though, but it was clear that there were serious dilemmas among Agritex staff about what steps to take next. They were obviously against the IMC which they found to be unco-operative, and were in support of the new Block Committees which were seemingly easier to work with because they consulted with Agritex in most of their activities and were certainly sponsored by Agritex. Agritex's enrolment of dissatisfied farmers in their strategy to unseat the Irrigation Management Committee could not be distinguished from local farmers' wish to remove the same committee from power. This apparently seemed to have been a well-hatched coup by both Agritex and some local and disgruntled immigrant irrigators to turn farmers against their 'popularly elected' body. For several months after the formation of Block Committees things seemed to be moving quite well for them. They were gaining support in the way they were attempting to control farmers' irrigation practices and fine those who broke the unwritten rules and the by-laws of the irrigation scheme.

For several weeks after that meeting there were discussions among farmers on the role of the two types of committees. I discussed the issue with some of them. One immigrant irrigator (Mautsa) who joined the irrigation scheme in 1964, and one of the most outspoken irrigators, said that he hated the idea of seeing the irrigation scheme full of committees fighting over control of the scheme. He argued,

"There are too many committees here, there are just too many committees in this place. *There should be one main committee in charge of everything.* Too many people want power here, and this will not lead us anywhere. *Where have you seen two bulls living peacefully in one kraal? If EWs cannot do the job that they came here for, then they should leave!*".

There were more than two bulls in this particular scene vying to be in charge of the same kraal. The Agritex stand was a crucial factor in deciding which way some farmers' support would go, but only if there were no obvious or glaring mistakes on their part which would automatically shift support towards their opponents. It was a matter of convincing one party of the good of the other, and there was little else Agritex staff could do to change the trend when farmers, especially in a meeting, shouted in support of one group. But then there was an ethnic divide among irrigators which played a significant role in the way they aligned themselves, even temporarily, with one group or another, although in some cases support for one group transcended the ethnic and religious divide. In this case the farmer cited above had the view that at least one committee would represent all farmers sufficiently. As an immigrant himself, he supported the IMC led by an immigrant. It seemed that there was no way that the IMC would be removed from power without a struggle, with or without Agritex supporting the Block Committees which the IMC initially saw as just a 'rebellious faction'. The lines of division were not getting any clearer though.

On 21 June 1995, there was a meeting of Agritex, the IMC and Block Committee members, held at the Agritex offices. The meeting was convened by Agritex after discussions about the role of both the IMC and Block Committees in representing farmers' interests. Agritex staff said that there was a significant decline in farmers'

production levels over the last couple of seasons. This was in a way linked to Agritex's idea to promote the feeling of getting back in control and ensuring their type of order in running the project. They said that they wanted to remind farmers that they were in a government irrigation project where they had to keep certain standards. It turned out to be an 'all-issue' meeting, that is, discussing any issue that they thought needed attention. Issues for discussion included dropping of farming standards and levels of production in the irrigation scheme. Part of the idea was to get the message across to farmers through their representatives that they had to raise their production levels. The implicit idea within Agritex was that irrigation farmers did not take their tenancy in the irrigation project as a serious commitment to commercial farming, that they were too relaxed and had to be reminded that they were not expected to perform like farmers in rainfed farming. The Supervisor addressed the small audience:

"We have problems with methods of farming and levels of production among farmers here. You are all irrigators and must always know that this is a government project, standards should be kept high, you must keep in mind that you can be evicted any time if you do not do the right thing, you will go back to where you came from, you are on state land all of you here. We will soon be grading all farmers in the irrigation scheme on how you produce, how you maintain your plots, and there will be a scale against which you will be measured, from good, through average, to poor. Some of you have too much land in the scheme, especially those who got two extra acres for good performance in the early days of the scheme. Some of your friends are now too old to work in the plots. This is the land that needs to be reallocated. You are in business here, and you have to do something to show for that. As extension staff, we are here to help you learn new and improved methods of farming, to preserve the soil, and live better lives. As leaders in this community, you should lead everywhere, why are some of you not paying your fees on time? The last date is June 30th of each year, but few of you have paid. Do not prevent people from paying because when they suffer you will not be there. Let them come to me when they cannot afford the fees, then we can see what to do with their cases. You are the ones to lead the way, as staff we are neutral, we do not want to end up like prostitutes, going from place to place as if we do not know why we are here. Additionally, there is the issue of food aid from the government. The big question here is: should irrigators get a share of this or not? This is a very big question and your answer will say a lot about yourselves and your performance as irrigation farmers. We have not signed the papers, and we are not going to sign them, especially where it says that we have to confirm that the person needs food aid, and is not able to provide for him/herself. We just have to send them back to the Councillor. How can we sign them when the applicant is a four acre plotholder in an irrigation scheme? You should de-register and put your children in your plots if you cannot manage anymore".

The last statement was said with a disdainful disappointed look and tone to it, probably meant to make irrigators feel that they had to try and defend their prestigious irrigator-status. There was an air of expectation that quite a number of things were going to change. When it was the IMC chairman's turn to speak he stood up and addressed the audience walking about stressing his points. No one would interject when it was his turn, but he would interject when it was another farmer

speaking. IMC members were more involved in the discussions than Block Committee members. The latter were quiet, except for their informal leader, Samunda, the previous IMC chairman, who kept projecting and where necessary, defending, the views and ideas of Block Committee organisation. Only a few of them said a word or two besides acknowledging a point made by someone else. In one of his moves to show how knowledgeable he was, and in a way enrolling me into the fray, the IMC chairman added something about my research. As if to remind the audience of my purposes in the area, he said, "his work is to try and find out what the problems are. He is looking at both the good and the bad sides among us, and does not select only the good or only the bad parts, he wants the truth of the situation, we do not have to chase him away, it may help us tomorrow". He then went on to update them on the state of the *jatropa* project, and they encouraged each other to plant more trees around their homes. One farmer said that the plant can grow anywhere without water, even on very dry soil. Extension Worker Sithole said that that was impossible. An argument ensued between the farmer's knowledge and the Extension Worker's technical expertise:

Extension Worker: "No plant can grow without moisture...",

Farmer: "Yes it can, I have examples to show you if you like...",

EW: "That is impossible, it will dry up in no time at all...",

F: "Then you think that I am lying?"

EW: "I just mean to help you. What I know is that any branch of a tree will not survive on the moisture carried in the stalk for long, so if you cut the branches now before there is a lot of moisture in the ground. You may have very few branch cuttings to plant during the wet season, and this will mean that the project will be further delayed."

F: "Ahaaaaah".

Other farmers joined in on how long it took for the plant's shoots to grow and where it grew wild around the Nyamaropa area. Some said that they already had a few bags they collected in preparation for the machines to grind. There was a moment of disorder and noise before the Supervisor intervened by asking everyone to pay attention.

The discussion then shifted to irrigation management and maintenance problems. The IMC chairman said, "There is a lot of dirt blocking canals, whose responsibility is that?" and added, "Block Committees should know who is doing what and where, they must monitor people in their areas closely, otherwise there is no point in having them". This was a surprising turn-around which appeared, at least to me, as a way of accepting Block Committees by the IMC chairman who had been opposed to them all along, seeing them as an attempt to dethrone him and his committee. It also sounded like a politically clever ploy to get them to feel confident and then discredit them or give them tasks that they could not effectively perform. By the same token this put Mpesa in a commanding position again as delegating what roles Block Committees had to play. At the end of the meeting there was a feeling of co-operation between the IMC and the Block Committees. The IMC had not been as confrontational and defensive as some Agritex staff had hoped or wrongfully predicted. Mpesa maintained his position that Block Committees keep their mandate to run their blocks, and Agritex felt they had brokered a level of co-operation between the two, but were

disappointed that a new IMC was not formed. The IMC chairman seemed to have effectively employed a strategy to play along and not give his opponents a chance to confront him.

After about two months, there were rumors that Mpesa was allying himself with one of the Water Controllers (who was his friend and worked in his block before being shifted) to try and disrupt the work of Block Committees, but there was no clear evidence to support this allegation. Agritex staff said that there were too many forces pushing Water Controllers to give or deny farmers water, and they ended up not knowing clearly who to listen to. They got instructions from Agritex, the Irrigation Management Committee, from Block Committees, and sometimes influential individual farmers, and ended up listening to whoever gave instructions.

Agritex staff hinted that they wanted to call an all-party meeting again where they would dissolve the present Irrigation Management Committee and form a new one from Block Committees. But this was later retracted when successive accusations of Block Committees' 'strictness and harshness' when dealing with alleged wrong-doers increased among farmers in the irrigation scheme, and seemed to turn the tide once more in favor of the Irrigation Management Committee led by Mpesa, with its more laid-back and relaxed way of operation and handling of farmers' problems.

One case that discredited Block Committees and that was spread among irrigators was one whereby a farmer, a young man, in his late twenties, was not in his plot to irrigate when water arrived in his sub-block. His plot was at the end of the canal, so no one blocked the water and it was being wasted. Someone reported the matter to the chairman of Block B's committee, where the incident took place. The Block Committee chairman took a padlock and locked the gate that opened to the particular canal. The younger farmer arrived just after the gate had been locked, and a nasty exchange ensued. He could not irrigate and had to wait for the next turn, over a week later. When news of this went round, it did not go down well with other farmers who felt that their freedom and entitlement to water was being threatened. Some of the older irrigators openly declared that the IMC and its chairman, Mpesa, should defend them and their irrigation scheme against the "assault from Agritex and *their* Block Committees".

However, Agritex staff were not going to give up. They, with Block Committees, still talked of holding the elections. When I inquired from the Irrigation Officer about the situation, he said, tongue in cheek,

"The Management Committee should not feel that we are trying to divide and rule them, this is democracy at the local level, and we are doing it ZANU (PF) style all the way. Irrigation blocks and their committees are the constituents, and the new Management Committee will be elected from the constituents, just like Government Ministers from among elected Members of Parliament. If present Management Committee members are not popular in their blocks, too bad, they will be eliminated".

But he had something else going for him and his team. Support for the IMC was growing again, especially among more senior members of the irrigation scheme with 4 to 6 acres (see Appendix 8.1), most of whom cleared their own plots in the early 1960s, or those who inherited them from their relatives and believed that they were family property which could not be given up. Some of them argued that the Block

Committees' leader, Samunda, was being used by Agritex together with other "new irrigators who joined yesterday (meaning recently)", to promote the block system.

The all-party meeting was set for 3 October 1995 at the Agritex offices, but Agritex decided to postpone it indefinitely when they realized that their side was likely to be humiliated. Agritex said that they knew that Mpesa had been busy campaigning among his old friends to express their displeasure with Block Committees. Mpesa told me that people knew what they wanted and could remove him if they wanted to, but he would stand for their interests if and when they wanted him to. He said that he had not been campaigning, but some farmers felt threatened, especially by the fact that he was silent about the whole issue and not challenging Block Committees directly as some farmers had expected him to. They felt that if they did not have someone to stand for them against Agritex who sought order and ease of management, and local irrigators who were hungry for larger plots, they might end up losing part of their land. The contentious issue of land is discussed in Chapter 2.

There seemed to be a deadlock between Agritex and a group of farmers. There were two sides to it, Agritex and Block Committees were not sure where to go, and wanted things to be smooth among farmers in general, but seemed to be setting the terms for that. The Management Committee and its supporters seemed to be heading for victory. They wanted to stop Block Committees and their supporters from dictating things in the scheme, they wanted to take charge as they had done before the formation of the latter. Mpesa said that he would enjoy watching Agritex being embarrassed in front of farmers if they tried to impose a Block Committee-based Irrigation Management Committee. He said that if farmers rose against them in protest, he would enjoy watching the battle, and they would beg him to rescue them.

Then there was a meeting where they were all going to discuss the state of affairs regarding committees. Mpesa and his supporters already knew of this and were saying that they would not be seen in that meeting. Agritex staff were saying that they wanted an IMC with the full backing of almost *all farmers*, not one with sectarian or group interests. This seemed too ambitious of them, especially with the range of identity differences among farmers in the area. The Supervisor told me that even if Mpesa was re-elected as IMC chairman, or voted out, Agritex would continue to work with him as one of the prominent farmers in the area. And they would let him run his *jatropha* project to its rightful conclusion. It seemed as if they had no other way of removing the IMC from power besides inviting the whole committee to a meeting where they would vote them, out as Mpesa did with Samunda's IMC several years before.

Earlier, Mpesa and his committee had refused to attend such meetings because they felt that there was still a risk of losing out, especially because Block Committees seemed to be popular in some sections of the irrigation community at the time. But it was still not certain who had the majority of farmers behind them. Agritex and Block Committees had apparently sidelined the IMC from most of the activities in the irrigation scheme, but the latter still ran their own affairs, such as selling poles from the farmers' woodlot of eucalyptus trees, or the chairman visiting urban area to look for buyers of farmers' produce such as beans which had no organized buyers in the area, as if nothing had changed. Some support for the IMC and Mpesa came from a fear among older farmers with large plots who felt threatened, and were saying that they did not want to lose their plots through the block system to Samunda's land-hungry dryland relatives and supporters. Some of them said that he (Samunda) had

very little to do with it, that pressure was coming from Agritex who were *using* him to try and impose the new system, as if it came from among farmers, when Agritex was promoting it from their higher offices. Some said that they noticed that Samunda was being pressured from outside the irrigation scheme by his dryland neighbours, by the Headman and by other local people, who were bitter over their loss of ancestral land which was turned into the irrigation project with minimum benefits for locals.

Mautsa, mentioned earlier as an immigrant and one of the early settlers in the irrigation scheme, and a volatile character himself, said that Agritex and Block Committees wanted to stir up an ethnic war in Nyamaropa between the Manyika (immigrants) and the Barwe (locals) groups. This was especially threatening after Samunda, a local irrigator and respected leader in the area, whose homestead was among local dryland villagers, had been saying:

"Where will our children go? Where will they farm? All the land has been taken and is being monopolized by immigrants who are not original inhabitants. We need a piece of it too for our own people. It is our land too. Immigrants are saying that they are not going to give an inch of the land to anyone because this is now their home too and they deserve it, and our children will not have anywhere to go if we don't get it for them..." (Samunda, 19 June 1994).

Most immigrant irrigators felt threatened and insecure when such sentiments were expressed, and some of them felt that they had to get legal entitlement to their pieces of land to be able to protect themselves from any external threats that might come from their dryland neighbors. If Block Committees formally took up a stand against immigrants, then the situation was likely to deteriorate into open conflict.

There were some problems within some Block Committees. For example in Block D, which was the original and strongest of all four Block Committees, one of the committee members resigned in protest at what the committee was doing to other farmers, and to what they alleged he had done. The committee said that he took more water than was meant for him and had therefore stolen water. He was supposed to pay a fine or miss the next irrigation turn. He asked the committee if anyone had seen him irrigate, and there was no clear answer. He said that if committees were just there to persecute other farmers he was not going to be part of them. He resigned.

There seemed to be a shift of support towards the old order in support of the IMC after this story spread around. Some farmers were saying that Mpesa was a better leader, that he did not listen to Agritex all the time, and only took advice after thinking about it. The feeling was that Block Committees thought that Agritex was always right. They were accused of chasing after personal grudges too, and Mpesa was said not to do that. He was said to look at what was right for most farmers. What was surprising in the case of the IMC was that the committee was almost personalized in Mpesa, to the extent that whenever farmers spoke of the IMC they would mention him, and not the other committee members.

An interesting development was witnessed by the Agricultural Extension Officer at the formation of Block Committees. He said that farmers had forwarded cases before to the IMC for deliberation but they had not been deliberated upon. He added that their (Agritex's) idea was to share views, and said:

"... whether farmers are my friend or not, I give them the same treatment. The IMC never does any work, we formed the Block Committees to help farmers manage the irrigation scheme themselves together with Agritex. For example,

Samunda sent a letter of application for the formation of a Block Committee in block D to Agritex, and we sent it through to the IMC in the spirit of not trying to undermine their authority, but they never replied to us or to Samunda. So he went ahead and formed the committee in his block. So can you blame him for that?"

Certainly not. It finally became clear to me that the formation of the new committees was Agritex's brainchild, meant to displace the IMC. It appeared like a blatant use or manipulation of divisions among farmers to achieve the agency's secret political and management project. The local irrigator and dryland groups of farmers supported the idea for their own potential benefits from it, and that was an 'unholy' alliance.

Meanwhile Mpesa was watching quietly. When I inquired from Mpesa about his next move, he said that Agritex should do what they thought was proper, and added that he was elected by the people and they would remove him when they did not need him. There was an air of confidence about the way he said that, implying they were not going to remove him from his position of IMC chairman.

On the 6th of September 1995, in a farmers' meeting with Agritex, Mautsa said that Block Committees were mere shovels used by Agritex staff to clean up the mess in the irrigation scheme and punish farmers. Kapadza, also popular for his opposition to Agritex, said that Agritex should hand over the irrigation to farmers and go off to their homes. He said that "all Agritex work is now being done by Block Committees, so why are they still here? Why don't they just pack their bags and go to their homes?". When they heard this, extension staff said that they would keep a good check on this farmer to see how he was managing his plot, and whether he had paid up all his fees, and to check anything that could indicate to them that he was a good farmer. Staff said that he was one of the farmers who spread hatred among others and incited them against the extension department. That same day, EW Sithole went into the irrigation scheme and checked the farmer's plot. He did not find anything wrong.

Extension 'in practice'

This section looks into some of the ways in which Agritex staff engaged in what I refer to as 'extension in practice'. This means looking into the actual ways in which they work with farmers in face-to-face encounters, meeting some of the challenges in farmers' lives through interactions between the two parties. Some of these situations present encounters that may not be revealed in public meetings where Agritex staff and farmers discuss more formal issues of running the irrigation project.

In 1995 a seed production company gave four new wheat varieties (Nata, Pote, Deka and Scan) to Agritex staff in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme to carry out trials among farmers. Agritex selected two farmers on whose fields they wanted the trials, but there were problems in that several farmers wanted the free seed. Initially, EW Sithole and his colleagues had selected Masaya, the chairman of block B, who happened to be EW Sithole's father-in-law, but the seed arrived late after he had used the land for something else. Besides that, he could not plant then because the Block Committee's agreed deadline for wheat planting had lapsed. The officially (by Agritex) recommended dates for planting wheat in the area were between the 1st and the 30th of May, but the block B committee decided that no one should plant after the 20th of May for effective regulation of watering. The seed came around the 20th. Agritex

decided to choose farmers whom they thought would be honest with the amounts of fertiliser they applied and other records. There was a ten kilogram pack of each variety, and each farmer got five kilograms of each. Agritex decided they wanted to have the crop planted in Mpesa's field. They approached him, and he initially resisted the idea, but he was persuaded by the idea of free seed and a chance to repair relations with Agritex, so he took it up.

Extension Worker Sithole helped Mpesa in the exercise and they planted the wheat together, since the farmer's field was in the Extension Worker's operational zone of block B. The other farmer was a local irrigator, a younger brother of the chairman for the strong Block Committee for block D (where block committees started from). Both farmers were said by Agritex to have used the right amount of fertiliser and irrigated sufficiently. However, when it came to harvesting and tasting the different varieties, there was a field-day at Mpesa's plot, which was followed by what one of the EWs called 'the bread party' whereby two loaves of bread were baked from each of the four varieties, by a selected group of women from near Mpesa's homestead (neighbours). The following section looks at the highlights of the 'bread party' and the lessons on 'extension in practice' derived from that particular encounter between farmers and extension staff.

The eight loaves were cut into small pieces to go round the group of about 40 people present. Tea was made to go with it, and then there were discussions and evaluations of each variety, especially as to which one tasted better. Mpesa, the host farmer for the party on whose field the wheat was grown, said that Nata, which farmers were already growing in the irrigation scheme, was not as bad as other farmers had said it was. He said that his wife always made good bread from it. Someone in the crowd said that it could be because she had worked at the local women's bakery co-operative for some time (See Chapter 5), drawing laughter from the crowd. There were more discussions on the bread and the different varieties while people drank and ate fresh bread. Mpesa added that farmers should be aware that the price of bread is going up everyday. Agritex asked for comments from farmers.

Some farmers said that the important thing with home-made bread should be the ability for it to satisfy a person for a long time, so that it could last half the day while they were busy in their fields. The audience agreed that Pote had made the best bread. It had a brownish colour and was heavier than the other three, and farmers said it was easier to chew and swallow than the other three, and much tastier too. When someone said that Nata was second best, EW Sithole clarified to them that Nata came in two different varieties, and they had to be sure which one they took and see if it was the one they liked or not. Mai Mpesa consented, and asked Agritex staff to explain to farmers these differences, and make sure that farmers got the right information. She added that she got seed from the Agritex offices, and the Nata she grew was so good that she did not understand why so many people around the irrigation scheme generally were saying that Nata made bad bread.

The Extension Workers said that sometimes people just said that the variety was bad when the problem might be in their kitchens. He added that they might be sending children to do the baking and they might not be kneading the dough thoroughly enough, or not mixing the ingredients properly. Mpesa then asked if they could hear from the women, and said, "... previously you said that you wanted to use only white flour, but today you chose a brown one, how come?", and then added,

"... the good thing with Pote (the variety which won the contest) is that it yields the highest production per unit area. We are farmers, and the few of you who came here today have to *take the lead in telling others about this meeting* so that they make the right choices".

I thought that he was doing the extensionists' job here too, asking farmers to spread the good news of the new and better wheat variety. But still, farmers always pass on and share information among themselves. Then he gave the chance to the Supervisor to give a vote of thanks. The Supervisor said that it had been a good day, that he wished the following season would be a good one. He then asked if anyone could give a short prayer for that, but no one volunteered, and he continued on the value of home-baked bread and of rural life, and more, saying:

"I have heard that some people in towns are starving because they cannot afford good food. Here in rural areas we eat the real thing, good food, like this bread we just had. We want things to be good for you, we are a link between research and practice, that is why we are called extension. Some of you are old, and can no longer fully utilise your land, you are lucky you have got some water for a few crops here in Nyamaropa. Some irrigation schemes dried up two seasons ago, we are here to help. This office was not put here to kill anyone, it is here to assist you all. Water is very little, we are trying our best, let us use it wisely. I thank the host Mpesa for his contributions, and the sugar he gave us to use for baking today..." (Nyamaropa irrigation Supervisor, September 1995).

Then the IMC deputy secretary thanked Agritex for giving the seed trial to the right man, Mpesa, adding that,

"... people talk a lot, they always do, they say he is this and that, that he steals money, he does this and that, but he always moves on We have never done this in the history of growing wheat in Nyamaropa, only if all Block Committee chairmen were here, they would see all of this good event. When I came here in 1964, there were five wheat varieties which were tried in this irrigation scheme, and not a single one of them made it to maturity because people do not give attention to someone else's crop, especially Agritex's crop. This is why I thank Agritex for selecting the right man for the job to make it a success".

Mpesa, looking quite moved by the praise given him by his colleague, said,

"I thank Agritex too. I do not always disagree with Agritex, I always try to get the message behind the words. I do not just blame them for what is happening. For example, the water problem is not their making, they did not stop rains from falling, let us accept changes where we are, and accept who we are, *ngatibvumeyi kuti tirivoadzidzi/ asivumeni ukuthi singabafundi* (let us accept that we are learners/ students). Let us give this time to our block B Extension Worker Sithole ..."

EW Sithole expressed his disappointment with the attendance. He said that it seemed only people from his block attended the meeting. Then Mpesa closed the meeting by asking everyone to clap their hands in the traditional way of respect. After this a member of a group of farmers discussing the day's events said that this was the first time something like that had been done, and suggested that it be done with all new varieties of food crops. It seemed that everyone who was there was singing the praises

of the Agritex staff and the IMC chairman. The other farmer who was also given trial seed for the same purposes as Mpesa was not at the meeting, and there were few farmers from other blocks besides block B in which Mpesa's field was located.

A close look at these encounters between extensionists and farmers brought forward several issues relevant to the main discussion in this chapter. Firstly, the way the new varieties were introduced. Farmers had been growing wheat before this. They got new varieties which they wanted to try out. This came through Agritex and somehow disrupted farmers' organisation (planting dates), but was accepted anyway. The highlight of the point was that Agritex selected a prominent farmer-leader for the trial, and one with whom relations were not smooth at the time. This presented both parties with a chance to work things out, and at the end it did, at least for that period. Secondly, women did the baking of the bread, but did not participate much in the discussions on which variety was better than others, although they did vote. They were the ones who did the main processing of wheat in the area, from planting, through harvesting, threshing, and storing, to baking or cooking. That probably explained why there were more women than men in the audience at the bread party. They were either interested in the whole subject of wheat in general, or their location close to Mpesa's home indicated that they were specially invited or mobilised to attend the occasion, as part of the host farmer's pool of supporters.

Thirdly, the occasion was used by different actors in pursuit of other projects which had nothing to do with the new wheat varieties. In other words, the event presented them with an opportunity to work on something else they were interested in. Mpesa, for example, took the chance to express and possibly reconstruct and renegotiate his position regarding his relationship with the extension agency, emphasising that he was just a farmer willing to learn from Agritex, a weak position meant probably to ease tension between him and Agritex. His supporters also took the opportunity to show their support for him and the IMC, especially by praising Agritex for selecting him for the seed trial. Mpesa's supporters seemed happy to point out that none of the Block Committee leaders were present at the occasion. The extension department also seized the opportunity to pacify relations with this group of farmers by saying that they were not there to 'kill anyone', but were there for farmers, to help them. They also explained *away* (I thought) water problems as everyone's problem and a responsibility for all farmers to use water wisely. At the end of the day, everyone came off as a winner in the contest, and Agritex staff expressed their satisfaction at a job well done. A fruitful encounter it seemed. The following section looks at an example of the encounters between extensionists and farmers that the former refer to as the "darker side of being in extension".

On 'the darker side of extension'

It was one hot Tuesday afternoon in Nyamaropa and a group of about ten farmers had gathered outside the Agritex offices demanding to see the Supervisor. He was in a meeting with his staff. When he came out, they confronted him, accused him of having ordered Water Controllers to close water for them alleging that they did not pay their irrigation fees. Some of them had brought their receipts to prove that they did not owe the department anything. Three young men were visibly furious. They said that they wanted to beat up the Supervisor for sabotaging their farming ventures and threatening their families' welfare. One of the young men told me that the problem

started when he was in the middle of irrigating a piece of land where he had just sown wheat. He realized that there was no more water coming through. When he checked with the Water Controller he was told that the Supervisor had ordered them to close water to all those who owed Agritex money. He headed straight to the office with his receipts.

Apparently the mistake was that the clerk had not cross-checked to see who had recently paid up to update the list. People who had already paid were still on the list of those who had not. Water Controllers relied on the names given to them by the clerk. Some farmers accused Agritex staff of 'targeting' them for punishment for being outspoken. One said,

"They want to kill us and our families, *murikuda kuwuraya vanhu imi / lifun' ukubulal' abantu lina* (you want to kill people). This is what we earn our living from, and then you do this, when am I going to get water again?"

Agritex extension staff pleaded with them saying that the problem was with the clerk who had issued the names, but some of them had waited out there too long to be patient enough to listen to all the explanations. They were actually too angry to discuss most of the issues, and some of them had seemingly more complex problems to discuss with Agritex staff. One of the most prominent cases was that of a farmer whose water was closed when he was still irrigating, having paid up everything; he came with his son who wanted to beat up the Supervisor. The young man, looking menacing, and towering over the shorter elderly Supervisor, said,

"Why are you treating people like fools, are you tired of your work? We will beat you up right here! Why don't you leave the jobs if you cannot manage any more. We respect you because you are older..."

The Supervisor said that he was not too old and could still *play the game*, meaning he could still fight the young man right there. He said, "*Handina kukura ini, gemu racho ndinori tambawo futi, tinorwa panapa / angiluphalanga mina, umdlalo wakhona ngiyawudlala futhi, siyalwa khonalapha* (I'm not too old, and I can still play the game, we can fight right here)". To which the young farmer contemptuously replied, "Fight you?" and, turned away. Then the young man's father intervened and told his son to go home, adding that extension staff should talk to the Supervisor about the problem. The young man's last words when he left were, "*pfutseke mhani / hamba katshana le!* (get off or go away)", which left some of the staff very embarrassed.

Talking to Agritex staff afterwards, they told me that they had been involved in other terrible incidents, but this was one of the most potentially explosive situations, and rather humiliating especially with outsiders watching (and recording) the event. A question that lingered in my mind was what did the Supervisor do to deserve such humiliation in front of everybody? He had ordered Water Controllers to do their job more diligently, and there had been a mistake, and he took all the blame as the person in charge. The Irrigation Officer, senior to the Supervisor, did not get involved, for the mere reason that he did not order the WCs to close the water. These were some of the hazards of extension in actual practice, and since then, I understood why some of the Extension Workers sometimes said that farmers were their real bosses, although jokingly. But there was more to come on the close encounters, in the 'gnashing of teeth' controversy.

Changing perceptions or farmers' verdicts on extension services?

"MuDhumeni ndinurse, nurse unobata nhengo dzemuwiri wemunhu, mudhumeni unobata nhengo dzekumunda"/ Umlimisi ufana lomongikazi, umongikazi ubona ngezempilo, umlimisi ubona ngezemasimini (an Extension Worker is like a nurse, s/he deals with problems of the body, and an EW handles problems of the farming field) (From a dryland farmer and Agritex General Hand, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, July 1996).

Farmers' perceptions of the extension department and its staff have undergone several changes as a result of political transformation and shifts in attitudes towards, and beliefs in, services provided. Below are views of some farmers interviewed in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme who expressed their sentiments about extension services.

Views expressed here did not necessarily mean that the farmers cited were spokespersons of all Nyamaropa farmers. Rather, they represented what I found to be popular feelings and views among farmers in the irrigation scheme at that particular time. Manyuchi, whose views are extensively cited, was one of the well known and respected irrigation farmers in the group that supported the Irrigation Management Committee and its chairman (Mpesa), and belonged to the Manyika immigrant ethnic group. The majority of irrigators I spoke to on extension services expressed the same or related sentiments as those of cited farmers. That was basically why their views were cited. There is no case for scientific representation, and I would like to believe that that does not reduce the validity and worth of these farmers' views.

Mai Chimbete, wife of one of four brothers (all irrigators) whose father was one of the first irrigators in Nyamaropa, said:

"We have our Extension Workers, some of whom are our friends and maybe relatives (one of her daughters had a child with one of the Extension Workers), we do not see much of them though, they just ride through the fields on their bikes, they say hello, and go on to wherever they may be going, probably to the shops, or to meetings. Extension Workers of the olden days when the White Manager was here knew how to deal with farmers, they would stop, sit down or work with you while talking to you, they showed you how to do things. They had more commitment to their work. These are different, but we are not complaining, and we do not want to chase them away of course, we need their services, their assistance is vital for our survival especially now that things are more and more difficult, but not everyone listens to them all the time, it is like in a family, you get some children who do not listen to their parents, but they cannot live well without the parents, can they?"

She seemed to be taking a neutral stand while also trying to be critical. This was an opinion of a farmer caught between a critical assessment of extension services provided and her own personal interest in the rating of extension staff because of close ties her family had with one of them. Other farmers who did not have this personalized family relationship with extension staff, and kept a business-like relationship with some of them, had other forms of relations with them, such as friendship. Extension Workers Sithole and Shura were especially well known and liked in their respective areas of operation (blocks). This was said by their colleagues to be a result of their longer periods of working with the same farmers than the other two

Extension Workers. They had both been in the irrigation scheme for almost ten years each.

My own perceptions of extension staff's role was that they were keen to work with farmers, but often got frustrated when some of the farmers accused them of taking sides in local conflicts, or of being too harsh or too soft with some farmers. From what I witnessed in their interactions with farmers, they tried to remain in control of the scheme while at the same time trying to avoid getting entangled in farmers' political and leadership wrangles or accusations of involvement.

I had an interview with one senior irrigation farmer, Manyuchi, who also ran a retail shop and a grinding mill in the area. He had won several farming competitions locally and beyond over the years (and one big prize for being one of the best smallholder burley tobacco producers as recently as 1996). Manyuchi was around 70 years old. He was an immigrant, an enterprising farmer and businessman, and he employed casual laborers during peak labour periods. He said that he specialised in tobacco production because it gave him a lot of money. He actually rented other farmers' irrigated fields to grow tobacco. He declared his support for the IMC and said that it let Agritex staff do their job. He spoke softly and emphatically, with an air of authority, and said:

" I know some farmers have been telling you a lot of wrong things about this issue of extension, but we have to face the facts [his facts], some are saying that during the Smith days (colonial regime) *things were much better as far as extension services were concerned*, especially in improving the lives of farmers. If I remember well, Agricultural Demonstrators of the olden days (as Extension Workers were known then) knew how to do their work, they would scout your field even in your absence and when they met you they would tell you what your field looks like in terms of pests and diseases. We used to be the best cotton and tobacco farmers in the whole province. In agricultural shows we won a lot of prizes from the crops we produced, those men knew how to assist us to get the best out of the small plots. During our earlier days, extension workers used to be very frightening people, there was a lot of force used to get farmers to listen and follow, but this was not a constant thing, some of them were very nice and understood us, but most farmers were afraid of them. Some managers in the irrigation scheme were White, and they would punish farmers for not doing things right, such as not weeding or not planting on the recommended dates..."

Then he went on to talk about the impact of national political changes on attitudes to extension services and extension staff.

"Today things have changed and the Government does not encourage that farmers be punished, people do what they want, and you can see what is happening with these committees who are taking over the irrigation scheme. Farmers are freer to do what they want, and you can say that there are times when they actually dictate to Agritex what they want, they are now powerful when it comes to dealing with Agritex. Agritex seem to be ineffective when it comes to telling farmers what to do, some of it is a result of fear of being reported to politicians, such as the case of 1992 when the Member of Parliament, the District Administrator and the Provincial Governor were called here by farmers who reported that Agritex was throwing away water when farmers' crops were

wilting. Politicians here play an influential role, and *Agritex staff are just human beings too*. They are afraid to be on the wrong side of political leaders".

He then shifted his focus towards blaming the Government,

"The Government made a mistake by putting too many people together to share small plots when they knew that the water source was not reliable, and that there was no lasting solution to the people in the catchment taking our water, it has actually become worse with time. *They have killed the irrigation scheme*, both Government and people in the catchment area. We are supposed to be modern farmers here, but we are not very different from farmers in the reserves (dryland farmers). Little education is not good, it is dangerous, *havanakufunda ba/ abafundanga* (they are not educated [the dryland farmers]). The manager (meaning the Irrigation Officer) is the father of water in the irrigation scheme, and is assisted by Extension Workers and Water Controllers. Block Committees should have nothing to do with water issues, they are just farmers, they should leave water management to Extension Workers and Water Controllers who are employed by government to do that job and are paid for it. If this goes on like this people will kill each other for water here. I cannot let someone else who is just a farmer like me tell me how to use how much water when we have the same entitlement to it. Are they registered and known to Government as workers?"

I pointed out that they were not, and he went on,

"So why are they so busy organising us? Some of these Block Committee members really go out of their way. Some of them go to the extent of buying keys and locking gates to stop other farmers from irrigating. How can that be justified, who gave them the right and the power to do that in the first place?"

That was a tough one for me, but I added that maybe some farmers preferred to have the strong hand of control from among their colleagues than from outsiders. Then I asked him what he thought about the belief among some Agritex staff that farmers generally wasted water, something which he had earlier mentioned to me because his homestead is near one of the drainages from the irrigation scheme leading to the river, and he regularly saw water running off into the river as a result of farmers not making full use of it. He said,

"I will tell you something my friend, when you milk a cow, you cannot avoid spilling a drop or two of milk on the ground, and when you are weeding in your own field, you will be lucky not to chop off one or two crops that you are weeding, we all make mistakes, all of us" (Snr. Farmer Manyuchi).

Our chat, or rather his talk, ended with him telling me that maybe if Agritex staff got a firmer grip of things in dealing with farmers, they would keep things under control. His emphasis on the fact that Agritex should have a strong hand in running the irrigation scheme was based on his dislike for the new Block Committees which at that particular time seemed to be gaining support and influence among farmers, but he said that what they were doing was Agritex's job. When looking back at extension staff of previous years during the colonial period, and the performance of irrigation farmers compared to farmers in rainfed areas, he felt there was a drop in standards and attributed this to lack of strict regulation and control. What he did not consider was

the age of most farmers in the irrigation scheme and their ability to work as hard as they used to when they were younger and winning regional prizes (Chapter 7 discusses in detail problems related to age and irrigation farming). The issue of employing punitive measures to force farmers to work harder and raise their productivity might not work with all of them. In his particular case, Manyuchi had done very well for himself and could afford hired labour which he only supervised, making age a non-issue for him. Not all farmers could do that, hence the gradual fall in levels of production.

One evening at the local bar I talked to my old friend Mautsa and the bar owner Chimbetete about current affairs in the irrigation scheme and around. They were both former teachers, retired to farm full-time in the irrigation scheme. They were both bitter about the way Agritex and Block Committees were going about irrigation business. This was the time when the committees were popular. They lamented the way Extension Workers were doing their work, especially the way they were "using Block Committees as auxiliaries in their work". They said that this was a government project and Agritex staff were paid to do a good job of managing it. Mautsa asked,

"Why should farmers with no training and no knowledge of the technical side of irrigation management be leaders of other farmers in such a project? What are they going to tell us? What then becomes the job of an Extension Worker? Today EWs are just too lazy. In earlier days they would scout your field before you even got there and they would show you right on your field how to do it yourself and tell you what kind of chemicals to apply. Sometimes you would find footprints in your field early in the morning and wonder who had gone through it, and then you would hear the EW telling you that he paid your plot a visit, and then from nowhere he would tell you how to deal with a problem of pests in your field. Today you have to rely on yourself or else you will always lose out. EWs do not move about as the earlier ones did. They just sit in their offices, and can be seen in meetings, or you can see them ride along the road on their bikes to go to the shops or to visit friends or their favorite farmers".

Chimbetete sipped on his Castle beer and said,

"I wonder what reports they send to their bosses in higher offices in the District or Province. I am sure they just say that everything is okay, that work is going on fine, otherwise they would be transferred or something like that. The bosses at the top should send in trainees or other junior staff, or students, who have some kind of commitment to their work, and remove these who have become too comfortable in their small world of operation. We need better management by people who have a commitment to the problems at hand. These people are paid by the government for goodness' sake, and they have to do something to show for the fact that they earn money for it, not sitting around and expecting everyone to know how to deal with such conditions as water shortage. Honestly what is a water committee? What does it do? Who said that there should be a committee to run farmers' lives? A committee which tells the Water Controller and the Extension Worker what to do? What do these people know about the finer issues of water measurement, distributions and conservation issues? Let those who are trained and are paid for the job do what they know best, we can always come in and help when they ask us to, not run in front of them, we will fall over the cliff I tell you, just mark my word, you will see..."

Listening to such strong sentiments about people I was working with was not comfortable, and I personally thought that they were trying their best under the circumstances. When I expressed this they both said that they were just not doing enough to keep everything under their (Agritex's) control. From this encounter with what I saw as 'extension-bashing' I learnt that farmers did rate those they worked with over a long period of time and used the various experiences with them as a gauge of how well those who come later performed. Part of it, of course, could be a way of simply sensationalising the past during which they themselves were younger, stronger and much more active than now. The two farmers saw the role of the extension department as that of leading farmers, teaching them, identifying problems with them and then recommending solutions. They saw extension staff as expected to be in charge of the irrigation scheme, and not farmers' committees.

The premise of their views was that extension staff were paid to work for or with farmers and should not delegate management-related duties to farmers' committees. It sounded a fair enough argument, but other farmers argued that it was their irrigation scheme and Agritex staff had to let them have more say in the way it was run. My own interpretation of their hard stance against the extension department was that they were among the group of immigrant Manyika irrigators who joined the project from the early years and had large plots which they wanted to keep, supported the IMC led by Mpesa, and felt threatened by the increasing strength of the new Block Committees led by Samunda which were calling for stricter regulations in running the irrigation scheme. Among the Block Committees' motives was believed to be a desire to take extra, or under-utilised, plots from farmers who had grown too old to productively utilise the land on their own. From the point of view of group interests, this was their main fear, and it seemed that some of their comments emanated from there.

"There shall be gnashing of teeth..."

Farmers' responses to Agritex's management strategies

1996 had a stormy start in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Tension was brewing between farmers and Agritex. More specifically between farmers and the Supervisor who had ordered water closed (yes, again!) to all farmers who had not paid up their irrigation fees for the 1996 (then current) season. The story from Agritex was that irrigation fee collectors from Mutare came and found only ±Z\$14 000 of a possible ±Z\$60 000. The Supervisor said that he was told by the collectors that farmers in other irrigation schemes had almost finished paying their fees for the season (cited Chibuwe irrigation scheme, and others in Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts within the same Province of Manicaland, as left with small amounts each to collect). He immediately called a meeting of Water Controllers and ordered them not to give water to anyone who had not paid up their fees for that season.

His colleagues said that he did not consult with them, but made the decision alone. To compound the problem, he then left for a short training course in Harare for a couple of days. He left strict instructions that anyone who touched the gates and gave water to farmers who had not paid water fees would be disciplined. Farmers came to the office to ask for water, but were told that no one would get it. They asked the Irrigation Officer, who was in fact superior to the Supervisor in authority within

Agritex in the irrigation scheme, to intervene, but he allegedly refused to have anything to do with the case because he had not been told about the issue and the measures taken. He took the supervisor's threats seriously, and said that there could be more behind the whole matter. To my enquiries he only said, "I want this thing to get to its rightful end". He apparently felt that the Supervisor had planned something to make farmers pay up, and that if the latter had made a mistake, then he had to pay the price of having to face angry farmers when he got back from his course. He did, in one of the most dramatic encounters I witnessed between farmers and extension agents.

After a couple of days, the situation was getting worse and some crops were suffering. Farmers were organising a protest demonstration at the Agritex offices. One elderly farmer and friend of mine, who was quite fluent in English, openly expressed his excitement with, "there shall be gnashing of teeth... [and they shall be cast into outer darkness...]", apparently quoting from the Bible in the book of Matthew about the hard times that were coming. Fortunately, it rained a day before the planned protest action, literally cooling off tempers, though not exactly abating the anger among farmers at the Supervisor's actions. Farmers then called for a public meeting with the Supervisor. Before the meeting there was talk among farmers, with most of them saying that Agritex staff were jealous of farmers' production and incomes farmers got from their plots. They also said that EWs just wanted to 'fix' them; several of them were calling for the dismissal of the Supervisor, some were saying that they wanted him to leave the irrigation scheme and be transferred to another place immediately. They said that they were tired of his harshness and short temper, and blamed it on what they called his 'colonial training'.

The IMC chairman had met the Supervisor briefly but went away to attend to a sick relative without holding a meeting with farmers to tell them what was going on. He had paid his irrigation fees in advance for the next two seasons. The Supervisor was called all sorts of names, including, devil, satan, witch, and murderer. All the good work he had done for and with farmers was temporarily forgotten or simply overlooked in the excitement about the meeting and anger at the threat posed by the unpopular decision to their expected yields and incomes from their crops. It was astonishing how quickly someone's identity could be transformed in a matter of days from a fatherly figure working for the good of the irrigation community to being labelled a devil, and afterwards to being referred to as the most experienced and knowledgeable. Each context seemed to have its own identifications of the different actors involved. For that particular time in the heat and the anger, the Supervisor was the enemy to be dealt with, but it would almost certainly not stay like that.

IMC and Block Committee members were seemingly united in this cause to 'discipline' the Supervisor in the meeting. They selected some well known outspoken farmers, with reputations of challenging Extension Workers in meetings, to attend this meeting where they would try and settle their score with the Supervisor once and for all. This was a special task force meant to deal with the problem. The Supervisor, when he came and was confronted with the tension, said that he was not going to hold an illegal meeting, and declared that he was going to meet committee members only. He went on to compile their names from Extension Workers to be able to screen non-committee members from the meeting.

Some of the EWs told him that he had made a mistake by ordering the closure of water without consulting farmers' representatives and his colleagues. But he turned on

them, and said that he would 'sit on them' (punish them) for being unpatriotic. He asked for my opinion, and I suggested that he should do what he thought was the best under the circumstances (I felt very un-helpful!). From the government's economic point of view, he had the right idea and was only taking measures to get farmers to pay, which was what the government wanted. But politically, and as far as producing food for survival was concerned, many people, including his colleagues, thought he got it all wrong that time. Part of the seed and fertiliser used to grow the very crops that had been threatened had come from the Government's Drought Recovery Programme, and he would be branded a sell-out who wanted the government's program to fail, and people to starve, in spite of his noble objective meant to serve the same Government.

Before the meeting, the Supervisor called me into his office and showed me his job description and the by-laws that said farmers could pay their fees up to June 30 of every year, but he was changing that, saying things were too relaxed in the irrigation scheme. He then showed me a file of eviction forms that he said he could use if things got out of hand in the meeting. His resolution to get things done was admirable.

The meeting was attended by about twenty farmers, and three out of the six extension staff. There were two policemen invited by the Supervisor to come and monitor the proceedings, just in case things got out of hand! It was held at the Agritex offices in the 'conference room' and, as expected, the Supervisor sat at the table in front with two EWs who were openly uncomfortable with the situation. The group of farmers' representatives sat on the benches, together with the policemen, facing the Supervisor. I took my position at the back row of benches with some of the farmers. One could sense the tension in the air. The meeting started with a prayer by block D's Committee chairman, Simoyi, from the Apostolic Faith Mission Church, who said, among other things, "Lord, you are the organiser of things, may you help us know what we are saying...". This was followed by a traditional opening of clapping hands, then the IMC's vice chairman, Matiringe, opened the discussions by going straight into the issue of closing of water for farmers who had not paid their fees for that (current) season. Below is an extract of exchanges from that meeting:

Matombo (one of the specially invited tough-talking farmers): "If water was closed by Agritex, we want to know where the others (EWs) are. Are they united in this? Where is the Officer?" [he was working quietly in his office during the meeting].

Supervisor: "Are you all committee members here? This may be an illegal meeting..."

Makanyanga (IMC secretary): "We have some committee members and selected irrigators representing everyone".

Supervisor: "Yes, but did you talk to the IMC chairman about this? How will I answer his questions when he comes?" [the IMC chairman was away for a political meeting with Provincial political party members].

The deputy secretary then said that he had talked to him and been given the go-ahead (I later found out that he had not spoken to him at all!). Farmers were getting anxious to discuss the issue at hand. They said that the vice-chairman was good enough for them. Then the Supervisor then why he had decided to close water for all those who had not paid, citing the visit by fees collectors and referring to money being wanted by the Government's Treasury Department in Harare.

He told them that they were in a government irrigation scheme, and acknowledged their problems, but emphasized that they had to pay. He then told them a story of a woman who came to him crying when water was closed and she had no money, that he had to pay her fees himself so that her crops would get some water. He said,

"I have been listening to your problems, the laws of irrigating here have not changed, you still have to respect the right to irrigate, to reside and to 'depasture' stock which you were given when you joined this project, and you can be removed if you do not perform your expected roles. If the law has changed, it has changed in your homes, and not in our offices. You are not paying for water, but that may soon change too, and you may be receiving monthly water bills. We understand your problems, we are different from the White men who did not understand the role of the extended family. I have broken the law to help some of you [by giving farmers water when they had not paid up their fees just to save their crops], but we have these eviction forms (waving a copy), and we can still use them, I receive all types of problems, and I have to do my job".

Kapadza, an irrigation farmer, immigrant and now a businessman running a popular bar in the area, was known for having once kicked a writing board used by the Irrigation Officer to illustrate his disgust at the officials in a meeting. He had repeatedly called for their ejection from Nyamaropa, saying that farmers were asking Agritex to take action for people who had arrears, but not for the current season whose deadline was not due.

The Supervisor said that that was not what Treasury and Central Government were thinking of. He added that he had met with Block Committees and they agreed to have people pay. Block Committees, through Samunda, said that they agreed that farmers had to pay, but did not agree with Agritex on the timing of the payment enforcement. The IMC vice chairman said that there were too many committees, asked again why water was closed, and said,

"It seems it was out of spite, a way of fixing us, making us suffer. We were coming from a bad season of drought last year, we needed water to recover, if you were going somewhere you should have told us".

The Supervisor said: "So you think I have *utsinye/ulunya* (evil intentions)?"

To which Matombo quickly said, "Yes you have". Then Samunda, in a raised and emotionally charged voice, said,

"We are not experts in farming, we all have to agree and co-ordinate our activities, during the worst drought of 1992 we had to pay fees even when we had nothing from the fields, we asked for an exemption and were denied one. Why should we get such a penalty now for this, and at a time when a promising crop is in the field? We are still within our time to pay the fees, so why punish us when *our deadline* [30 June] is not over yet?".

The Supervisor responded by saying they all had to act like adults, not children (probably an attempt to calm the anger in the farmer's voice). Then the IMC secretary asked, "When are we supposed to finish paying our fees for this season?", to which the Supervisor said, "Harare said they want the money...", the Secretary interjected with, "... but our period from July to June is not over yet, is it? And are we not supposed to grow crops for us to be able to raise money for the fees?". The small crowd buzzed in

agreement, and the Supervisor said, "... I spoke to *your chairman* about all this and he agreed ...". The attempt to bring in the largely respected and powerful IMC chairman did not work here for the Supervisor, and before he could finish his sentence, several farmers in the crowd chorused, "... where are the minutes of that meeting?". Then someone said that there was confusion between the IMC and the new Block Committees. But Samunda immediately defended them, and said: "There is no confusion between the IMC and Block Committees, or among Block Committees themselves, we did not discuss the issue with the Supervisor, if we had been told we would certainly have gone to talk to farmers about it".

Then Mautsa, who once advocated free for all irrigation during water shortage in 1994, asked, "Who writes reports from this area to the top offices in Nyanga?" One committee member said that the Officer does it together with the Supervisor. The idea was to tease the Supervisor more about doing things alone. Farmers had received information probably from some of the EWs that there was no unity among Agritex staff and the Supervisor had acted alone in ordering the closure of water. Nyakatawa, a committee member, then asked,

"Was the closing of water legal? Why did it have to be done now, and which law was used in deciding on the issue? Which by-law was used here?"

The Supervisor, visibly upset and trying to control himself, replied,

"You are free to go to anyone you like with this matter, you can go right up to the President if you so wish, but I have to go through my Department's channels, and I may never get to the President".

Then Manyanga, one of the prominent and eloquent Block Committee members (from block B) said,

"You are here to help us, we are farmers, you and us have to help each other all the way. We are not fighting you, you should have called us to discuss the issue of water and fees, and what steps to take next, or at least announce that things were going to be different from now on. Sudden changes like this can be very disruptive. Right now farmers are in the dark as to what exactly happened or what is going to happen, we are busy trying to produce something for our families. You have to co-ordinate with the committees, it should not be like we are fighting, we do not want to fight, we have to teach each other... Government trucks came here to give us food, fertiliser and seed, and there are these grain loan schemes, how can people repay them when their crops are allowed to wilt when water is there? We have to teach each other".

The Supervisor consented with, "Now you are talking sense ... now we are understanding each other". After this and other exchanges farmers pressed the Supervisor to tell them when they should pay their fees. When no clear answer was forthcoming, the IMC deputy chairman said, "When one makes a mistake, one should be man enough to admit it. It is not bad to admit that you were wrong, that you made a mistake, it is allowed to do that in a court of law or even in Church". The Supervisor said, "Well, if you want me to...", but several farmers cut in and, almost together, said, "No! ... it has to be from you, from your heart, for all of us... not for any one person". Then, looking down at his papers on the table, he admitted to having erred.

The final moments of that scene were very embarrassing, if not humiliating, and it was difficult for the Supervisor to handle it, even for the two EWs and myself. I sympathised with and felt for him. The IMC vice chairman then thanked him for *being brave enough* to take the heat and to admit his mistake. He repeated that he had met the IMC chairman, but they said that he had "met with him in the bush" since there were no minutes to show for it. The bush referred to here was a symbolic one, meaning that they had met informally, something that could not be taken seriously as it was not on record, which was out of line and could not be used in the context of the meeting. There were traditional sayings that things done in the bush were either illegal, evil, or wicked one way or the other, and tended to be secrets other people.

Then one of the Block Committee members, Manyanga, who was said by Agritex to be unhappy with his colleagues, pointed out that many people were now against Block Committees. He then suggested that all committees, including the IMC, be dissolved pending fresh elections for a new IMC. The meeting then went into the issue of setting a date for the elections, but the Supervisor and the IMC's deputy chairman were against the idea of setting an election date in the absence of the IMC chairman. They promised to notify the chairman as soon as he came back. There was some pressure from some farmers to have the election right there, but the Supervisor refused, and the vice chairman was especially adamant that he was not going to chair a meeting to remove his chairman from the committee they led together. After the meeting, some farmers could be seen talking and laughing with the Supervisor, saying that they were hoping that something like this would never happen again, and that they have to work well with Agritex staff. It was agreed that farmers were going to be given water. The head of Agritex in Nyamaropa said that next time anyone wanted to do something so serious there should be more consultations among staff. They agreed with farmers that after the deadline anyone still owing money to the department was not going to be given water to irrigate.

It was a significant victory for farmers, and a resounding one for that, but an embarrassing day for Agritex staff who attended the meeting. Somehow one felt that it was not supposed to be like that, that extension staff should not endure such embarrassment, and it was heartening, almost confusing, to see them talk like good old friends with the Supervisor after the encounter. Although some junior staff privately blamed the Supervisor for the ordeal, they agreed that they felt they were part of it all. There were discussions about communication within the department among staff, and that they needed to consult more with each other to avoid such incidents in future. On the communication issue, they went further to complain about the lack of telephonic links with District and Provincial offices, and lamented the inefficiencies of the radio which was the only means of communicating directly with the other Agritex offices.

What became clear from the last scene of encounters between Agritex and farmers was that Agritex's position as an extension service had changed since independence. In trying to come to grips with the new situation, the agricultural extensionists followed three different strategies successively: first one of retreat (1994), then one of an active party on the scene supporting one group of farmers and by-passing the elected farmer representative body (1995), and finally one of true masters over farmers tapping from the arsenal of rules and regulations at hand (1996). All of these positions yielded a response by the farmers and resulted in a different dynamic of interactions. None of the strategies proved satisfactory, but it is important to note that with the Supervisor

publicly offering his apologies for the way he handled the water fee issue, an opening seems to have been forged for a new style of operation in Nyamaropa: a type of management that is based on an openly negotiated order.

Discussion and conclusions

This chapter dealt with encounters between Agritex extension staff managing an irrigation scheme and farmers living and working there. It was also about encounters between groups of farmers in the irrigation scheme, and how the different parties enrolled each other into their different projects often to gain more influence over others. The Nyamaropa story sheds light on a number of pertinent issues like the confusion over the role of the extension service in irrigation schemes; the need to appreciate the importance of negotiations in establishing mutually usable links between extension agents and their clients; the role of politicians in post-independence extension service's performance; and the need to view the work of extension agents in a wider network of social, kinship and political relationships.

The precariousness of farmer-extensionist encounters should not confuse the wider pattern that emerges. My interpretation of the material presented here is that 'at the back' of these encounters unfolds a larger process of change concerning the relationship between local farmers and state or external agencies. Extensionist-farmer relations in daily interaction in Nyamaropa had unpredictable twists and turns. The way Agritex staff were enrolled into farmers' struggles for control of the irrigation scheme showed how cunning farmers could be in their quest to run their own affairs or at least circumvent institutionalised rules and regulations. Mutual enrolment by both Agritex and farmers in their respective 'projects' (such as the need for different groups to gain control in farmer representation, and the Agritex objective to depose the reigning farmers' representative body) led almost directly to the creation of a tense political atmosphere where each party took advantage of the other's weaknesses to (temporarily) take charge of part of the irrigation scheme's management functions. This aspect of the politicised nature of extensionist-farmer relations apparently could not always be avoided. It seemed to be an inherent part of the field of extension. In his study in the Midlands Province, Drinkwater says that "... Agritex's goal is [inherently] highly political, and not merely technical" (1991: 226). If indeed the main function of Agritex was "to articulate farmer problems, to synthesise, distil, consolidate, adapt and disseminate the final research recommendations" as Nyathi (1995: 14) put it, then there was a fundamental problem of wrongly assuming that farmers could not articulate their own problems. I saw this type of thinking as a carry-over from the pre-independence era, and part of the modernist ideas that dominated the period during which the irrigation scheme was constructed. The underlying question is how Agritex and farmers disentangle themselves from this colonial legacy and forge a new way of dealing with each other. In this chapter we see the various actors grappling with this issue, leading them into uncharted territory of conflict and accommodation.

Agritex's hands were tied by the repeated entry into the extension scene of the political factor from beyond the Nyamaropa locality. The political element in farmer-agency relations could assume a more threatening posture than local level dynamics between rival parties could hope to withstand. Such was the case in Nyamaropa when political heavyweights from District and Province descended on civil servants running the irrigation scheme and tried to solve their problems. On the political element in

extension, Chambers says that "...no major redirection of extension activity is likely to achieve lasting success without sustained political support" (1974: 82). In a way, this was one of the strategies employed by farmers who brought in the politicians to win their battles and show extension staff that they had more power resources to fall back on or summon for assistance (than the agency).

The role of Agritex was generally understood in Communal Areas as being to advise farmers and teach them improved and better methods of farming. This was for both irrigation and dryland farming areas. There seemed to be a mix-up in the way farmers perceived the role of Agritex in government-run irrigation schemes (at least in Nyamaropa). This was based on the apparent confusion of whether to remain simply advisors to farmers, or to be administrators of the government project. This chapter did not attempt to define the role Agritex staff had to play in such contexts, but presented, raw as it were, situations where the role of extension staff came under the spotlight, and where farmers seemed to question the very presence of extension staff in their area.

The issue of extension staff deciding to sometimes play passive roles in the running of the irrigation project at one point had two sides to it: first, it could be that Agritex wanted to see whether farmers had the capacity to manage water on their own. Second, and most probably, they might have been aware of mistakes that farmers were making and wanted them to get a practical lesson on their own on *how not* to manage the scheme. They might not bear all the blame for the way farmers had punctured holes into the whole system of irrigating, but they surely were well placed to know that joint appreciation of the project's problems would create better agency-farmer relations conducive to more efficient management.

The farmer-agency interface, as shown in the cases presented above, was full of complex sets of relationships. While one might get a sense of collaborative agency/client links in some of the relationships, it was more crucial to note that the relations extension staff established with 'their' farmers went a long way towards influencing the way their extension messages were received. Moris (1991: 107) says that "[a]n individual's effectiveness when working at the agency/farmer interface will depend upon the nature of the contact s/he establishes with potential clients". So far, and besides the heated encounters noted, agency/farmer relations in Nyamaropa could be said to be a mixed bag reflecting the heterogeneous nature of local level socio-political interactions. The ethnic, cultural and other group identities among farmers in the irrigation scheme did not make Agritex's job any easier.

Farmers having found ways to steal water and get away with it, or having devised their own strategies to counter punitive measures taken against their failure to pay up irrigation fees, exposed Agritex's failure to handle forms of farmer resistance. What was of interest here was that there was a serious management problem with farmers doing most of what they wanted to do, and Agritex not taking decisive action to keep a check on their practices when they broke rules. Some farmers wanted Agritex to take decisive action, otherwise they did not see the reason why extension staff should be stationed in the irrigation scheme in the first place, but there was no consensus on this. My feeling was that Agritex staff genuinely wanted farmers to be their own masters in irrigation affairs, but had to combine this with their official mandate to manage the project.

The environment in which Agritex had to perform its duties was thus very complex; compounded by the recurring and chronic water shortages in Nyamaropa.

In such tense conflict situations when livelihoods were threatened, differential responses were likely to emerge. Conflict is part of the reality of interface encounters and of external interventions. The power game played by both Agritex and farmers in meetings as shown above exposed the difficult situation that extension staff were caught in daily. The strategic enrolment by farmers of Agritex into their leadership wrangles between the IMC and Block Committees, together with the way Agritex staff took advantage of the wrangles to initiate moves to dispose of a group of farmers they thought were disturbing the project's development, helped reveal the webs or networks of social, kinship and political relationships that existed among the different parties.

The agency-farmer interface was not only a contest to determine whose view of the local farming world was dominant, nor only a political power game to be understood in terms of ethnic, kinship and group divisions. Understanding such interface situations and their intricacies helps to unravel some of the problems that have beset the extension service for decades, in spite of marked successes (Rukuni, 1994a). It shows that local actors have come to realise that the future is theirs. They are grappling with the various options open to them, and in doing this engage in clashes and negotiations among each other, between themselves and outsiders. In Nyamaropa there was some evidence to say that a new, locally negotiated, order might gradually emerge: an order in which the roles of farmers and state representatives, and local and outside actors, would be defined in locally negotiated and accepted terms.

Praise given to colonial extension services seemed to go against the other popular belief that smallholder farmers did not get enough, or proper, attention from the government during that period (Rukuni, 1995; Drinkwater, 1991), and the fact that during the war EWs were regarded as collaborators with Europeans (Pazvakavambwa, 1995: 104). It could be that farmers had experienced life with the two 'types' of service and were better placed to compare them, or it was their way of ridiculing post-independence extension services.

EWs in the field were few compared to the large number of farmers they dealt with, and it was intimidating to be caught in situations where large numbers of farmers threatened to assault a small group of extension staff. The extension staff to farmer ratio of 1:800 (Pazvakavambwa, 1995: 105) might not reflect the general picture in all areas, although in irrigation schemes it could be lower. During the study there were more EWs than there used to be during the colonial period. There had also been a shift in the way extension messages were delivered, from a coercive prescriptive approach of the colonial regime, to more persuasive and seemingly softer methods after independence. This had seen changes too in the way farmers perceived the extension department. They used to be frightened of extension staff, but now they saw them as either their children or their friends who would not bring themselves to punish them if they happened to break the rules.

This change was said by both farmers and Agritex staff to account for the *laissez faire* attitude among some farmers who did not take Agritex advice seriously, and they reported extension staff to politicians in cases where they felt they were being unduly oppressed. On the same issue, Bourdillon says that "... farmers are sometimes hostile to agricultural advisors who enforce rules... and they resent being told by outsiders what to do...(and) being compelled to make changes they neither understand nor trust" (1987: 87). This resentment might have changed in some areas, especially with changes

in impressions of the work done by extension staff, but hints of it lingered on among some groups of farmers.

When farmers learnt new ways of making the most of their limited land and water resources, they were likely to start appreciating whoever was helping them in this regard. Resistance was often more of a reaction to something than spontaneous action against innovation. Farmers would not always blindly accept changes. They would often adapt, modify and relate change to their own familiar surroundings.

Developing or keeping a good extension service has been, I believe, one of Government's aims. It was a means to a certain end, and helped improve the lives of rural populations. The performance of extension staff and their ability to deliver what they were sent out to do could be measured approximately by production figures from farmers in their areas of operation. How staff related to farmers and dealt with their social, identity and political problems there was crucial too to the changing ways in which farmers perceived the extension service providers.

Although "the most common reason for a government to employ an extension service [could be] to increase and safeguard the nation's food and export crop production" (Röling, 1982), the service providers cannot be kept in an environment where they might not effectively perform their duties. But this does not necessarily mean that when there is not enough water in an irrigation scheme like Nyamaropa, Agritex staff must leave. Rather, it reveals the differential responses likely to emerge in tense conflictual relations when livelihoods are threatened. Conflict is part of the reality of interface encounters and external interventions, and this is only one illustration.

The obvious solution for extension staff would be to encourage careful use of the little water remaining. If extension staff got caught up in the struggles over water, they had to find means of extricating themselves. These were the situations where encounters with farmers developed into tense dilemmas or stand-offs, where in some of the cases extension staff were used as pawns by some parties in their struggles with others, or where the department took advantage of the situation and seemingly used one group to tackle the other (problematic one).

The 'mechanics' of interaction (for lack of a suitable word), the different languages used in farmer-extensionist encounters, and the ways in which they resolved disputes, reflected the extent to which they co-operated in their joint activities. Some of the encounters presented above revealed a mixed combination of volatile relations and friendship in living together. This might be the essence of the complexity of the constantly changing socio-political reality of extension-farmer relations. Relationships were almost always changing, and support for one leader or idea over another tended to constantly shift as new relations were formed and new situations requiring new relationships emerged. These changes sometimes ignored social linkages such as kinship or totemic relationships in favor of economic or political linkages, such as was shown in the way Agritex, the IMC and Block Committee leaders related to each other over time.

Different leaders seemed to rely more on their 'relations' when they needed support for their 'projects'. For example, when Samunda was working on forming Block Committees he frequented Agritex offices and even wrote them a letter notifying the department of the block's intentions; when Mpesa was actively working on an oil-tree (*jathropha*) planting project, he sought Agritex support, and worked closely with them in the wheat seed trials (the two leaders' life stories are given in Chapter 7 below). The

different social groups' constant re-constructions of their cultural identities, and how they shaped their particular identities to suit specific objectives, is critical for understanding how they got to relate to their changing farmer-extensionist relationships, and especially how they dealt with their volatile and fluid political constituencies. Changes in a group's membership, or changes in support of a group's methods of handling identified local problems, were often sudden and unannounced. This made the political lives of local leaders seem fragile and insecure, even for the IMC chairman whose leadership was regarded by some of his ardent supporters as peremptory and unchallenged.

The uncertainty of group support for each leading member of the irrigation community at a particular time made the political arena in the area all the more exciting for the observer. The investment by political players in their supporters' vote of confidence could be seen in the way they played on and brought out their opponents' weak sides, such as Mpesa on Samunda's campaign for the block system and being used by Agritex, and Samunda on the Mpesa led IMC.

Notes

- 1.. This title was given to farmers who had completed a stipulated period and covered certain subjects in training lessons for extension training groups conducted by Extension Workers.
- 2.. The Irrigation Management Committee constituted of a chairman, a vice chairman, a secretary and a vice secretary, a treasurer, and about six committee members representing different villages around the irrigation scheme. Block Committees had the same structure except that they did not have village committee members.
- 3.. It was difficult to give an accurate figure on this because farmers continued to subdivide their plots and re-allocate them to their children, wives, relatives and friends.
- 4.. Water Controllers were officially graded as General Hands, but in the irrigation scheme the role of a Water Controller was seen as a form of promotion from largely menial tasks performed by General Hands. As a result of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) funded by the World Bank and the IMF, and requiring the government to cut down on its spending, the extension department was not replacing retiring or resigning General Hands, a move which was said to be leading towards a situation whereby farmers would have to organize themselves to do the work formerly done by General Hands, such as cleaning canals and generally maintenance.
- 5.. The irrigation Officer said that he changed his strategy of confronting a bad situation head on, to keeping quiet and acting cautiously after a 1992 incident where farmers who had not finished paying their fees were denied water. Farmers were very upset by that and they called in the Provincial Governor from Mutare, the Member of Parliament who came all the way from Harare, the District and Provincial Administrators, who castigated Agritex actions in front of farmers. Since then he has taken a low profile, but is respected among farmers, some of whom said they were not sure how to deal with him.
- 6.. Among irrigators, there were two main ethnic groups, the mainly immigrant Manyika and the local Barwe. Within the irrigation scheme the immigrants constituted a majority, while outside in the dryland area the Barwe numbered more.
- 7.. Being related to someone here took many forms. In this case it related to having either a common background in terms of coming from the same geographical region, or sharing the same totem. In some cases the relationship was created and cemented for purposes of mutual support when the need arose, and in other cases it broke up when there were major differences. On the whole, any slight reason or excuse to be related to someone in an influential position was taken up, and some relations were often strategic in nature, a kind of social or political investment.
- 8.. A *mutupo* is a totem, part of one's surname, which could be the name of an animal, bird, reptile, etc. This was respected by the group or clan that identified with it and they all considered themselves

relatives. It was normally used to identify groups of people, distinguish them from others and make inter-group marriages possible, or almost impossible if they shared the same totem. In the latter case, there could be a traditional ceremony to break up the kinship part of the relationship to make room for marriage.

9.. The way Agritex meant to change things in Nyamaropa was 'undercover' because, in my view, it was not done openly enough with the participation of everyone concerned. Extension staff were not going to call farmers for general meetings, and they were not going to sit with those officiating in the meetings as they normally did. On committees it was done in such a way that the IMC leadership only realized later that there was a rival committee in the same irrigation scheme.

10. These were the words of the Supervisor talking to the team of four Water Controllers, when they were accused of giving water to farmers who had not finished paying their maintenance fees, at a time when Agritex staff wanted to regulate water use.

11. Water Controller Samunda was a cousin to Block Committee leader Samunda who initiated, with Agritex behind him, the formation of Block Committees in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme to rival, and try to remove, the IMC.

12. The Water Controller told me of one of his experiences when he refused to give water to a farmer who had not finished paying fees after the deadline. He was asked if the water was his, and was promised a good beating. Then he was banished from his favorite beer drinking place for months after threats of poisoning.

13. This committee had been in power for the last three seasons (three years).

14. Farmers in the irrigation scheme probably took this "we are in business" idea from Agritex, since it seems the Supervisor frequently referred to it, to try and bring out the commercial element in the context of farming under irrigated conditions.

15. The main reason for highlighting this is to compare it with the other case about the Supervisor closing water in January 1996 for farmers who had not paid their fees when in fact the deadline had not passed.

16. During dry seasons where farmers in Communal Areas did not get enough food from their harvests, the Government provided assistance by giving them food hand-outs. There was sometimes a form of selection whereby families with working members (or in areas where food was expected to be easy to produce, such as in irrigation schemes), were not given free food. Some irrigators in Nyamaropa applied for it and expected Agritex staff to sign the forms in confirmation of their plight, but the latter refused.

17. Although I partly enjoyed hearing that from a farmer who was in one of my case studies, I knew that it was one of his subtle ways to show how knowledgeable he was, part of his political investment.

18. ZANU (PF) was the ruling majority political party in Zimbabwe, in power since independence from British rule in 1980.

19. The host farmer, Mpesa, gave the audience data on amounts of production per variety per half a border strip each. A border strip was roughly 4 metres wide and 20 metres long. Each variety was thus grown in an area of about 2 by 20 metres. The Scan variety had 74 kg, Deka had 77 kg, Pote had 111 kg, and Nata had 78 kg. Farmers chose Pote as the best of the four varieties, not necessarily because it had the highest yield per unit area, but because they said that it tasted better than the other three.

20. This was used to refer to the colonial period in general, but Smith was the last Prime Minister of the White Government that was removed from power by African Nationalists in 1980.

21. This assertion was supported by letters written by White Nyamaropa Irrigation Managers in the sixties about the performance of African farmers in the irrigation scheme.

22. The water source was reportedly reliable then, and there was more control of catchment activities than there had been in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, there were better rains than in the 1990s.

23. The word 'reserve' here was used to refer to dryland farmers around the irrigation scheme. Irrigators regarded themselves as living and working in a different farming situation characterized by a commercial or business orientation, and they regarded dryland farmers as staying in the poor colonial reserves with little hope for development. This was one of the distinguishing terms, and derogatory too, used by irrigators to stratify the two groups of farmers.

24. The Supervisor was a respectable elderly man who had worked in extension for almost forty years. He often referred to his experiences with White Managers and farmers in the past as informative. He

believed that lack of control in irrigation schemes had negatively affected production and irrigation performance.

25. This was a loan scheme initiated by government to give rural farmers grain on loan terms and not for free. The idea was that when they harvested and sold their next crop, they would repay the loans, thereby helping government recover its grain stocks. This was done in line with the IMF/World Bank's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of cutting government expenditure.

PART FOUR: Official Contradictions

**Chapter 7: Negotiating irrigating lives¹
 Dilemmas of age, inheritance and rules**

Introduction

The social and economic lives of irrigation smallholder farmers are often fraught with uncertainty over continued access to irrigated land. This fear springs from the idea (and fact) that smallholder irrigators in these government projects do not have title to the land that they must cultivate under the rules governing such programmes in Zimbabwe. However, this does not necessarily deter farmers from pursuing their various objectives in the best ways possible. Some of the strategies to achieve their various goals have included breaking the rules laid down, remaking and re-interpreting the rules to suit their interests. In the study area in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, the farmers' organisation (the IMC), and the extension agency (Agritex), drafted a set of by-laws. These were rules and regulations on how irrigation farmers should conduct themselves and their irrigation business. Officially Agritex staff had their own mandate in the project, and part of this was to ensure that farmers learnt new and improved methods of farming, and to help transform normally subsistence-oriented (former dryland area) farmers into emergent small-scale commercial producers.

A salient feature of the relationship between farmers and Agritex was that Agritex expected irrigation farmers to perform better under irrigation conditions than did dryland farmers. They expected them to always conduct their farming businesses in a commercialised manner regardless of the limitations farmers faced over time, such as age and labour shortages. Although Agritex staff did acknowledge that farmers often met unexpected problems in their farming efforts, they often stressed that being in irrigated farming meant that they had to strive to remain highly efficient in their farming so that they would be able to reap all the benefits of their activities. Underlying farmers' views of irrigation farming was the idea, based on proven fact and experience, and reiterated by non-irrigators around the irrigation scheme, that irrigation farming was better than rainfed farming and this was mainly during bad seasons and droughts. This was in spite of the fact that irrigation farming more than doubled the amount of work farmers used to do under dryland farming conditions.

This chapter does not address issues of farmers' productivity in terms of figures in irrigated farming as such. There have been studies on this aspect already (Rukuni, 1984, 1988; Makadho, 1990; Chivizhe, 1989), and, in my view, economic analyses deal with the issue of economic productivity in more detail than a sociological investigation. This chapter deals with issues of irrigation rules, aging irrigators, swapping of irrigation fields, leasing of plots to outsiders, inheritance practices, and other strategies farmers devised to remain productive in the irrigation situation. What this chapter also does is to analyse some sociological aspects of the lives of both the irrigation project as a social process of intervention, and irrigation farmers as ageing and active agents in the project's life. This analysis brings out the different interpretations that different sets of actors give to their and their colleagues' irrigating lives. The focus, as the title of the chapter suggests, is on the dilemmas (constraints and opportunities) that Agritex and farmers encounter in attempts to keep up with their

respective changing roles and identities in the project. In some cases, this was part of efforts by some farmers to devise strategies that would help them avoid being 'trapped' by often constraining irrigation rules, and to remain irrigators, even when they could no longer work effectively to fully utilise their irrigated fields according to official expectations.

The issue of age (of both irrigation farmers and the irrigation project itself) is closely linked to several pertinent factors discussed below. The first of these is the issue of inheritance of irrigation fields and successful attempts by family members to keep fields within their families when a registered plowholder leaves, dies, or is too old to work. This is based on the (now unused) rule that irrigation farmers are lessees on state land, and can be evicted any time they fail to perform to recommended or expected levels. Although farmers have called for the granting of title deeds to the pieces of land they have been using for over 30 years, there has been little positive response from government (for example, in the Land Commission Report chaired by Rukuni, 1995).

One of the arguments in the chapter is that smallholder farmers' cultural and group identities (or differences) are accentuated by their interactions with irrigated farming, and that these identities and differences are often manipulated by different actors in attempts to serve their group or individual interests in competition with others. Also discussed in this context is the story of inheritance of family assets, including farm land, which is part of normal practice in local people's customs. The query from farmers was why inheritance should be different under irrigated land, especially in cases where the person to inherit is not immediately present in the irrigation scheme. Rules stipulated that that was not proper, practice said that it was possible and had been done many times before. The same might be true for sub-leasing or renting of irrigated land. Rules forbade it, but it was a common practice, and an efficient strategy of keeping an irrigated field productive even when the 'owner' was no longer capable of utilising it, and their children were not available to take over. Sub-leasing, it seemed, was one of the strategies employed to beat irrigation rules and the negative effects of ageing, and different farmers did it differently. Crucial to the argument in the chapter is the concept of group cultural identity. How were farmers who came to settle in the irrigation scheme treated by the whole experience over the years? And how did those farmers who were living in the same area handle the new experience of irrigation farming. What lessons can be drawn from the different experiences of different groups of actors involved with the project? Especially, how have their identities shifted, changed, and been negotiated through their interactions with irrigation intervention and the new social scenes that it brought or helped to create?

Several case studies of farmers and their households are used for critical analyses of different arguments. Among the cases selected for analysis and illustration here are stories of farmers who came from far afield to join the irrigation scheme, some did well and others not so well. There is also a look at the various perceptions of different farmers of rules governing irrigation farming, which deals with farmers' different social backgrounds and the different ways in which they then relate to irrigation farming. The first case looks at the last meeting that I had with farmers at the end of the official fieldwork period. In this meeting farmers insisted that I should not write about the well-known practice of their sub-leasing part or all of their fields to dryland farmers and local businessmen, or to other irrigators around them. Manyika or immigrant irrigators were more vocal, and local irrigators did not say much, although

some of them, such as the Councillor, did say that it was acceptable. Their reasons for refusing centred on the idea that it was their private matter and I had to keep it that way, away from public scrutiny; and they were saying all that in the presence of the government officials managing the project!

The second case is a look at the life of one of the first farmers to settle in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, who was involved in the digging of canals from the start (1956-60), and joined the project from then. He came from another district to settle there because of the irrigation scheme, like hundreds after him. This case highlights some of the social problems that resulted from an extended encounter with a development project imposed from outside. The detail provided on the particular farmer's life brought out the dynamics of development intervention and some of the unexpected outcomes related to the ageing of the project and its participants. The third case is one of two local villagers who joined the irrigation scheme against the wave of opposition to the project from their village and their family members, and went on to do well for themselves to the envy of fellow villagers. One of them, Sakubende, severed most links with his dryland relatives who resented his move into the irrigation project, and the other, Samunda, kept strong ties with most of his dryland relatives. The fourth case looks at the life of a local leader who also joined the project from the start, from outside the area, as a Manyika. Sometimes he broke some rules, enforced them, and wrestled with other political actors to maintain a position of influence in the irrigating community and immediately beyond.

Case 1: The invasion of public privacy

It was a typical Nyamaropa day, hot and dry, with some dust floating around in the air. The meeting was on a Tuesday, around mid-morning, on March 19, 1996. It was the first time in more than two years in the area that I had convened a meeting with farmers in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. This was to give them feedback on my research findings and to discuss some of the issues that I was writing about. The meeting was supposed to start at 9 in the morning but, as expected by everyone attending, it was bound to start an hour or two later. It was difficult to get everyone there, especially important guests like the Headman, who was now old and not feeling well, the IMC chairman, and my host 'mother' (Hakutangwi), who were busy all morning in their homesteads. I drove the Headman and his assistant to the meeting. The local Councillor, Mutare, Block Committees leader Samunda, and others came earlier than the rest, at least by local standards. Mpesa was the busiest of the people who were there, organising sitting arrangements. His rival for political leadership, Samunda, was chairing the meeting. The Councillor, Mpesa, Samunda, the Irrigation Officer, the Supervisor, my colleague and our visitor Paul Hebinck, sat in front of the audience on chairs, while the men sat on benches with the Extension Workers and some of the women. Most women sat on the ground in front of the leaders. There was a table in front of the meeting's chairman Samunda, who sat beside IMC chairman, Mpesa. I sat with the rest of the audience, just at the edge to be closer to them, since I had to address them.

After everyone was seated. The chairman, Samunda, told them that I had called the meeting, that it was their son from the University who had something to say to them about what he had seen and heard. He added that it was about what farmers were able

to do and what they were less able to do, what they were good at and what they were failures in. Then he gave me the floor and I addressed them, in my broken ChiManyika (one of the dialects of the Shona language spoken by most people in Manicaland Province). I gave a summary of my topics together with the main points under each topic that was in my study, and they seemed to be very curious and excited to get into the discussion, especially to hear what I had found out and probably to correct me. They listened patiently and quietly, interjecting only to correct me on dates, on my ChiManyika, and on some names. After that the discussion was open to everyone. The Councillor was the first to speak, and he queried the validity of part of my data on the history of the irrigation scheme, especially based on the people I had mentioned as my informants. He told me that they had come later, and their historical accounts might be inadequate, and asked whether I was aware of that. I told him that I was, and then added a list of names of elderly members of the irrigation and dryland areas that I had interviewed about the historical developments in the area, and that seemed to satisfy him. Others nodded their acknowledgement and motioned that we move on to the next issue.

A range of other issues on the agenda were discussed, until we came to the one of water and land. Mpesa asked, "Whose water is it?", and Mai Makanyanga said, quite bluntly, "Water belongs to God", and there was laughter at that, probably more at the speed with which the answer came than at its precision. Samunda said God makes rainfall and then the government makes it possible for people to use it effectively, like their situation in the irrigation scheme. The Councillor then asked which water we were talking about. Mpesa said, there are three things we were given by God here, that is water, sunlight and air. He added that farmers kept getting raises in water charges in the irrigation scheme (this was in response to a rumoured change in water charges in all smallholder irrigation schemes which was going to hike all irrigation fees for farmers around the country). He mentioned that the Department of Water was demanding a lot of money for irrigation water. He said "They want money but have they put anything in that? Do they contribute diesel for that water to come here?". (The Nyamaropa irrigation system is all gravity fed). He added, "If you put your machines and bring the water here, yes, you can demand your money, and we will pay up. But in this case Smith (the last Prime Minister of the colonial regime) left this dam here, and you come today and ask us to pay for the water? You want money but you did not even add a cent into the whole thing". Then the Councillor said that they had been paying fees for a long time, that if it was the colonial period they would have been given title to the land a long time ago. Mpesa added that if they (government) explained to them and told them what was happening farmers could pay, adding that there was nothing for free these days, "except for dirt which just sticks to your shirt for nothing".

Then the discussion shifted to the issue of inheritance of irrigation land. Mpesa said that when the man dies (most farmers in the meeting spoke of the plotholder as a man, in spite of the fact that more than 35 percent of registered plotholders were women) the plot has to remain within the family, and normally the sons get it. The Councillor said that from the start there was no inheritance in this system. Farmers who failed to pay rent were evicted. For some people, when the plotholder died, they lost their irrigated plot there was no inheritance. Inheritance only started when people realised that it was a bad system to lose one's land like that, and this was after Independence when the rules apparently became easy to bend. In response, Mpesa said,

"In Harare people have title deeds (bonds) to their houses, what makes people in rural areas fail to have the same for their land? We do not want these fields to be called communal lands, they think that we are stupid, they think that if they give title deeds to us we will sell them to businessmen. We want security".

The Agritex clerk, who handled most of the farmers' payments, and often dealt with their complaints and payment problems, chipped in with,

"The laws of the old times are still in effect, they have hardly been changed, it is only that we do not follow them. There was no inheritance of irrigated land, and even today the law is that if you die now, the land goes back to the state, it is only that we are now people who understand".

Then the Agritex Irrigation Officer (highest ranking government official present) spoke for the first time during the meeting. He said that what was encouraged was to plan with the people, and added that in the past development workers used what was called the 'carrot and stick' method, whereby they would punish those who did not follow what they said, and assist those who co-operated. He further commented that some of those harsh laws had not changed on paper, but that things were different in practice. He also said that people involved in such things as expired laws, such as farmers, should understand these developments. Mpesa said that as extension staff, Agritex employees must work with the people, and added a question: "Say I have two sons, and I happen to die, what happens to my land in principle? It can end up being given to another family because the laws have not changed, why don't you sort it out?". It was a touchy issue, but from interviews with many farmers in the area it was obvious that inheritance was common practice, and land often passed from men to their sons, or to their wives. There was some commotion until the chairman said that we should move on to the next topic for discussion.

The next issue was that of renting and sub-leasing of irrigation fields: one of the most sensitive issues among topics for discussion, and I thought it was really exciting, if not sensational. At this stage I could see some farmers shifting in their seats, and some whispering to each other. The Councillor started with,

"Renting or leasing is neither good nor bad. You take someone to rent in order to help them, and they end up claiming that the land is actually theirs. People are losing their plots that way here. I can be in town, and I get someone to rent, and when I get my money I come back and 'say my friend move out'. In that situation I would have benefited, but what does it do to the other person?"

Then Mpesa, gesturing with an open hand at me, said,

"Newsman', I think you should move out of the meeting for a while and we discuss this in private ...".

There was some confusion in the crowd and some farmers said, "No, let him stay, he knows about it anyway", and Mpesa continued,

"In our meetings we did not want to talk about this issue, there is no law that allows us to benefit from state land which we are renting too, we are not allowed to do that. We do not want this issue to be written about in the book. As for me, I do not know anything about it".

The Councillor said that the issue had already been discussed with farmers before, and there was nothing to be afraid of. The clerk came in with the point that if Agritex got to know that a farmer was leasing out his/her plot, Agritex could take it away because they would have seen that the plot was too big for the farmer and s/he could not manage it on his/her own.

The Irrigation Officer spoke on the issue. Farmers seemed expectant and surprised at what he said, they all went quiet. He said,

"Mr. Chairman, whether we like it or not this thing of renting and sub-leasing or full-leasing will always take place in one form or another. Some farmers can just give their friends farming inputs and come back to harvest, they may arrange that the other person do all the work and get paid for it or something. It happens, if only people could listen. When we say water is short we tell you what acreage to grow per season, and we ask you to limit acreage including that of your friends who are renting. We know that it is happening. We only need to understand each other on these things".

Then Mpesa, again talking to me, but looking away from me this time, said,

"Comrade, what you have heard is the truth, but we do not want the issue to be included in your book".

Then Councillor Mutare said that there was another side to the issue, that when someone from the same village wanted a plot of their own in the irrigation scheme they could not get one, but then they would see someone with six acres leasing part of their plot to someone from outside the area, then there was a problem there. He said that was why others did not like the idea and wanted it to come out into the open and be discussed. Then for the second time in the meeting, a woman farmer, Mai Makanyanga, said something in the meeting. She said that such an issue should be deleted from the book and not be made public knowledge. Then Machingura, one of the new and younger Extension Workers, said that the people who were urging that sub-leasing or renting should not be written about were probably the ones who were leasing out part of their plots, or had rented from others. Then another farmer, an immigrant and senior irrigator, said,

"...but I lease out the plot so that I protect it and keep it in the family for my children when they grow up, it is a way of keeping it in the family. I think we need to do that. What happens to my children when they lose their jobs in town? They need somewhere to live from. Land is everyone's pension, and they have a claim on it...".

Mpesa added that people were being retrenched from their jobs in towns as a result of companies and governments restructuring, and as part of the IMF and World Bank financed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), and were coming back home, which meant that they came back to demand land from their parents who had to keep it for them as is customary in most Zimbabwean rural communities. Then he said that the sub-leasing 'thing' was an issue between two people, and it should stay that way, not be made public in a book. Kapadza, an elderly irrigator and businessman concurred with, "... a secret between two people should stay like that, or else people will know too much about them". Then Mai Hakutangwi (from my host family in the area, looking away from me and addressing her farmer colleagues -we had privately

discussed the issue before), said, "The problem is that we do not know what the book will start up for us, in terms of responses from the government to what will be written in there about what we do in Nyamaropa, so we should watch carefully what we say here". The Agritex clerk said, "Maybe all these things have been written about already and some concluded", to which another senior irrigator (Mautsa), said,

"People lease out their land everywhere, we see that all over the place, some people lease out their large commercial farms, sometimes the government may not know about it, so I would rather such a thing is not written about".

Another senior irrigator said that the issue should not be published. Then EW Shura said that whoever put such laws (of not allowing sub-leasing) meant them for European commercial farmers, and wanted to restrict people from that practice. They put them in place without fully understanding the way people lived in Communal Areas. In African custom people and livestock share land, livestock and other resources if they live together. I thought this was a well-put argument to allay their fears, but farmers went quiet, until Mpesa, sensing an opportune moment to put the matter to rest in a way that would satisfy most farmers in the audience, came in with,

"Let us agree on this, that we do not want this issue to be written about in the book. Those against it being written about lift your hands up (counting ...) and those who want him to write about it (counting again, and then ...). Well, there, we have a consensus, do not write about it comrade".

At that point I tried to justify my position with questions on where leasing or renting would finally lead to, where it would end. I asked them if they did not want to let everyone know that they would do it anyway whether the authorities said yes or no to the practice. Mpesa said that what they had agreed and voted on was their common stand on the matter, and they did not want themselves to be read about in a book as people who were benefiting commercially and illegally from state land. Then Kapadza, looking straight at me said,

"I know this young man very well, he is a good friend of mine, we like the idea that you write about our [irrigating] lives..., but we do not want you to write about this issue, we cannot support you in this, you can write about anything else, but not this. A secret is a secret, even when everyone in the village knows about it, if no one talks about it openly, then it is still a secret...".

And Mai Hakutangwi added, "On this one we have refused, and that is it". Mpesa also agreed with, "If it is your way of trying to help us by exposing some problems we have, it is okay, but as for this one, no, let it rest". I felt helpless, I wanted to convince them that it was harmless, the writing part, that they would not be reprimanded for it as a result of my writing about it.

This was a self-defence onslaught from immigrant farmers in Nyamaropa who were known to be involved in sub-leasing and renting of irrigation plots. It was an uncertain area of discussion with unexpected outcomes in relations between farmers and Agritex staff soon after my departure. My initial impression was that farmers were trying to tell Agritex that they (farmers) knew that they were doing something illegal, and wanted Agritex not to take action on the matter. Then the Irrigation Officer said to them,

"You are just denying the truth here, you are denying the fact that the plot can be kept in the family for someone who may be outside working through leasing it temporarily".

The clerk came in with, "Some of you who lease out do not come over here to pay the money for irrigation fees. Some people are asked to pay Z\$263 for renting only three strips, and they come here and ask us what it costs to use an acre, when we tell them they get really surprised. You have to take this issue as a grievance, you do not have to suppress it like this, like it is not happening: you can do that now but it will still come out one way or the other because it is happening". The IMC treasurer challenged her with, "Let us get one thing straight here, no one who is committing a crime can admit openly that they are doing it, can a woman tell her husband that she is cheating on him?".

There was laughter at this, and then Samunda, the chairman of the meeting, motioned to Mpesa that we should move on to the next issue, on farmers' committees. After the meeting, Mpesa told me that it was up to me what I did with the information Nyamaropa farmers had given me, and added that I had to respect their views, and do what was right. He did not elaborate, but I got the message that he was stressing the point he had made in the meeting that I should not write about the issue at all.

What caught one's imagination in this encounter among farmers, extension staff, researchers and visitors, was the open discussion of sensitive issues and the direct order to myself from farmers that the well-known, but less talked about, public secret of sub-leasing and renting of irrigation plots should be omitted from the research findings. That the researcher should pretend that it did not exist was fascinating. Besides leaving an obvious gap in the ethnographic text, the omission would negate part of the basis of the study: the notion of groups' livelihood practices and their identifications with irrigation and other resources. Among the different groups of people in the meeting, there were critical identity differences on whether the issue should be let out into the open through the book or not. The reasons for these differences were more interesting than the actual public expositions of what was or was not proper to do. The safe bet for most of the farmers was to keep it known locally (although not talked about much), but not written about in a report. The Councillor was a local, having been born in the area, and the chairman of the meeting, Samunda, was also a local among other locals in the meeting, and they tended to support the idea of it being written about, largely because they did not derive direct material benefit from the practice. In their capacity as government representatives, I half expected the Councillor and Extension Workers to denounce sub-leasing, at least in line with the rules laid down on that. But they admitted that the practice was rife and they had to accept that farmers needed to do it to secure their plots for their families. With regard to Agritex admitting that farmers were sub-leasing and apparently condoning it, they may have hoped that it would be so well-exposed that it would be dealt with from the higher offices by their bosses rather than themselves, because they could not really enforce the rule that no one could rent or lease out their land.

The strong opposition to the idea of publishing on the practice of sub-leasing and renting, especially by immigrant and senior irrigators in Nyamaropa, was evidence of the threat that such a practice posed to part of their livelihood. The practice had become part of their lives, and helped them maintain relatively good levels of production and therefore be regarded as good farmers and retain their plots. It

especially provided them with much-needed labour during peak periods, or with oxen for various activities for those without them, and they could not take the chance of having it exposed to the outside world. Farmers' differential positions on this issue were based not on their respective ethnic identities, affiliations or origins (locals, immigrants, etc.), but also on their group affiliations and identities within the irrigation scheme and right there in the meeting. Another crucial basis was the issue of age, of family labour supply, of the need to secure money for the annual irrigation fees, obtainable through sub-leasing part of the irrigation field. The debate was a direct expose of the identities and relations of people in the irrigation scheme and their link to the livelihood challenges in and around Nyamaropa.

Case 2: Chibonda's encounters with irrigation intervention

Chibonda's background

Below is a narrative of the life of one full-time irrigation farmer in Nyamaropa, who gave his account of his involvement with a government irrigation scheme from its inception. Chibonda was chosen not just because he was articulate (an added advantage) or accessible, but because he was not one of the eminent members of the Nyamaropa irrigation community, even though he seemed to know a lot about the area. By local standards, as one farmer put it, he was more "on the poor side". Chibonda himself told me that he became poor after he came back to the irrigation scheme from the war to find all his property plundered and his family scattered. He said that he was one of the poorest irrigators who needed government assistance. I was lucky to meet him (I was referred to him by the AEW who had worked with him). He was well known in Nyamaropa as one of the first plottolders, and for being one of the irrigators who knew how the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme came to be, by virtue of having been one of the workers (as a foreman) during the construction of canals.

Chibonda was 68 years old when I met him. He said that he was born in Maronga village in Chipinge District of Manicaland Province, into a family of six who relied on subsistence cultivation by hand hoes for their livelihood. He stressed that his father was taught by the American Agricultural Missionary, Emery Alvord, how to farm in 'more advanced methods' that would bring in higher levels of production, such as rotations and use of chemical fertilisers. He said that his father was a good farmer, and was given a demonstration plot by the Demonstrators (Extension Workers then) led by Alvord in the 1930s because he had won several farming competitions. Chibonda hardly talked about his mother. He said that he herded his father's cattle for most of the time when he was young.

He started being more interested in school around 1936. He attended boarding school at Chikore Mission in Chipinge, and was sponsored by Missionaries and most of the time worked at the Mission for his school fees. His job there involved feeding the Mission's pigs (at 68 years old in 1996, he was starting a poultry and piggery project to help himself with something less physically strenuous than farming, and to "help school leavers in the area who are unemployed"). He went on to complete his Std. 5 and 6. Then he wanted to go for a Teacher Training course but could not proceed because more money was required. He looked for courses to enrol for, especially building, but could not go to the Training Centre near Harare for lack of finance.

He finally settled for a place at the school of Community Demonstrators and did building and carpentry. After his successful completion he started working for Sabi Tanganda Estate, in the lining of canals for their sisal irrigation. A friend of his, who had been his teacher from Std. 2 and 3, encouraged him to join the civil service. Chibonda was married twice, in customary marriage. He had six children, three boys and three girls, with his first wife. They all got some education up to high school and some of them had jobs in towns around the country. For example, one of his sons was a Veterinary Officer, another a police Sergeant. They were all married and visited Nyamaropa once in a while to see their parents, although the latter no longer really lived together. From his second marriage after the war which ended in 1979, he had 3 children, two girls and one boy. He said that none of these children ever went to school, and the marriage did not last.

Initial contact with irrigation farming

In 1952 Chibonda joined the Irrigation Department, and first worked in the construction of the Mutema irrigation scheme's canals. In the early 1950s he was involved in the construction of the Tawona irrigation scheme. In 1953 he was transferred to join a team that was going to start work in Nyamaropa. They started working with the main water system from Regina Coeli Mission, 7 km away from the irrigated fields. He was actively involved in the construction of most of the present system's main and supply canals. He was made a Foreman, and continued working in the construction of the main supply canal until 1959. In 1960 they started digging the earth canals for internal distribution. There were initial plot allocations in 1960/1. Two to five local villagers who had worked in the canal digging exercise joined the project as farmers, and Chibonda was one of the first immigrants to join the irrigation scheme in 1962.

He worked in his four-acre plot that was used as a demonstration plot by the Irrigation Manager to show reluctant locals and anyone suspicious of the actual motives of the government some of the benefits of using irrigation resources. He remembered making a good sum of money from his crop sales and being envied, almost hated, by other farmers for his close liaisons with Demonstrators and White Irrigation Managers. He was transferred in 1970 to work for the District Development Fund (DDF) in Chipinge, in dip-tank roofing and changing dipping medicines for cattle, but retained his irrigation plot. He left the job after his wife complained that there was too much work for her alone in the irrigation scheme, and he rejoined her in 1974.

Chibonda and the war

In 1978 some dryland farmers from near the irrigation scheme who were opposed to the project accused him and the Headman of having helped construct the irrigation scheme for White men's benefit. They were said to have allowed White men to come and harass people on their land to build a colonial project in an attempt to make the government look good. The general feeling then was that anyone whose loyalty to Nationalist feeling was in doubt risked being killed. Chibonda and the Headman were picked up one night by a group of ZANLA² liberation fighters and taken across the border to Mozambique for execution.

They were not killed, they were taken to a higher command of the guerillas and questioned separately. Chibonda said that he told those who were accusing him of

being a sell-out that all he wanted was development and change for local people. He added that if the war was won, he was still going to work for that, and that the next government was going to benefit from his work, that they were going to invite him to repair or build more canals. He said that he then asked them if that was worth killing for. They let him go. He did not want to go to the refugee camps where the Headman went, but enlisted for military training and joined others fighting in the bush. Everyone back home believed that they had been killed.

In 1979 he came back home to the irrigation scheme, only to find that his wife had 'married' his younger brother, in the customary manner after they thought that he was dead. He said that his wife refused to come back to him, his six children were working in different places around the country, and one of them had joined the liberation movement as a guerrilla fighter. Chibonda found himself immediately with no family, no farming equipment, no cattle, and no-one to seek support from. His property had been stolen or simply plundered, including his tobacco barn. He had to start all over again, now as an older irrigation farmer with hardly anything of his own.

Since coming back from the war, he had to hire labour and oxen for ploughing, weeding and harvesting. He had a widow friend and together they pooled their labour and cash resources. He had almost moved in with her, but could not do so completely because he felt that it was not proper, and people would start talking. He jokingly referred to her as his 'bodyguard'. After a few months he left his homestead and moved in with her against her children's wishes. They worked together in both his irrigation plot and her dryland fields.

Local people of the Barwe ethnic group regarded Chibonda and other irrigators as foreigners. He was one of the first irrigators in Nyamaropa and said that he would always be proud of it in spite of his fate. Although part of his irrigation track record aroused jealous feelings from some of his colleagues, he was able to relate to some of his fellow farmers cordially. This was seen in the way some of them offered to help him with part of the farm work freely. He had the reputation of being known to be more knowledgeable about Nyamaropa's development than the local people there, at least as far as the development of the irrigation scheme were concerned. He said that the District Commissioner (DC) in the 1960s referred people visiting Nyamaropa to Chibonda for information and advice, or for general information about the area. For example, when a researcher, Norman Reynolds, came to do his work in Nyamaropa in the sixties, he was also referred to Chibonda. Not all people liked that, especially because Chibonda was an immigrant. During the war, some locals got their chance to get back at him, but he survived it.

While digging the main supply canal around 1958, his team dug up two old graves. His work-mates could not handle it, some of them left. They were afraid that the dead people's spirits were going to be upset by the disturbance and seek revenge on those families who disturbed them, causing accidents or mysterious deaths³. Chibonda had to keep the job going and that was the only suitable path for the water as indicated by the surveying team. With a small group of other workers, they dug two new graves, placed the remains in them, and pleaded with the dead not to be upset by the disturbances. He apologised, saying that it had to be that way; that he was giving them a new home, and that they were being placed at the new place just the same way they had originally been placed. He was uncertain of what would happen as a result, but

hoped that the small ceremony had worked. He said that later he thought that that could have been one reason why some local dryland farmers did not like him.

Chibonda said that the worst experiences in his life in Nyamaropa were when he was picked up by the ZANLA guerillas from his home for execution in Mozambique, and when he got back to find his wife gone, his family scattered and his property plundered. He said that if it was not for the irrigation job and for the offer of irrigated plots that he got when he worked there, he would probably be better off living somewhere happily with his wife and grandchildren. But he added, with a smile, that maybe Nyamaropa would not be as good as it is and helping a lot of people fight starvation in a wide area around the project.

Some of his most gratifying years were when he worked with Demonstrators on his new irrigation field which was used as a demonstration plot. He said that that gave him so much satisfaction that he decided to stay on permanently in the area, especially when he managed to produce a good crop and won a prize, and was also able to send his children to school and improve his family's living standards. His one year work as research assistant with Reynolds was full of memorable experiences in that he learnt more about Nyamaropa people from an outsider's probing questions than he could bother to find out on his own. He admitted that that was why he decided to work with me in my research, to see if things had changed, and curiosity about what I was going to find out in Nyamaropa.

Chibonda's friend, 'the Bodyguard', whom he said played the role of wife, friend, assistant, partner and nurse, was his family. He would often pass by his first wife's place now and then and be given food. He said that Manyaira, one of the local businessmen, was one of his friends who helped him with his tractor when it came to ploughing his fields. He said that he liked his beer, and went around villages drinking, or went to a local bar for a change. At the end of 1994 he fell ill. His eldest son came from town to pick him up in a car and take him to hospital. He was said to be suffering from tuberculosis (TB), and spent several weeks in hospital. After his recovery, he wanted to come back home to the irrigation scheme, but his children could not let him, they felt that it was for his own good that he remain in town with them. When I met him during one of his rare visits to the irrigation scheme, he was looking fit and stronger than the last time he had been there. In a way, his children had rescued him from a slow deterioration towards a painful death in the irrigation scheme, with neither family nor medical attention.

Chibonda leased out most of his plot to two local businessmen, Manyaira and Manyuchi. Manyaira was a dryland farmer with about twelve acres. He also privately rented a lot of land in the irrigation scheme, and worked with his two wives and more than ten children (hired labour) during peak demand periods. He had a retail shop which had just been constructed, and owned two tractors which he used in his farming business. Manyuchi had eight acres in the irrigation scheme and still rented more whenever he could find someone who needed help with their irrigation fees, or could not use all the land. He had a retail shop, a grinding mill, a tractor and a van. He used his tractor for ploughing his plots and threshing wheat, and hired out some of his farm equipment to other farmers for a fee. He frequently hired casual labour and had three permanent employees. He produced large quantities of tobacco, had two tobacco barns at his homestead. The two businessmen were known to be always on the lookout for land to rent, and they said that they were helping other farmers to keep their land from being taken away from them if they failed to pay irrigation fees.

Chibonda was one such farmer. One question that remained unanswered was what would happen to Chibonda's plot if he did not come back from town, or if he died. His first wife, who had her own two acres in the irrigation scheme, said that the family (meaning herself and her children) had agreed to register one of the sons as the plotholder, but they had to get Chibonda to agree to it first. They could all use it when they needed to. She still had a role to play in his life, and when he came back from hospital to visit, he stayed at her place, and she harvested some wheat that Chibonda had planted with 'the Bodyguard'.

The role of businessmen in the irrigation domain

The issue of some farmers from outside the project and businessmen renting several acres in the irrigation scheme, in private deals with some of the irrigation farmers, was raised in discussions with farmers. One farmer said that there was no problem with that as long as the renting farmer paid the fees for the one leasing it out, the deal was a private arrangement and was to be kept that way. Some of the farmers said that sub-leasing affected the smooth running of the irrigation scheme, and argued that if it was allowed to go on some people might end up renting large parts of the irrigation scheme if they had money to rent the land. Some businessmen who were renting plots had more than six acres of their own and after renting other farmers' plots they irrigated around ten acres each, while other people were on the long waiting list to gain access to irrigated land. It was difficult to find out how much land some of the businessmen rented because the deals were secretive, and the dealers were not forthcoming with answers to such questions.

Agritex staff knew about the transactions but could hardly do anything about them; there was no irrigation policy that prohibited such deals directly, the problem was the potential for a situation where a few people would have access to a lot of land when others did not have anything. There were other relatively successful farmers (not businessmen) who also rented more land in the irrigation scheme, and they included local teachers. These kinds of arrangements helped keep old or poor farmers on the land, and should be seen in their functional role and not be dismissed as a problem situation because they did serve an important purpose in access to land and irrigation. Some of the old plotholders could be removed from the land if they did not have such deals because they could not work all their land on their own, and this was where the argument that they had to give it up came from. There was what one could call a monopoly of development ideals and prospects for success, with a few people, often businessmen and politicians, in leadership positions and somehow benefiting from the deals.

Chibonda's friend and businessman, Manyaira, started renting plots in the irrigation scheme in 1992 with one acre. He grew maize, cotton, and tobacco. Most of his crops were for sale. He said that he would like to be fully commercialised in his production but the limitation was the shortage of land that all farmers were facing in the area. He had thought of buying a small farm outside Nyamaropa, somewhere near Rusape, but the main crop that was suitable for that area was virginia (flu cured) tobacco, which might turn out to be too expensive for him in production and processing. He was used to air cured burley which farmers in Nyamaropa had produced for years. He decided to stay in Nyamaropa and make the most of it by

renting whichever good plot he could lay his hands on. He was reluctant to talk more about his rented irrigation plots, saying that he felt insecure talking to a virtual stranger about his secretive deals. However, I managed to get from him the fact that he had been accused by some people of trying to get Chibonda's plot, of going behind the old farmer's back to Agritex and saying that the old man could not use the plot any more because of age and illness. He had even persuaded them that they should change the ownership to him or to one of his children who could use it and pay the necessary fees.

Manyaira went on to say that even if Chibonda decided to give the plot to him he would not take it because he would still face the same problem of the law that all irrigators should renounce their dryland plotholdings and be full-time irrigators, or move out of the irrigation project altogether. Manyaira said he would go on renting until he grew too old to farm. Then he asked me if I was not going to sell him out to Agritex with all the information I had. I had to assure him that I knew he was renting before I came to him and almost everyone knew it, and I had got some of the information from Agritex staff themselves. No one seemed to care really as long as no one got hurt or lost their land unfairly. He said that it was good to use all the land that was available if water was there. This was especially important since farmers and the government were paying a lot of money to keep the irrigation scheme running, yet production was low in some of the irrigation schemes with the majority of plottolders growing old and weak.

This case, and numerous others similar or related to it, showed how the age of irrigation plottolders generally meant that they would not continue to be productive irrigation farmers, and sometimes they would lose full control over their irrigated plots. A critical point of analysis here is the fact that, as an identifiable group of social actors in Nyamaropa, they often rationally found ways to remain on the land in the irrigation scheme, benefiting from it. Most of them seemed to prefer freedom from government regulations and from family interference in the way they managed their irrigation plots. The need for *carte blanche* authority in running their plots could be said to increase with age among plottolders, especially among those who felt threatened by the prospect of their family members taking over the land while they were still alive, but unable to work effectively on the land. This spirit of independence was characteristic of large numbers of farmers, and could possibly characterise other smallholder irrigation schemes around the country.

Case 3

This section looks into constructions of cultural and social identities of two local farmers who decided to join the irrigation scheme, with different consequences. It is divided into Cases 3a and 3b. Case 3a is on the irrigation life of Sakubende, a local who decided to join the irrigation project against the wishes of his family members who were opposed to the introduction of the irrigation project, and looks at his subsequent success which they began to envy him for. Case 3b is the story of another local farmer, Samunda, who decided, much later than Sakubende, to join the irrigation project. There was no resistance to his move however, but encouragement instead, and pleas for him as a local leader to try from inside the project to make more land available for other local dryland farmers who needed irrigation land to produce food for their families.

Case 3a: Sakubende's project being different and making it

Sakubende's background

Sakubende's family came from what was latter called Bende Gap. Sakubende said that his father had two wives, and was said to have had a lot of money which he made from his traditional healing powers and the popularity he gained in the whole valley from the practice. But he did not send his children to school, he buried most of the money underground. The family lived in the same homestead, as one household, but with two separate kitchens for the two wives. Sakubende said that during those days agriculture was not taken seriously as a commercial activity. The family only grew a bit of maize to feed themselves. Their father had many cattle and goats, and this made him very popular. He spent most of his time at the traditional court of the Headman with other men discussing social issues and politics.

During his youthful days, Sakubende said, his main task was to herd cattle and tend goats. He would miss a meal if one goat or cow went missing. In 1945 he went to work in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city in the South-Western region. He was the first to get married from among his brothers, and he says this was because he came home more often than others, and saw the need to get married and settle down to farm. When Sakubende finally came back from town to settle at home in the early sixties, he decided to join the new irrigation scheme in Nyamaropa. His brothers and relatives laughed at him for joining the new project. His elder brother went to the extent of giving him a nickname: they called him Tichaona, which literally means "we shall see". They thought that he was going to die in the irrigation scheme from harassment and hard work. The family kept a close watch on him to see what would happen. Sakubende said that when some members of his family laughed at him for joining the irrigation project, his father said that "a mad man who plays with the soil should not be laughed at because the soil can spring many surprises". His main four-acre plot was in Block B. An additional one acre was in Block C. Sakubende and his wife brought their few head of cattle to the scheme and worked hard in their irrigation plot and produced cotton, tobacco and beans which they sold, and made more money than they ever made before. They built a brick house with an asbestos roof, seen locally as one sign of prosperity, and generally improved their standard of living much to the envy of the curious relatives. There was growing animosity within the family as a result of Sakubende's success; jealous and envy seemed to be the source of the hatred. The soured relations persisted to the 1990s, and the Sakubendes did not have many close relatives from his side they kept regular links with, only from his wife's side.

Sakubende had eleven children; five boys and six girls. The first child was born in 1954 and was called Hatinawedu (meaning, "we do not have our own" friends or relatives, or no one loves us), referring to the fact that they did not have many close relatives on their side in the irrigation decision. He also had a Christian name, Joseph, which was a reflection of his parents' conversion to Christianity. He had become a good farmer in the dryland area where his father had had his homestead before joining the irrigation project. He was also a well known local politician in the ruling party in 1996, and was a local Councillor for the ward (Magadu). Sakubende's first

born son had two wives who were sisters, and three children. Sakubende's second child was also male, born in 1956 and named Shorai (meaning, "despise us if you like"). He had five children, and had four acres in the irrigation scheme. He normally worked with his wife in their irrigation field, and hired labour such as that of school children during peak periods, for example for cotton picking. The third child was also male, born in 1958, and called Revai (which means "go ahead and gossip as much as you like..."). His christian name was Philip. He had a good job in Harare.

Then there was the fourth child, a girl, born in 1960, and named Hatirivari (meaning, "we are always vigilant and shall not be caught unawares"); she was the last to have a Shona name because Sakubende said that he became a Christian soon after joining the irrigation scheme, and had to change his whole life to break away from the past. He stopped drinking beer and worshipping ancestral spirits. Then there was a girl named Monica, who was married in Mutare. The fifth child was a boy, born in 1962. He worked in Bulawayo and rarely came home. The sixth child was a girl, born in 1964 and named Violet. She was married and lived in Rusape. The seventh child was also a girl born in 1966, called Mavis. She was married in Masvingo but her husband died. The eighth born was a girl named Maria, born in 1968. She worked in a hospital in another region as a nursing sister. She was not yet married. The ninth child was a boy named Richard, who was referred to as "the home defender" because he was last among the boys. He helped around the home and in the irrigation plot. The tenth child was a girl born in 1972, called Maggie, she was still at home. The last born was Joyce, and she was also at home doing most of the housework.

Just next to Sakubende's homestead, within the same fence, was the household of one of his sons, with his wife and children, who also had his own irrigation plots. They worked together sometimes. Sakubende had two boys who were casual workers. Besides farming in his irrigation plot, Sakubende also kept chickens (broilers) for meat, most of which he sold in the irrigation neighbourhood. His wife died in June 1994, and he remarried later. His homestead was said by other irrigators and some dryland farmers to be good. The family had a big six roomed house, a separate kitchen and one store-room where they kept the family's grain and other reserves. All their buildings were made of bricks. They had solar energy powered lighting, a black-and-white television set, a radio, and rode around on bicycles. Most irrigators' homesteads had one or two brick houses with asbestos or tin roofing. Homesteads with all houses built from bricks, and especially plastered outside or even painted, were regarded as those of the rich and well to do, a sign of success and achievement.

Changing identities and changing fortunes: life in the irrigation scheme

Sakubende would normally be up at 05:00 hours in the morning, and immediately go to the fields. He would take a break around 10 am to have some breakfast at home. After 2 pm he would go back to the plot and work until 5 in the afternoon, which was sometimes a daily routine for those who stayed at home to farm. Sometimes Sakubende worked with a young man who was employed to help out with different tasks in the field and at home. For example, in spraying pesticides on crops (such as cotton), Sakubende mixed the chemicals, and Thomas (the employee) did the spraying with the tank on his back, under close supervision from the older man. Sakubende said that he could no longer work too hard because of his age (69), so he did the supervising. He said that he had no classroom education, but his knowledge and

experience in farming was broader than that of some farmers who went to school. Some of his children said that he was sometimes harsh with them when it came to working in the field; that he did not tolerate any laziness or idling, and wanted everyone to be always working, and that could partly explain why he had been relatively more successful than other local irrigators. He woke his children up early every morning to go to work. When most of his children were grown up, they took over the different tasks and he would just monitor their work and show them some specific things they needed.

He gave his youngest son Richard two acres which he registered in his name. While being a move to teach the younger farmer how to run his own farming enterprise and gain experience, plot splitting was also a strategy to gain access to more land for the family when there were restrictions on how much land each plowholder could use per crop per season. This happened mainly during water shortage periods such as winter seasons. Beside Thomas, who was a permanent employee, and another boy who herded cattle, Sakubende did not normally hire labour. He said that he gave members of his family money so that they could do their own shopping or use it for what they wanted. His Church friends were always supportive because he said that he kept good relations with anyone who did not give him trouble. He would sometimes hire labour to pick cotton, and in many cases used school children to do the job all at once. He paid the school after selling the crop, but there was one problem with the children: they mixed good cotton with rubbish and dirt, which meant that the family had to spend hours grading the crop in order to fetch a good price at the marketing depot. Sometimes people from different Churches were hired to do the job, and they too were paid after the sales.

Sakubende had sufficient farming equipment. He used his own cart to move organic manure from the cattle kraal to the field, cotton bales to the marketing depot, and anything that needed carrying. Sometimes he was hired by others to ferry their cotton to the depot, charging different prices depending on who it was he was dealing with. The cart could carry two bales per trip. Some farmers hired his oxen for tillage, but he did this only when there was no pressure of work on his side. He had four oxen and three cows, one of his sons had two oxen, but they used their draught power collectively. His eldest son who lived in the dryland area had no oxen. They all died during the big drought of 1991/2, so he used his father's. Sakubende's farm boasted of one plough, a cultivator, a cart, a wheelbarrow, 2 shovels, 15 hoes, 5 sickles. The family also had six goats which were kept at the eldest son's place in the dryland area because Sakubende thought that they would be a problem to keep in the irrigation scheme, since they tended to roam around destroying people's crops. Joining the irrigation scheme changed Sakubende's life. It changed the way his relatives regarded him, and afforded him a better standard of living that his relatives latter envied.

Sakubende's encounters with intervenors

Sakubende had made friends with some Extension Workers in Nyamaropa, and believed that if farmers listened to them, they would learn much more than they were getting. He was not happy with the way Water Controllers did their jobs though. He argued that when a farmer asked for water, WCs just opened the canal gate and disappeared. This often meant that as a farmer with a lot of work one then had to warn

others in the sub-block that there was water and they should take it or else it would be wasted. His story was that years back WCs would look for people in their homes and tell them to come and get water if it was in their block, they were responsible for the shortage of water in the irrigation scheme. He added that, "you should see how much water is lost these days, ... and then you hear people crying and asking for assistance from government, when the government that farmers live with every day is the one throwing away the little water that there is". He further said that EWs came to Nyamaropa from around the country, to do a job which they were paid for, but they were not doing a good job of it. The fact that some of the Water Controlers were from the surrounding dryland area made Sakubende and other farmers think that they were jealous of the successes of irrigation farmers, and that they allegedly disturbed their farming by disrupting water schedules. I thought he would spare the EWs, but he went straight into a tirade and said,

"EWs today are also not doing their job well, in the good old days they would teach you everything, show you pests in your crop, teach you which chemical to use on them, how to use it, they would show you little things like how deep your plough should go and how you should space your crops. This is not what we see today, they only ask you to come to the meeting, but munda unoenda kumusangano here? Makonye anoenda kumusangano here? / izibungu zake zaya emihlanganweni yini? Amasimu ake aya emhlanganweni na? (Has the field ever attended a meeting? Do pests go to your meetings?). We should all meet in the field where meaningful action should take place. The Irrigation Officer is a good man, he came here and almost transformed this place but was pulled back by people who felt threatened by change. They frustrated his efforts to introduce strict rules of operation which would have been good for us. They even called in the local Member of Parliament to threaten him and his staff. He withdrew from the fore-front, and today if asked something he just refers you to your IMC which seemed to know everything, one day we will all come straight into the right path, you will see ...".

Interesting views indeed, especially coming from a local irrigator who did not like colleagues who were too militant against irrigation authority, and who supported extension innovations together with the leader of local irrigators (Samunda). Sakubende was one of the farmers who believed that intervention from outside in its different forms was good for farmers, and actually supported the trials and proposed introduction of the Block System (see for example, Manzungu, 1996: 47-68). Somehow I still thought that Sakubende was partly telling me what he thought I would like to hear about interveners and farmers' responses, but the strength of this feeling was reduced by the way he criticised Agritex staff, some of whom he had referred to as our common friends. To a large extent, he liked to try out new things, new ideas, and to look at things way beyond the immediate risks of the particular season.

Family relations and negotiations over resources

One day I found Sakubende talking to one of his colleagues from the Apostolic Faith Church about politics and differences between groups of people. The argument developed from an earlier one about the role of colonial government in shaping current social and economic situations in countries they had ruled, but this had a

different angle to it. Sakubende said that irrigators and dryland farmers were not very different as human beings, but they did have a lot of what he called "small differences that matter in each person's life, such as whether someone was a Christian or not, or whether the person liked to farm or to work for someone else for a wage, or to carve wood and sell it, or build houses, for a living". He said that irrigators and dryland farmers near the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme should inter-marry so that both communities could assist each other much more easily in farm work and spread the benefits. When his visitor said that the problem was with some lazy dryland farmers, and he would not want his daughter to be married to a dryland farmer, Sakubende said that in all fairness, no one should stop their child from marrying whomever they wanted, and added that children should judge for themselves if they were doing the right thing or not, or whether they wanted to marry into a particular family or not. Family differences in resources should not be a determining factor. Then he asked, "Is it enough that two people like each other and want to marry, or should one consider other issues such as potential for dying from starvation?". And between bouts of laughter, he added, "... black and white people should not marry [his neighbour's son was married to a White woman]. Some animals are better than human beings in their reasoning, look at baboons and monkeys, they live on trees and on the same hills, but they know whom to mate with when the time comes: have you ever heard of baboon-monkey crosses? ...Not me, I have not". I agreed with the last bit, largely because of the limitations in my own knowledge about the 'marrying' habits of monkeys. I thought he had made his point, that people have differences and identities which they use to distinguish between and among each other, and some of them are based not on fact, but on prejudice, which is yet another strategy of exclusion, or of regulating and controlling access to resources. Sakubende held such ideas because he had seen the types of relationships that emerge out of situations where dryland farmers and irrigators have arrangements to share their labour and their fields, especially the fact that they both needed each other. He was also aware that in some cases, such as his own, one's family and other social linkages could provide most of what a farmer in the irrigation scheme needed in order to survive.

After almost fifteen years, relations between Sakubende and some of his brothers started to improve. Some of them later converted to Christianity and began to get on better with Sakubende. One of the brothers stayed at Kute, about 20 kilometres away, and sometimes came to see the Sakubende family in Nyamaropa; they would give him some food from any crops that were ready at that season to take to his family. He had become a regular visitor in Nyamaropa. Some of the regular visitors were from Sakubende's late wife's family. During the war, Sakubende and his family went to stay with relatives at Magadu, their 'original' village in the dryland area from where he left to join the irrigation project. Sakubende believed that one of his younger brothers who hated him wanted him dead during the war, and plotted to have the liberation fighters or the government's security forces kill him for allegedly 'selling them out'. It was as if he was supposed to be punished for having joined the irrigation scheme. Most of his children, especially his sons, were working in towns, or had run off into towns, during the height of the war. There was fear among most irrigators that they were going to be killed by local dryland villagers for joining the colonial project.

In 1995 Sakubende was preparing for his remarriage, and most of his children were not excited about the prospect. They complained that they were likely not to get the

benefits they were getting from their farm work which would then go to their step-mother. Sakubende said that it was up to him what he did with his life, that he needed someone to take care of him when he grew older or fell ill. His argument was that his daughters-in-law would not do what a wife would commit herself to. Then he went into the issue of his youngest daughter's impending wedding. He said that he was going to slaughter an ox for her as a gesture of thanking her for having married 'in the right manner', that is, before having a child out of wedlock. His sons, with whom he did most of the farm work, had sounded resistant to the idea of his ordering that an ox be slaughtered for the wedding. They argued that they needed the ox for ploughing and other tasks that brought in food and income to the family, and they were not ready to sacrifice it for the wedding, which in a way was taking one member of their household who provided labour away from them. The strength of their argument was in the fact that they had three oxen which they used for farming and other purposes, and slaughtering one would mean that they would be left with two, which might not be able to cope with all the work that needed to be done. Sakubende said that they were not going to stop him from doing it the way he wanted, adding that they made their own money from the fields he gave them and he did not dictate to them how they used it, hence they should not tell him how to use it. Sakubende used the Biblical example of Abraham who was going to sacrifice his only son to God because he wanted to show gratitude.

He said that he got everything he ever had from God, so he wanted to give something back as a thank you sign, and added that God made the wedding possible, so why not show appreciation for it? On his children's responses, he said, "why should they decide what I do with my life while I can still work for myself? They have been arguing that remarriage means that their mother's wealth is going to be enjoyed by another woman, but part of it is mine too". On the dispute about the use of family resources and the oxen for the wedding, Sakubende asked, "Why should I slaughter a goat or two for my last born girl who has done such a good thing? She has made me proud in the whole irrigation community because on that day everyone around Nyamaropa is going to come and enjoy the day with me, and after all it is my ox and she is my child". His determination overcame the complaints of the sons, and the ox was slaughtered, the wedding was a success, and Sakubende remarried. He was happy with the way things were going, and kept on working hard in his field and tackling the common problems that face every farmer in their own ways.

Case 3b: Samunda's project: merging cultural differences in shared farming lives

Samunda's background

Samunda was born in the Nyamaropa area. His father had two wives. Samunda's mother was the younger wife. While the first wife had four boys and one girl, his mother had two boys and two girls; from all his father's children, only four were still alive, two from each 'house'. Samunda was the head of the family. He took care of the families of his brothers because they were dead. One of his brothers had three wives. The first wife, now deceased, left eight children (five girls and three boys), the second wife had seven children (six girls and one boy), and the third wife had four children (two boys and two girls). His sister had seven children, and two of the girls were

married in Nyamaropa. Samunda had two boys and five girls whose ages ranged from 22 to four years old.

He worked in Harare in 1959 as a gardener. Then he went to Bulawayo in 1966, where he worked until 1969. He came back home to get married in 1971, but went back to Bulawayo in 1978 until 1980 when he came to settle down and join the irrigation scheme. There were a few vacant fields which were deserted by farmers during the war and when the irrigation scheme was temporarily closed in 1978. But he had started farming in the irrigation scheme in 1977 with his brother. Before that he said he attended meetings called by the District Commissioner to ask people to join the irrigation scheme in the sixties. Most of the local people refused because they did not want to pay irrigation fees. They used to pay £2.50, but when it was raised to £5 they drew back, then the authorities started accepting people from outside. By 1996, however, most local people wanted to join the irrigation scheme, the problem was that there was no land available any more, and the new extension area (70 hectares) would not be enough. Samunda believed that there was need for people to sit down in a meeting and talk with some of the old farmers in the irrigation scheme who could no longer effectively utilise their irrigation plots. He argued that they should be sounded out and be able to say what they would like to do, or to have done, to their land. His suggestion was for land to be shared with local land-less people who were becoming desperate for land and food.

On leadership and farmers' groups' identities

On the sensitive issue of leadership among farmers in the irrigation scheme, in which he was personally involved in his capacity as a local political party leader and former chairman of the IMC, Samunda said,

"Presently our leadership needs a lot of practical guidance, it is very poor. Leaders must learn to come out clear, and not just hide behind a lot of talk and lie to people. Tinofanirwa kusandura maitiro/ kufanele siphumele egcekeni ngezenzo zethu ('we have to come out into the open in what we do, we need transparency'). For example, on payment of irrigation fees, we should not lie to people that we will get them an extension of the deadline for payment of fees when we do not make that decision ourselves, and then we go off and pay our fees and farmers face punishment. We do a lot of fighting amongst ourselves and it does not pay us at the end of the day. We are like a big city, with people coming from all over from different areas and from very far off. You cannot expect such people to always work together harmoniously. We meet at Church and do more or less the same thing in the proceedings, but when we go home or to the fields, we do different things. Locals did not like the project and the way it was introduced, along with the implications of full-time farming. When immigrants came, they took it up with a lot of energy, and openly said that locals were backward, and now they think that Agritex is useless. For example, in the last general meeting, Agritex was not even on the agenda to say anything, and they sat at the back with the crowds while the IMC, which is dominated by immigrants, led discussions on the business of the day".

At this point I could see that he was getting really worked up, he started referring to his main political rival in the area, Mpesa, and said,

"Our problem in Nyamaropa is that we allow one person to run the show, to the point that some people have even given up trying to have something to do with the way things are done in the irrigation scheme. We should also try to give Agritex their place in the business of running the irrigation scheme".

The battles that the two leaders had fought between the two of them symbolised the shifting or changing power and identity relations between the various groups in the irrigation arena. Each of them, when given the opportunity, would mention the other as a rival, or as someone with some strengths and some weaknesses. However, they would often try to put themselves in a stronger position by highlighting their own strengths, which were normally based on support from one or the other of the different groups of farmers in the area. In public meetings they would often clash in terms of suggested ways of proceeding with solutions to common problems, but this never really got out of control, they tried to soften up their differences by yielding to each other's ideas or giving each other different important roles.

It was common knowledge that Samunda and Mpesa were the two main leaders and political rivals in the area, and this cast them into conflicting positions. The main issue that outlined their identities, and that the two of them frequently mentioned to me separately, was that the other belonged to a different ethnic group and they both saw themselves as representing the interests of their respective groups which would be unfairly served by the other. Mpesa (in Case 4 below) was an immigrant and a Manyika, hence he represented that group of farmers who numbered more than the locals in the irrigation scheme. Samunda was a local from the Barwe ethnic group, and stood for their interests, such as seeking new ways to gain more access to more land, most of which was in the hands of immigrants.

Samunda was popular for what some farmers, including those from the immigrant group, said was his more democratic approach to issues affecting farmers than his fellow leaders. The feeling was that he consulted more with farmers than others did, before acting on a problem affecting them. He was said by other farmers and by Extension staff to be both an effective farmers' leader and a good farmer. He did not lease out his plot for a fee to anyone, but lent part of it to his relatives to use during winter to grow wheat for themselves for food (for free). He said that he did not want to give free handouts, but preferred that they produce food for themselves from the land. He said that those who leased out their plots were often those who had failed to raise enough fees for their plots. He was a member of the Roman Catholic Church, although he still liked his beer drinks and continued to host traditional ceremonies and conduct traditional rituals in his homestead.

On extension, intervention and making a difference

Samunda strongly believed that the block system type of organising production was the best for the irrigation scheme, that it would make water distribution easier, and each block would have its own syphons, which would quicken irrigation turns. He said that the way the block system was introduced actually created the problem of unacceptability. Agritex staff were fully behind the new system. The reasons for this ranged from the fact that it was an order from their higher offices to sell the idea to

farmers vigorously, to the point raised by those farmers opposed to the idea, that it was simply meant to make crop monitoring easier for extension staff. Agritex staff said it made it easy and more efficient to manage resources, especially when water was short. This last point caught on well with farmers who could not tolerate water shortage problems. It did not sit well, however, with those whose deals with other irrigators, businessmen, or with dryland farmers, to come into the irrigation scheme to use part of the land for labour returns would be disturbed. The proposed system would expose them and make it almost impossible to keep such arrangements, which made it possible for even those farmers who could no longer work in their fields to continue to earn something from having access to irrigated land. The differences and their bases were clear to Samunda, and he argued that the new system would open up new land for the large numbers of local villagers who were hard hit by droughts each year when land in the irrigation scheme (their original land!) was not fully utilised.

Samunda maintained that in addition to making more land available to dryland farmers, a block system and the existence of a Block Committee meant that farmers could discuss issues with their Extension Workers in their respective blocks and with other farmers more easily. Those who could not express themselves in large general meetings would also have the chance to speak their minds in these closed smaller groups of farmers who shared the borders of their irrigation fields. Samunda and his supporters believed that this innovative idea would also mean that EWs would sort out problems in their blocks with farmers and their committee, making problem solving a shorter, and less strenuous activity. Their other argument was that during water shortages farmers would be able to control each other's hectareage to conserve water, and they could possibly monitor water wastage among themselves. A problem arising from such an arrangement, which seemed to be against Samunda's ultimate objective of making land available to his fellow local villagers still outside the irrigation scheme, was that it would become difficult for drylanders to come into the irrigation scheme for renting plots during winter under the new system. The block system meant that if farmers leased out part of their land to others, they would not be able to use extra land for themselves, for the Block Committee would see to it that each person stuck to their stated (limited) hectareage. If a farmer from another block, for example, wanted to use a friend's land in another block, they would have to come through the Block Committee first, otherwise they would incur heavy fines or watch the crop wither from lack of water.

Another argument on the block system and leadership brought up by Samunda was that Mpesa, who strongly opposed the new system, had most of his political support from people who did not want to see the kind of changes Samunda and his supporters advocated. This support came from absentee plotters, or those who could not do without sub-leasing from drylanders, businessmen or other irrigators. Mpesa was said to have a sizeable following of widows and elderly farmers most of whom could hardly work the land themselves on their own, and had to 'contract' other farmers to do the work for a fee or a land arrangement while using part of it themselves. Some farmers got money from drylanders who then got small portions to grow and irrigate wheat in winter, or during any agreed season.

Samunda argued that government should institute a law whereby during a water shortage period Agritex would just order farmers to use the block system. This would ensure that farmers did what was in their common interests, as a majority and not as

individual beneficiaries from the situations. Samunda then pointed out that the strategy used by his opponent, of raising farmers' expectations of getting water from the perennial Gairezi River nearby, through a promised water development programme by an NGO from Harare, was not going to be feasible in the near future, and people were being made to believe that it was imminent. He added that it had been started by the colonial regime in the sixties, but abandoned because of the terrain and the expenses involved in constructing the irrigation works. He maintained that farmers should save the little water that was there, and the system of block irrigation that Agritex and he were advocating was going to be the most efficient way of helping them remain productive while plans for other durable solutions were being drawn up.

Water was one of the most contentious issues during the drought seasons in Nyamaropa, and leadership battles were won or lost partly by how a leader handled the water shortage problem. During the 1994/5 season when there were serious water shortages, some farmers remembered the 1991/2 drought and how much wheat they got from their small block system strips that Agritex enforced. However, soon after that example, some farmers mobilised others in private evening meetings at the irrigation compound. They accused Samunda of plotting to impose the new system on farmers. They said that he was being used by Agritex as a local from Nyamaropa, and was going to take away land from some of the older immigrant irrigators who did not have their children around to take over unused land. A general meeting was called and Samunda, who was then IMC chairman, was removed from office in a no confidence vote, together with the rest of his committee, who were labelled sell-outs. That was the time when Mpesa came back to the IMC chairmanship, and since then immigrant irrigators have not trusted Samunda's intentions. But he felt that that was part of the process of change, and strongly believed that they were going to turn around when they finally realised that solutions to their problems did not lie in empty promises, but in practical action from a commitment to the irrigation project over time. He was playing for time to change some of the views of Mpesa's supporters, since he could not effectively exploit, in this case, his ethnic resources of group identity or his origins to his advantage.

The fear from among some farmers was that Block Committees might undermine the role of the IMC and make it look useless. According to Samunda, this would show that the organisation actually had no legitimacy, and no properly defined role to play in the irrigation scheme. For Samunda, the new system would not enslave farmers as was maintained by those opposed to it. It was meant to help use diminishing resources more efficiently to the benefit of more people. It all sounded like a good political pedestal for Samunda, and a well-planned political agenda it was. The water shortage idea was a strong argument to most farmers who felt the pinch of the shortage of water and could not foresee a solution from the existing set-up. Samunda was a different leader, promising a practical solution which was based on actual evidence of what most farmers had personally experienced, but which threatened their access to more land, while promising something to those with less access to irrigated land. The different leaders had to juggle different things and gamble in their every move. There was uncertainty among the majority of irrigators, and that made for the creation of a situation where different leaders played on the hopes and wishes of the different groups of farmers.

Samunda, like Mpesa below, had his strong points, such as support from prominent local irrigators including Sakubende (Case 3a above). It was the source of their rivalry

and the basis of their respective strengths that made the social and political arena in Nyamaropa irrigation scheme look so fascinating. The role of development intervention in creating and shifting social and cultural identities among groups of farmers living together, and the resultant unexpected outcomes of clashing or conflicting interests and formation of rival factions based on group affiliations that could split the irrigation community into various often overlapping groups. The interesting part was that one could see the role that intervention was playing to the different groups, and especially the social factors that had hitherto not been investigated in development work in Zimbabwe, which included sociological concerns such as the creation of social categories and constantly changing group identities. The different groups' continuously shifting cultural and symbolic boundaries as their members shifted their identifications, or when some different groups' interests merged, or overlapped, tended to lead to the formation of group alliances or group cohesion. This was so especially when farmers' known group differences (such as the fluid immigrant-local dichotomy) appeared to dissolve in their joint projects to, for example, collectively challenge the intervening agency's stand on the need for farmers to limit acreage per crop per season.

Strategic bargaining seemed to be at the centre of the interactions at all times among farmers. Leaders such as Samunda and Mpesa played on the group differences and identities among farmers. They also depended on the outcomes of interventions and extension on different people. They still could be understood as key actors in helping shape further developments at the crucial 'meeting' places in the irrigation scheme, especially in joint meetings with Agritex or when farmers met to discuss their problems.

As part of the paradox of development intervention in Nyamaropa, Samunda undertook to make a leadership difference himself in the Nyamaropa scene by initiating the formation of a Block Committee in his block (block D, see Map in Chapter 2). He argued that if the rest of the farmers in the irrigation scheme did not want to effect change in their respective areas, he would try out his ideas with farmers in his block, most of whom were in the same situation as he was and supported his project. He argued that block D needed to stand on its own, apart from the IMC, and added that the IMC could not help them in all their problems at all times (and said that the IMC *hayibatsire / ayilancedo*, meaning that it was 'useless'). He added that it was a group of people who only thought of themselves and their own interests and not those of other farmers. He wrote a letter to Agritex applying for the formation of the Block Committee in Block D, and this was forwarded to the IMC for approval by Agritex. The IMC did not officially respond to it, but when the chairman was asked later, he said that block D could go ahead and do what they felt was right for them and their families. They went ahead and formed the committee, but Samunda was not the leader, he was only made (or made himself) a committee member, the same status he held in the existing IMC which he denounced. He said that they were going to institute the rule of law in their block and things would run smoothly for them so that the other blocks would follow suit. Samunda said that *musha usina mutemo hausi musha / umuzi ongelamthetho awusimuzi*, (a home without rules or values is not a home). Within a month after the block D committee was formed, blocks A and B, which had plots for the majority of immigrant farmers, had formed their own Block Committees too, with the help of their Extension Workers. A whole new process of

changing relations, shifting identities and breaking old alliances to create new ones began in earnest in Nyamaropa.

Part of Samunda's influence came from his leadership in a project sponsored by a local NGO called Nyanga Development Projects (with Irish funding). He was chairman of the Nyanga Vegetable Growers Association (NVGA), which promised to provide a truck to ferry farmers' fresh produce to the market at subsidised rates, with farmers running the project themselves. With the market problems irrigation farmers were having in the area, this was a potentially profitable venture and they paid the joining fee in large numbers. Samunda continued to give feedback to farmers almost in every public meeting. In one meeting where he spoke about the need for people to pay their registration fees, he said that when the project starts, farmers who were holding back would run to pay up, but membership would be closed by then. He stressed the need for farmers to accept change, saying, "those of you who still think that this is not going anywhere have to learn to accept change, or at least recognise the need for it, or else you will be left behind".

Samunda outlined his strategy and the advantages of what he meant to do through the formation of the new system which had the support of Agritex (if not their initiation and sponsorship from the start). He argued that Block Committees helped farmers within their blocks to monitor the situation of water use, and that the neatly laid out system of irrigating would leave intruders outside. He laid out his story thus:

"We all now have to irrigate systematically, one after the other from top to bottom of the block. We all have the same hectareage during one season, which is a good strategy for water use efficiency. There is no place for intruders and no way in for dealers (businessmen) who upset the whole system. If one wants to deal or has a deal with an outsider, they have to do it within their limited acreage and nothing more. Block Committees make accountability easier, and we can take note of problem situations more easily without knocking our heads around looking for the source of a problem. No one will be able to run the irrigation scheme as if it is their private enterprise or their family any more. As time goes on we will not need the IMC, they will find themselves without a role to play in the affairs of the irrigation scheme. Those who feel insecure with the changes have to follow behind those who are more adventurous because change catches on gradually. It is taken up much faster if people work in groups because they feel secure that way, no one will laugh at me if I fail since we are all doing it together. Deals with dryland farmers will no longer be easy. Actually they should stop, unused land should be confiscated and reallocated. This is state land and no one should be allowed to benefit unfairly while some people suffer for lack of land and water. We must control each other's greed to this extent. We have to push government through Agritex to do something about these absentee landpersons' plots before we have a situation whereby only a few individuals run half the irrigation scheme. Some of the people who have been in the fore-front of resisting change towards Block Committees are benefiting from the existing sub-leasing arrangements. For example, Sanhingi has a brother who left the irrigation scheme to join a resettlement area and has twelve acres or so there, but he still is a registered plowholder in Nyamaropa, and he can come and claim it back anytime. His name should have been deleted from the register a long time ago and the plot given to someone who needs to use it, not a relative who already has something to live from. Part of the plot is

being rented by a local businessman. There should be an open democratic situation in Nyamaropa, and Block Committees should be the rule. We all have to be accountable for our actions and to each other since we share common resources and a common environment. We should not lie to people about this Gairezi project (led by Mpesa as the IMC chairman). We cannot be telling people that they will be able to get water from the river before the end of the year because none of us know that for sure. Even if we were told that, we cannot bank on it because we do not control or influence those people who make the decision to start the project. It could be decades away but we are singing about it as if it is going to take place tomorrow ..." (Samunda, 23 June, 1995).

Samunda had shown a level of frustration with the leadership in the irrigation scheme, and his wish was that they change the leadership and put in younger and more energetic people to change the way things were being done in the irrigation scheme. He was strongly campaigning for a share in the irrigation scheme for the large numbers of local dryland farmers who were keen to join the project.

There was a cursed word in people's vocabulary in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, and this was the word "block". Once any one mentioned "block", they were likely to have a range of mixed reactions from farmers, especially from those who were against Samunda and Agritex's proposals to introduce the block system. Some were simply against anything that threatened to restrict their activities, those who preferred a *laissez faire* system of irrigation operation and management. One strategy that Samunda and Agritex adopted to get around this terminological problem and its effects was provided by a Development Worker from the sponsors of the new organisation that Samunda chaired locally, the Nyanga Development Programme. His name was David Makotore. He recommended to Samunda and Agritex that they change the term 'Block' in 'Block Committee' to 'Area', and refer to the new farmers' organisations as Area Committees. After that there were mixed references to the new committees, but a significant aspect of the whole development was that they gained support. For months afterwards Block Committees were generally accepted and praised by many farmers as having controlled water theft and for re-introducing firm control over irrigation farming practices.

However, the tide turned later when some of the Block Committee members became too strict with some farmers, and exacted harsh fines for irrigating beyond the given limit, for example. Feelings of lack of freedom spread around the irrigation compound (villages) and fields until calls for more control of the committees led to discussions in meetings about their powers vis a vis the IMC. An agreement was reached in one meeting where farmers said that BCs were going to work closely with the IMC, but under it so that it would solve problems that got out of hand, such as farmers accusing BCs of harsh punishment. In a way, Samunda had won one of his big battles, to gain some form of influence in the irrigation scheme's domain, in the process earning back some of the respect he had lost in the ousting by Mpesa.

All these wrangles showed that the irrigation scheme's political, social, leadership and organisational scene was contested terrain, especially regarding irrigation management. Those fighting for control used a variety of methods, employed specifically to assist them get to a position where they could influence changes around

them more effectively. Samunda's weapons included his ability to mobilise farmers in his block to rally behind him, and he did not seem to impinge on his rivals' social circles in that way, but worked with people in his area in such a way that others outside it felt the need to respond. This created a situation where his project became the ideal one, much to his advantage. As a farmer, a leader and a political actor in Nyamaropa, Samunda used his identity as a leader and his difference from his rivals, to gain support from among the group of farmers who identified with him in relating to the irrigation scheme. He stretched this aspect of cultural and group identity to try and 'create similarities' among different farmers (locals and immigrants), by emphasising that they were all farmers faced with the same dire irrigation situation of water shortage and weak organisation, hence the need for 'collective' action to tackle the problems. His politics seemed to work.

We can trace the source of the social and organisational problems to the form of development intervention, to some of the unexpected social outcomes of irrigation development. One can then assess the role of group identities. This may not necessarily be strategic difference, but 'collective differences', reflected in members' strategies, negotiations and struggles for control of processes of change among conflicting groups (and individual) farmers. The following case analysis of Mpesa is an extension of the present argument, with another slant to it, looking at an immigrant irrigation farmer's use of social identity, group cultural difference, and political guile to rally support for his personal political projects. He had what he saw as important for the rest of the farmers, and thought that other farmers would identify with what he personally believed was the best way of tackling their common problems.

Case 4: Mpesa: On the politics of irrigating lives

Mpesa's background and views on irrigating lives

Case 4 differs from the last two in the sense that this is a story of a farmer who was an immigrant to the area (like Chibonda in Case 2). He came initially to join the project and start irrigation farming both as his new home and as a business undertaking to earn him a living. Unlike farmers in the other two cases, the farmer here hardly identified himself with what was deemed local, and frequently mentioned the cultural differences that set immigrants apart from local irrigators.

The selection of Mpesa for case analysis was borne out of the fact that when I came to the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme in 1993, Agritex staff would always refer me to him for answers on questions pertaining to irrigators' social relationships, on farmers' organisation, and on irrigation management issues in general. He seemed to be quite a lively actor, if not one of the main actors in the social scene of the Nyamaropa area. This made me curious to meet him, and when I did, he was also curious to know what my mission there was. When that was cleared, he was willing to talk to me about Nyamaropa, pointing out from the start that I had to verify the information he gave me with "more senior citizens of Nyamaropa" and other farmers who would give me other versions of stories and information he gave me. Here I sensed that he might like to enrol me into his projects or make me a political ally. Besides being a known community leader, he struck me as someone who would give his own views about the irrigation situation without trying too hard to tell me what he thought I would like to hear. However, I am not saying that he represented a perfect case, as it were, but I did

think that he provided useful insights into social issues in the Nyamaropa irrigation and dryland areas.

On Mpesa's background, I found that he was born in 1934 in Mutasa district, but his family was forced to move to Kute, from where he finally moved to join the irrigation scheme 20 km away. This was in another geographic location with another ethnic group and its own traditional leadership. He did a course in conservation and started work as a conservation 'pegger' with Agricultural Demonstrators who later began work on the Nyamaropa project in 1956. He kept his conservation job until 1962 when he joined the irrigation scheme. His father worked on the construction of canals in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme in 1957. He decided to join the irrigation project after seeing how the first irrigators benefited from it.

As immigrants, before they started farming, Mpesa and others visited the local Headman and Village Heads in Nyamaropa to pay mutete (gift as show of respect and form of homage to the custodians of the land, a way of accepting or acknowledging their leadership). They paid about one pound to the Headman and twenty five cents to their respective Village Heads. This was to ensure that they would have official traditional recognition among locals and traditional institutions as 'adopted citizens' of Chief Sawunyama and Headman Sanyamaropa's land. It was also a way of gaining access to farming land, but it meant a form of bondage to the rules of the traditional authority such as observing chisi. Soon after joining the project Mpesa said that he began to gain recognition in the irrigation community and was regarded by others as an aggressive farmer with leadership qualities. In 1964 Nyamaropa irrigation farmers formed a co-operative for marketing produce and procuring inputs. He became the first vice chairman, a position he held for four one-year terms. Since then he went on to hold many local and regional leadership positions, and believed that he was serving the community, but not for nothing. He stressed that he got political support from other irrigators when he needed it, such as during IMC elections, because, to him, "kandiro kanoenda kunobva kamwe/ ikhotha eyikhothayo" (a good turn deserves another).

Between 1974 and 1977 he was involved in a secret exercise of recruiting youth to join the liberation war by helping them cross over to training camps in Mozambique. When security agents got to know about his clandestine activities they came looking for him. He managed to escape and cross the border to Mozambique himself, where he underwent military training, after which he was sent to Romania for special training. He came back in 1979 just before the cease-fire.

In the early 1980s he was moved from one place to another to help manage government farms, but got frustrated because he could not be with his family. In 1983 he decided to leave the job and re-join his family in Nyamaropa. He said that he intended to stick to Nyamaropa and make the most of what resources were available, and in his own words, to "turn the soil and water into a mine of gold" through farming. From initial interviews and observations I thought that he was a hard working farmer, with a forceful personality, someone who always wanted to be in the picture of things, or in control of what was taking place around him. In discussions and meetings with other farmers or with Agritex staff he liked not just to have a say, but if possible to have the final word, hence the label and nickname he was given by extension staff in the irrigation scheme, that he was a 'dictator' nicknamed 'King of the Valley'.

On Family matters

As husband and father, Mpesa said that he had an average-sized family (Central Statistics Office's 1992 survey put the average family size for Nyamaropa ward at 4.4 members). He was born into a family of six (three brothers and three sisters). One of his two younger brothers was also an irrigation farmer. The other one had a plot in the irrigation scheme, but had given it to his son when he decided to leave the irrigation scheme and go and live in their Kute home with their parents. He was farming in the garden that was along the river in the catchment area for the irrigation scheme (Chapter 4).

Mpesa had three sons and four daughters. None of his children were into agriculture as a means of earning a living. One of the sons worked in Nyanga hospital. Another was doing a teacher training course in Mutare, while one worked for a bus company in Harare. One of the girls stayed at home in Nyamaropa and helped with household chores. Her parents bought her a hand loom and she was in the process of starting a weaving business for which she had attended a training course. Another one was married somewhere else, and one was still at school. His wife played a central role in the family's farming activities, and she said that most of the time he would give her instructions on what to do and she would work on those lines, although it was up to her too to change their plans. They both said that decision-making within the household was a joint process done through consultations among household members, but this sounded too romantic a view of their situation, considering that they were different people and he was often away on farmers' business or pursuing his political career.

There was a clearly discernible traditional touch to the Mpesas' home, with some classic examples of the subtlety of African patriarchal ideology exhibited through the way Mpesa's wife related to him. True to tradition - a tradition couched in the institution of patriarchal authority relations by the way - she knelt when she served him food (when I was there). She came rushing when he called out to her, and generally showed a lot of respect and awe towards him, the former of which he generously returned. She called him *baba* (father), which is a standard customary address for fathers and husbands or male heads of households in some patriarchal societies in Zimbabwe. One can risk the wrath of female colleagues here by saying that there was no clear evidence of oppression in their relationship as it was portrayed. This could have been a front exhibited for outsiders or researchers to put into their notebooks, but it was quite convincing nonetheless.

On farming and extension, leadership and intervention

For Mpesa, farming was not something that most people in communal areas could be taught as if they had no experience in it. He argued that farmers should be allowed room to incorporate extension knowledge into their own farming systems and not be asked to change ('transform') their traditional and other local practices as if they did not benefit from them at all. He added that the problem was that of communication between farmers and extension staff, not least within the extension agency itself among staff at different levels. He said that there should be more dialogue on what farmers wanted to grow, when and how. Mpesa believed that his previous experience and work in government gave him an edge over other farmers who had been farm

labourers, factory workers, or merely subsistence producers on land they inherited from their forefathers. He believed that he "knew what people needed", and knew how to make the most out of the land. Hence his claim that he had to lead the irrigation scheme and its people to a different plane where they would chart a new course for themselves in their farming business and run their own affairs with no disturbance from anyone from outside the project.

The question, 'why do some farmers take up leadership positions in irrigation schemes?' stayed with me throughout the study of social relations in Nyamaropa, especially when I was with Mpesa. He was regarded by many irrigators and dryland farmers as both a leader and a villain at different times. Mpesa said that he was a people's leader; Agritex staff recognised him as one of the prominent leaders; fellow irrigators elected him repeatedly to leadership positions (after he had cleverly campaigned, mobilised and assembled his own support). But was he a leader? What is leadership?

Leadership is "the art of controlling followers" (Bailey, 1988:5). It could also be much more than that: it can be an outcome of coaxing and sometimes begging others to take one's side in controversial or contested issues. It is a way and a quality of being able to enrol other actors in your own individually perceived and collectively marketed project promising to benefit the followers in one way or the other. Like power (Latour, 1986; Villarreal, 1992, 1994), leadership is relational; there has to be someone willing to recognise another's leadership for it to have any meaning at all. It is fluid and also shifts between different actors at different times, depending on how they manipulate the conditions around it and the views of other actors involved in the negotiation process. But can one irrigator control other irrigators? Control may be too strong a term here, but one tends to think that irrigation leaders could influence what took place in the lives of other irrigators, but not control how their colleagues responded to situations that emerged around them. As a politician, Mpesa was in the ruling political party's District Executive. He also sat in the party's National Consultative Assembly. Locally he had been involved in wrestling matches for power in the Irrigation Management Committee (IMC) wrestling matches with other farmers, especially the leader of the local irrigators, Samunda, in Case 3b above.

One particular scene that shed light on some aspects of leadership wrangles in Nyamaropa was the 1993 local ZANU (PF) party chairmanship elections. There were two people vying for the post, Mpesa and Samunda. There was what one might call traditional rivalry between the two leaders and they had been alternating in some of the positions for quite some time from the early 1980s when Samunda came into irrigation farming full-time. Mpesa represented more of the immigrant irrigators while Samunda was a local irrigator who commanded respect among most local irrigators and dryland farmers. During this particular election, Samunda was more popular, and he won the election. But sensing continued rivalry between the two of them, he 'ceded' the position to Mpesa who took it up. Samunda retired into the deputising position. This apparently had nothing to do with the fact that Mpesa was better connected to powerful politicians in government. For more than three years Mpesa managed to retain the chairmanship of the IMC, mainly by using a strategy of being in the middle of organising one or two projects for Nyamaropa farmers' benefit.

Then there was the contentious issue regarding Mpesa's relationship with Agritex staff. He said that he was aware of the fact that he was in a government irrigation

scheme and had to follow rules and regulations that governed the place. However, he said that this did not give Agritex staff the right to 'push him around', or to 'run his life'. His standpoint was that there should be more communication not just between farmers and Agritex staff, but first within the agency itself, up the hierarchy, especially between ground or front-line personnel and those higher up in the department's hierarchy. Mpesa said that extension agencies and development organisations in general have their own perceptions of communal area populations, and a common one was that most of them were resistant to change, or at least too slow to adopt innovations. He said that he thought it was the existence of such ideas among interveners that led to the creation of 'top-down attitudes', which in turn led to resistance from some intended beneficiaries. He told me that he had read about that in a pamphlet from a workshop on grassroots participation in development once!

Mpesa said that Agritex adopted different extension strategies to go with changes that took place in the farming business of small farmers, but 'farmers remained farmers', picking out what they thought could be useful to them and leaving the rest. But again, one would like to believe that the choices that each party made were within certain regulating, if not determining, parameters. Mpesa said that his main obligation was to serve the irrigation community, so he had to stand up to all outsiders and make sure that they did not bring in ideas that would either cheat or hurt irrigators. And this sounded politically correct. The fact that he was also seen by some of the people he led as an outsider himself did not often occur to him. He said that he believed in irrigators' rights to have the project as their permanent homes and not to remain squatters on "so-called state land". He added that after 33 years farming and living in the same place, he considered himself a 'local', and therefore wanted to defend locals and their interests around the irrigation scheme. This could be one reason why he sometimes recorded vehicle registration numbers of strangers in the area, or of what he termed 'suspicious characters', who could be anyone from outside Nyamaropa. Sometimes, especially when the situation suited his individual or group interests, he would deny this 'local' identity, such as when the traditional leaders said that all people living in the area (including, and especially, irrigation farmers) should observe *chisi*. He would argue that irrigators were not part of the local cultural framework, that they were immigrants and in business in the irrigation scheme, and he was alone in that type of argument. However, when it came to the land issue, and the need to identify with the area in which they had been living for more than three decades, Mpesa found it appropriate for outsiders' interests to take up a local identity. This is where the idea of shifting or changing group identities and changing groups' cultural identities comes into several arguments that run through this book.

Mpesa believed that in Nyamaropa Agritex's role in farmers' lives was to manage the irrigation scheme and teach them improved ways of farming. An easy mandate he said, but not so easy in practice for the extension staff concerned. The farmer questioned the way Agritex as an external institution did its work. He said that he worked in a government department before and understood that even if staff on the ground wanted to change some things, they could never change everything. They had to stay in line, and do things the department's way, even if this meant disregarding the interests or priorities of farmers they were meant to serve. The department's staff might have their well-meaning technical solutions to some problems faced by farmers, but they had to apply them in a highly politicised social environment. Hence the ambiguity of their situation which sometimes led to ineffective or deflected policy

implementation, and could lead to animosity between the two parties (of farmers and the extension agency). The role of by-laws as regulations governing the behaviour and performance of irrigation farmers came under scrutiny from Mpesa. He said,

"By-laws are there for farmers, made by farmers themselves, and they must change to suit and not suppress farmers. They are drafted by the committee, and passed by farmers in a majority vote. They can, and should, be overlooked when there are critical problems such as the drought. They are nothing but a regulatory instrument. Irrigation is not an individual thing and most farmers realise the need to work together. People work hard every cropping season and land is running short with unemployment in towns and people coming out to farm. By-laws, which are meant to regulate the system, sometimes hinder the smooth operation of farmers in their business. Most of them are not used anyway..." (IMC Chairman Mpesa, 23 September 1994).

The impression I got from his position on by-laws was that he would not hesitate to breach a by-law if doing so would benefit him in one way or the other, and in doing that he was not alone. Farmers stole water almost everyday, they grew more crops than was recommended, they grazed their livestock inside the scheme, and got away with it. Mpesa was said by some farmers to often take water when it was not his turn, he grew his vegetables on more land than was recommended for that season, and argued that irrigation land and water was meant for them to make a profit. Sometimes he grew more because he combined his land with one of his sons or nephews, and other farmers thought that it was all his. It was a profitable strategy in as far as having a larger acreage of a crop per season was concerned, and he exploited it fully to his family's benefit. He did the same thing one season, and the following year many farmers followed suit, and there was chaos with water shortage and water stealing was rife. But Mpesa still had an interesting theory to describe it. He said, 'shiri yakangwara inovaka dendere rayo neminhenga yedzimwe shiri / inyoni ekhaliphileyo yakha isidleke sayo ngensiba zezinye (a clever bird makes a nest out of other birds' feathers)'. This was his way of justifying his water use practices that went beyond the given limits per individual farmer. In this case he saw himself as the clever bird. He contended that if most farmers did not use the water, and some of it was left available, any clever farmer should utilise the chance and benefit from it, and he did, with maximum return, and others cried foul.

Mpesa queried the way extension knowledge was passed down to farmers, however good it might have been. He said that he had no doubts that Agritex's intentions were positive and well meaning, and that the department played a pivotal role in improving farmers' farming practices and production levels, but there seemed to be some pressure being exerted on farmers to accept new ways even if they did not want the change. Here he immediately moved on to the example of the block system which most farmers seemed to hate, and which Agritex staff and some disgruntled farmers were advocating. While seemingly forceful about the idea, Agritex staff said that they would not impose it on farmers, but continue to negotiate with them.

Another point of argument raised by Mpesa was that of cropping programmes. He said that Agritex should not force farmers to grow particular crops because people had different interests. Some farmeres wanted to sell all their produce while others wanted to eat directly from their work. For Mpesa, it was not, or rather it should not be, the

prerogative of a government department to decide what crops a farmer should grow and when. A noticeable feature of what he termed 'limited independence' in Nyamaropa during the course of the study was that farmers had a variety of crops in their fields which were not in the cropping programme for that season. For example, during the 1994 winter season Mpesa had two acres of tomatoes, rape, choulmollier, and cauliflower. Agritex had recommended that each farmer grow two border strips of beans for the little water remaining to go round. He earned himself thousands of dollars for that one season (1996). The winter crops that all farmers were supposed to grow were wheat and beans, but a range of other types of crops was grown. No one had their crop uprooted (which farmers said used to be the practice in the early days of the irrigation scheme in the 1960s). This was one of the clear demonstrations of the flexibility and permissiveness (or was it helplessness), of Agritex's situation in the face of farmers' resistance against externally arranged irrigation farming and management.

Mpesa was also keen to talk about the state of small-holder irrigators in the whole of Zimbabwe in general regarding the ownership of the land that they cultivated. He pointed out to me that he was not impressed with the way government was doing things, especially when it came to giving title deeds to communal farmers. He said,

"I have stayed here for more than 33 years, but I am still a squatter on this piece of land. I still have no claim on it. We pay all the fees that are asked of us just like the people in towns paying their mortgages for their houses, but we do not get the title deeds like they do. Why is it that people in towns get better treatment than us in rural areas almost in every respect? Who is more important? Why does the state hang on to this land that naturally belongs to the people on it? Why can't they let go and give it to us? We are squatters on our own land because of some law somewhere. It is like we are constantly at a station, waiting to move on. There is no security for us and our children, any single mistake and one can be thrown off the land with nowhere else to go, and then what happens to the whole family? We have written to government asking for title deeds with no success. We feel like we are not treated like citizens of this country. We can take care of ourselves and our offspring if the land is given to us. This thing that if we are given title deeds we will sell the land to businessmen is nonsense..." (Mpesa, 23 September 1994).

Title deeds were a contentious issue among irrigation farmers, and probably added fuel to the fire in irrigation farmers' feeling about insecurity of their tenancy status in government-run irrigation projects. The formation of the Manicaland Small-Scale Irrigation Plottolders' Association in April 1996, for which Mpesa became the first chairman, was most likely a result of this insecurity. The new organisation, which was initiated by farmers in Nyamaropa under the leadership of Mpesa, had fourteen irrigation schemes in it, from around the whole of Manicaland Province, although some schemes did not immediately join (The Manica Post, 3 May 1996).

On this issue of the irrigation project being given over to farmers to run on their own without Agritex management, Mpesa said that it was a good idea as long as farmers could manage to run it profitably. He suggested that this could be done gradually and in stages over a period of time, adding that should it be done, farmers must first be trained on how to go about it. He said that presently (1995) there was no capacity for running the irrigation scheme among farmers in Nyamaropa, and confided that, "we still have pending maintenance fee cases because farmers are not

owning up. Turnover itself is a desirable thing, but it is not something that can be done overnight, it must be gradually and carefully done in stages with proper evaluations after each stage if possible, but certainly after the final stage of management transfer". Agritex staff could certainly use such insightful ideas from farmers like him who seemed to have a reasonably good grasp of issues involving the development of small-holder irrigation schemes.

On intervention, leadership strategies and group identities

Mpesa's views on the Nyamaropa situation as portrayed above was quite different from, for example, Sakubende and Samunda's in Cases 3a and 3b above. He was different not because he was slightly more educated, but because he did not come from the same area as they did, His perceptions of development, of external intervention, and of the role of the extension department as the managing agency for the irrigation scheme were different, if not more enlightened, than those of the other two farmers, in my view. He was clearly more aggressive, radical and more critical of the situation around him than the others, and took his chances at exploiting the farming and political situation while other farmers preferred to regard intervention as generally bringing some good for the intervened. He was bound to clash with some of the local leadership because of the way he saw things, and he did clash with them. The following sub-section looks at one of the strategies that Mpesa employed in his attempts to gain more influence, to keep control or a political position, or to keep his political rivals at bay. The example of the jatropha project below shows how he manipulated access to information about a development initiative in such a way that he became the only link with the sponsors of the project. Eventually this became his political ticket for election campaigning. He had to be retained as IMC chairman so that he would see the project through and 'deliver water in abundance to Nyamaropa farmers'. It was a wise move that paid dividends.

The jatropha project started when a group of visitors attached to an NGO in Harare came to Nyamaropa on a tour, and among them were people from a funding agency who listened to the problems that Nyamaropa farmers put forward. The visitors promised to initiate a project to get water from the nearby perennial Gairezi river. Some of the farmers probably forgot about the promise after several months, but Mpesa did not, he went all the way to Harare to pursue the issue further. After a while, one of the executives of the NGO, which was linked to the donors as the local co-ordinator of the programme to assist farmers to set up their own projects, came to Nyamaropa and convened a meeting where the whole programme was discussed. After that meeting, several months lapsed before anything could be done, and noone, except Mpesa, seemed to know what was really taking place. Then a meeting with the NGO was held whereby details of the project were laid out for farmers' discussion.

The NGO staff said that the donor's conditions were that farmers would not be given water just like that, but they would give farmers equipment and means to make it possible for them to source water. They would provide engines for pumping water from the river, and dig canals for taking water from the river to the fields, but farmers would have to find their own sources of fuel to run the engines. The NGO's prescribed solution to this was that farmers should grow a particular type of oil tree, from whose seed they would press and refine oil for running the engines, which would be 'cheaper

and environmentally friendly'. It seemed to be a sound project, and Nyamaropa farmers were excited about the prospect of putting their irrigation water shortage problems finally behind them once and for all. As the man at the centre of the project in Nyamaropa, and one who had repeatedly chased the issue up all the way to Harare, Mpesa's political capital was boosted among most irrigation farmers who had endured repeated seasons of water shortages.

Farmers then got seed from the NGO and found themselves already owing Z\$700 before they knew it, for the seed. But they accepted it because it was through their IMC chairman who knew about the whole project better than anyone else in the irrigation scheme. The seed was planted. Branches of the tree were transplanted all over the place. Farmers hoped that in a few months' time, or a year at most, they would be harvesting the seed to press for oil to run the engines and flood the irrigation scheme with water from the Gairezi river. All the information about the stages of development or progress with money, oil-press engines, water pump engines, was known largely to Mpesa. He rarely mentioned details of progress to the rest of the farmers in meetings, except to say that he was expecting the donors to contact him, and to encourage farmers to grow more of the plant. He might have had little information too, but the fact that he was the only link that farmers had with the project's funders in Harare made him politically indispensable to Nyamaropa irrigators. He knew that very well and was able to capitalise on it for his political leadership drive.

Mpesa's belief, based on evidence from the other parties' participation and show of eagerness, was that farmers and extension staff did support the jatropha project, although he thought that extension staff on their own were not united. He felt that they should help farmers improve co-ordination and communication among themselves and between farmers and the supporting NGO. Then he went on to criticise the way Agritex as an extension department was working with farmers. He argued that there should be 'improved and proper' irrigation policies - probably policies that suited his personal or sectional projects, or those that served the interests of the majority of the immigrant irrigation population and put him in a favourable political position. He added that rural life is about farming, and,

"I am not saying that we should treat Agritex as if this is already a post mortem (sic). The problem for us as farmers dependent on these crops, is that some of the enforced extension methods are simply experiments or trials, and they are carried out on our lives, at our expense. Experiments must have the potential to benefit the community, they must suit the particular area, they must be specific, tikafananidzwa ne Nyanyadzi ne Chibuwe ne dryland ne mamwe ma irrigation azvifambi ba, zvakasiyana, vamwe vanorima minda midiki vachirimawo madryland vaine free grazing areas/ singafananiswa lamanye amairrigation anjenge Nyanyadzi leChibuwe labemaphandleni akulungi lutho ngoba sehlukene, abanye balamasimu eirrigation amancinyane baphinde babelawangaphandle, babuye babelamadlelo amakhulu (we cannot be compared to other irrigation schemes like Nyanyadzi and Chibuwe, we are different, and nothing can be right that way, some have small irrigation plots and also have dryland fields, in addition to that they have enough grazing land)".

This was an insightful and critical analysis of the situation of farmers and the role of Agritex in their lives. What struck me in the analysis was the farmer's views on

differences among farmers in different irrigation schemes, and the awareness of variations or diversities in their farming and social contexts. This was in a way similar to the views he had expressed another time that within the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme itself, Agritex staff, besides carrying out 'experiments' (eg crop trials) on farmers, were also using divide and rule tactics to keep farmers under their control. In response to the allegations (or accusations), the head of the Agritex office in Nyamaropa said,

"(T)he IMC guys are just clinging on to power, we do not have to divide them for the IMC to lose support, they should know that we can do without them, they are just an extension method put up by the agriculture authorities, and they should not get the impression that they are invincible. There is no policy that says that we must keep them. Their annual elections are due in July, and we know that they do not want to leave, and they are going to use this jatropha thing as an excuse to stay on in office. They are also using the payment of rates arrears as a weapon, telling farmers that they will talk to us to extend the final dates of payment from June to September, and they know that farmers are going to like that move and vote them back into office en masse. This guy, the IMC chairman, is very good in talking, just give him a platform and he will flush you out if he does not like you. But we sometimes work well with him. He has some women who support him strongly and they only have to shout or applaud when he says something and he is on the roll. The next general meeting is likely to be explosive".

And Mpesa was 'on the roll' for certain during that particular phase (mid-1995) because he was acknowledged as the reigning IMC chairman without a single vote cast, and the opponents in the new Block Committees said and did little to change the status quo. The jatropha project was still a 'great hope' several months later, and the different actors were still juggling their different political strategies to stay on course for the achievement of their various goals.

A note on problems of age, inheritance and irrigation

Tendai Madziwabende, a young man in his twenties, teaching at a local school, came up to me after a couple of beers, and called me loudly by name, catching other people's attention in the bar. I had spoken to him several times before about the situation of farmers in Nyamaropa and the problems of labour and ageing farmers. When he got my full attention, he said, slowly and with irregular pauses,

"You know... my brother, the problem here is that of age There are plottolders who are too old to work ... but they still hold on to irrigation plots which they cannot utilise All they do is give us small pieces of land seasonally to rent, but nothing to own (sic), and we help them stay on by paying their maintenance (irrigation) fees, they are selfish ..., I tell you, we just have to grab the land from them...and this place can change".

There were other younger irrigators who were interested in getting land of their own, but their situations differed according to the family size, the age and ability of the registered plottolders to manage the farming enterprise, and the availability of extra

sources of income. In cases whereby older farmers felt that they needed their children to play important roles, they gave them part of the family plot to run on their own, such as in the Sakubende family in Case 3a above.

The following snippets of cases on age-related issues from the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme tell part of the story of resource allocation within households. They are quite similar to the story in Case 3a above between Sakubende and some of his sons when his daughter got married and he wanted to slaughter an ox for her.

The first story is that of a family's system of sharing or appropriating income or farm earnings. Such problems in the irrigation scheme seemed to be especially in those families where children were grown up (school leavers with no employment or tertiary qualifications, and little prospect for urban employment). They were to work in the family holding because not all farmers had plots large enough to split them up when the son, for example, got married, or finished school with no paid employment. Some of them did not want to hear of their plots getting split between family members.

In this one particular case the son worked on the same four-acre plot with his parents. He had complained to his father in previous seasons that he was not being paid as much as he was entitled to from the effort he put into the family plot. His father, in his seventies, got all the income, and appropriated it the way he saw fit. The son often got nothing except that his parents, especially his father, bought groceries for the whole family. The young man said that his friends were 'paid' more by their parents, a nominal sum as some kind of pocket money at least. One season after their sales of tobacco and cotton, he took some money from the house. When his father asked him about it he denied having had anything to do with the theft, but there was all the evidence pointing to the fact that he had taken the money. No one else had access to the house. His father reported the case to the police, who went on to question the young man. The son told the police the whole 'story of his life', where upon the police decided that it was more of a domestic case than anything else. No charges were laid against him.

The second story sounded more like a simple case of theft arising from greed. It concerned a young man who worked together with his parents in one family plot. The son was given a limited quota of cotton bales to sell to the marketing board in the form of numbers, so that he would sell part of the cotton for his own cash. He was not satisfied with the amount of money he often got. Since he was responsible for transporting the cotton bales to the depot for sale, he changed some of the numbers of his parent's bales into his own, and when the cheques came, it was his that had more money, when he had fewer bales. When his parents found out they did not go to the police, but talked it over with him and reached an agreement whereby they would increase his earnings. They acknowledged that he was more in charge of the farming activities than they were as an old couple, and that it seemed like a satisfactory deal to let him have more. A domestic case indeed, solved within those confines too, but indicating the common problems surrounding age, plot inheritance and family resource allocation, typical of many other families with aging registered irrigation plotheolders in Nyamaropa, and probably in other irrigation schemes around Zimbabwe.

There were farmers in the irrigation scheme who were said to be too old to work in their plots productively. This was a delicate problem for Agritex. An old couple could have a two hectare plot from which they could utilise only half largely because there

was a shortage of labour in the area. Some extension staff believed that some of the old farmers were resistant to change by refusing to let go of the under-utilised land. Their suggestions were that elderly irrigators with children in urban centres should give up part of their land so that many landless younger farmers could gain access to land of their own. For most of the elderly irrigators, mainly those who were among the first to join the project in the early sixties, giving up any part of the land was a betrayal of their children, and their own efforts of cultivating the land and feeding it with organic manure over the years.

The main argument against formally giving up part of the land was that land was a family asset. The contradiction in the irrigation scheme was that irrigators were regarded as lessees on state land. To most of the farmers, it was still 'their' land in much the same way as it would have been before colonial tenurial regulations were applied. Traditionally, everyone had access to land for cultivation by virtue of membership in a clan, a village, or a chiefdom (Bourdillon, 1987). Irrigation farmers wanted their children or close relations to inherit their plots. Most of those who had their children in urban areas argued that they would keep the land until their children came back to inherit it as was customary. The fact that some of the children did not want to come and settle down in a farming life did not seem realistic enough to some farmers. Actually, examples of young men losing jobs in town as a result of ESAP reinforced their belief that their children would eventually come to take over the family farming business.

The two stories of theft meant more than simple cases of goods stolen from farmers by their children. They were references of the critical implications of the value of irrigated land, availability of land, appropriation of irrigated pieces of land, regulations governing sharing irrigated land, inheritance procedures and how much control elderly irrigators had of the land that they jointly used with either their junior family members (children) or those to whom they leased part of their land. A statistical look at the number of irrigators, that is, at those irrigation farmers whose names appeared on the register of ploholders, revealed that there were approximately 40 per cent of irrigators above the age of 60 years. The majority of them were in their forties and fifties, with a number in their seventies, and 2 over 80 years old. This phenomenon exposed some of the weaknesses of the plot allocation system in smallholder irrigation development, which had apparently made such projects victims of their own success in that the ability of these farmers to educate their children, which was enhanced, if not alone made possible, by earnings from irrigation farming, consequently meant that they were not going to have successors in their farming businesses. Most of the children who got jobs in urban areas did not want to come back to farm. The contradiction here was that some of the parents whose children were present did not seem keen to release most of the land to the children to take charge of. This was also derived from the customary family relationship with land, whereby the head of the household does not give up overall decision-making powers over the use of the family's piece of land until death. Changes in family relationships and farmers's perceptions of irrigated farming plots required complementary changes in the cultural fabric of inheritance and people's attachments to it over time. But there were cases when some did, with encouraging results, such as Sakubende and his sons in Case 3a above. The worrying aspect of this phenomenon was that there were no rules laid down on inheritance, since small-holder irrigation schemes were on state land, which

meant that land inheritance was technically illegal (although it was practically the norm). This was also related to the idea of irrigation farmers' land insecurity that Mpesa touched on in Case 4 above, and that as farmers, they might be evicted from the land at any time with little recourse to the law or to any body that could defend their rights to irrigated land. It was hoped that the findings of the Land Commission, which were released in 1995, would change this situation and give more security to farmers.

Discussion: Irrigation projects, identities and changing livelihoods

We have seen how different farmers in the irrigation scheme deal with their various situations of trying to make a living in constant interaction with others who have different views and thus have different levels of effects on each other's projects. The chapter generally discusses different views of farmers in shared irrigation livelihoods, and in their well-constructed group identities.

There are both theoretical and practical implications attached to the issues raised in the stories of the meeting at the start of the chapter, and the four cases of farmers whose lives have differently been tied up with the irrigation project and with each other for years. For practical purposes of policy-making and planning or implementing people-friendly smallholder irrigation projects, this section of the book highlights some of the overlooked social and cultural processes of change, together with the consequences and outcomes of such interventions. Although the outcomes will most likely be understandably varied in different contexts, the material in the chapter shows that a project constructed by outsiders over time will change their socio-cultural identities. It will also continue to help them foster the creation of new social groupings with new identities. A central point in the chapter is the way different groups of farmers, relate to, and constantly change, their relationships to the main resource of irrigation farming. Irrigation is what initially brings them closer to the other farmers in situations where they must co-operate for each of them to benefit from the type of farming they are involved in.

Another aspect of the changing relationship that farmers have with the project is the way they shift in their ways of utilising it. The issue of sub-leasing is a sensitive spot in the discussion of the lives of irrigation farmers in Nyamaropa, and this is mainly because it is widely practiced and closely guarded as a secretive and private matter open for discussion only between the parties involved. The level of one's participation in the practice, or the level of participation of friends and relatives, seemed to partly shape the way farmers regarded the practice in spite of the fact that it was an illegal practice. What the meeting at the beginning of the chapter reveals is that the changing social relations among farmers are partly shaped by the way different farmers relate to the irrigation resources and partly by the way they exploit them. Those who may be in a position to benefit from sub-leasing tended to defend the practice and wanted it kept as a secret, in spite of the fact that the very agency charged with enforcing the regulations that prohibited the practice knew all about it and took no correctional measures. Those farmers who felt cheated by the practice among their colleagues, and seemed not to have much room for it, tended to condemn it strongly.

An interesting part of the different responses to sub-leasing is the way different farmers on opposing sides of the issue are aligned to socially and culturally different groups, the way their group identities tend to collide and form new identities that make up the Nyamaropa social puzzle. Local irrigators generally did not have large

plots of land, except for the few who joined the project from the start. This made them keen to gain access to more land, and taking up the block system idea being promoted by Agritex was one open possibility towards achieving that objective. While immigrants were seen as not properly respectful of local traditional and customary rules, which was an added issue of conflict between the various groups. Immigrants themselves felt that they had been in Nyamaropa long enough to gain locality, if only as an identity with the irrigation project. They believed that how they used their irrigated lands should not be a concern for any other irrigator or in some cases not even the staff of the managing agency. The issue of age then came into the picture: should ageing plottolders give up their land or not? What should be done with the issue of inheritance of irrigation plots in smallholder projects around Zimbabwe? Farmers in Nyamaropa felt that they had earned the right to own the irrigation fields that they were allocated more than thirty years ago. Their strength in this issue came from the fact that they had to continue earning a living from somewhere. One way they knew how was through farming, which meant that they had to employ labour to do it in their old age. Some of them entered into deals with some of their colleagues, with dryland farmers, or with some local businessmen, who would use part of the land and pay most of the irrigation fees. This way, they continued to survive from the land, and kept it in their families for their offspring who might one day decide to take up farming.

Theoretically, there are various ways to deal with the issues that emerged from the cases presented above. Particularly interesting were the different 'life stories' of the four farmers who joined the irrigation scheme at different stages and apparently for different but related reasons. The reasons did not matter much here as long as the underlying factor was to be able to farm better than in dryland areas and make a better living. What was interesting in their stories were the changing identities as they continued to wrestle with each other in various groups of identification. The other issue was that each group, seen here through farmers' stories, mobilised social, cultural and political resources among other farmers to ensure that the group achieved its objectives.

The changing identities of groups, as in local, immigrant, drylander irrigators, heathen, Christian and others, made a difference in farmers' lives mainly when they were used in attempts to project a particular message or impression on others such as competing groups. For example, Sakubende was happy to be an irrigator, and changes his beliefs and his identity to become a Christian. This was in close alignment with most immigrant irrigators, a way of gaining acceptance among the immigrant irrigator community perhaps, and one that seemed to work for him since he became one of the well known members of the irrigation community. The group of farmers who were like Sakubende, most likely with large plots too, would be expected to support the idea of keeping sub-leasing a secret, but he did not do so because he had a large family and split up his field among his grown-up sons. Some of them had their own families and used the family plot as a business. Sakubende supported the block system that would enable some of his local dryland relations to join the project. This explained why he was on the side of Samunda, the charismatic local leader who campaigned strongly for the adoption of the block system for efficient water use and full benefits of irrigation to as many local people as was possible.

The irrigation project in a way aged in performance with the ageing of its irrigation farmers. This came with changes in their perception of the project over time. The way farmers identified with it shifted with time and experience, together with their new needs of labour, support and payment of irrigation fees. New identities were assumed over time among irrigators, and this fundamentally changed farmers' relationship with the project in terms of working in it productively. Some of the bases of cultural or group difference such as social, religious, or farming status identities, were changing in the process of the ageing of irrigators and their relationship to the irrigation scheme. This point relates directly to Long and van der Ploeg's (1989) idea that a project is not a discrete thing in space and time; that it is a process, negotiated over time.

On the whole, it is projected clearly through the material here that the lives of smallholder irrigated projects can be transformed with the lives of irrigating participants. Physical structures may change a little but generally remain almost the same. The social actors interacting with them, however, change, age, and transform their relationships to the structures over time. These changes also affect the various ways in which they relate to each other, and to other actors responsible for managing how they relate to the physical artifacts. Chibonda's life may not be regarded as an irrigation scheme's failure to achieve the ends that it was meant to. There was more that influenced his life than farming, and although he was in the irrigation scheme for the larger part of his life, it was the war that took him off the project. When he came back, things had changed and he had changed too in terms of the strength to work hard. Furthermore, he did not have many reliable kin since he was an immigrant, which made him dependent on relatively new friendships. The project had changed too, and he needed to work with other people for him to utilise the irrigation resource. The Chibonda case and others of Sakubende, Samunda and Mpesa were just a few examples. They show how development projects (and programmes) change people's lives over time and influence their perceptions of themselves and of each other. There is need for detailed studies focusing mainly on this issue of the social outcomes of irrigation development intervention. Such studies may show that some development projects can be victims of their own successes over time, as the age dilemma in Nyamaropa reveals.

Notes

1.. 'Irrigating' is used in the sense that farmers made their living through irrigating their crops. They had 'irrigating lives' because they farmed land from which they could not make a living without irrigation. Most Nyamaropa irrigation farmers maintained that they were different from other villagers near but outside the irrigation scheme because their lives were about irrigation and they worked throughout the year.

2.. ZANLA stands for Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army. This was the military wing of one of the liberation movements, the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF), which eventually won the first national elections in 1980 that gave Zimbabwe its political independence from colonial rule. The other strong liberation movement was the Patriotic Front - Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), whose armed wing was the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) forces.

3.. There were different types of spirits believed to be capable of doing different things to people who treated them badly. An avenging spirit of a dead person was believed to be capable of killing members of the family of the one who wronged the dead person. Disturbing the graves of the dead was feared

in line with what the dead were capable of doing to the living. See part of the work of Vijfhuizen, PhD thesis, 1998; Bourdillon (1987).

4. Sakubende's decision as a local villager to join the irrigation project was opposed by most members of his family. The difference that is being referred to here is that of this 'locally deviant' decision that several local villagers like him made. This way, they claimed a different identity from the rest of their own people who stayed out, and the label of 'traitor' stuck with them until after the war. They also became 'different' in the sense that they made more money and produced more food surpluses than their dryland families. They were different, and they made it in life as relatively more successful farmers than the rest of the dryland community.

5. He had to marry the sister to his wife because the first wife could not bear him children, and by local custom, the same family from which he first married could arrange to give him another wife if there was a young woman in the family who would accept him.

6. Mpesa told me that since the construction of the irrigation scheme he had been in leadership positions for most of the time except during the war when he had to go off to Mozambique to fight for freedom from European imperialism. Some of the top positions that he had held included that of Nyamaropa Ward Councillor, District Party Chairman, member of the National Consultative Assembly, and Chairman of the Irrigation Management Committee for several successive terms.

7. I felt quite uncomfortable writing about this part of their lives, it was as though I was intruding into their privacy. I suppose this is where the use of pseudonyms becomes important, otherwise one is seriously persuaded to leave the piece of ethnography out of the text. As a methodological problem, I have often wondered if a non-African, non-Zimbabwean researcher/ writer would fall into the same trap and feel almost the same way!

8. Here we wrestle (again) with the tricky terms of 'leadership' and 'authority'. One can argue that both are outcomes of negotiation, and that authority is a quality or notion of influence conferred on one by others, while leadership is as outcome of ongoing negotiations. There are different ways the two concepts can be used, and the tricky part is that leadership too can be socially endorsed, and constantly be renegotiated during one's term.

9. On a related note, Long says that "it is important to take full account of conditions that constrain choice and strategy". This, however, is not to say that the individual is regulated by structural conditions as such, but they do have an effect, or a role, in the shaping of outcomes in social actors' relationships with other actors or 'things' (1992: 38).

10. Drinkwater said that there were democratic ideas which contradicted technocratic practices within Agritex, and added that "...the problem is... that in the end Agritex's goal is highly political and not merely technical" (1991: 266).

11. There seemed to be some misunderstanding within Agritex itself and among farmers of what the Block System really meant. Extension staff tried to explain to farmers what they understand to be the Block System, but farmers neither clearly understood nor were they willing to listen further once the threat of losing part of their land was exposed. They said that the whole idea was to control them and reallocate their land holdings for the benefit of local irrigators and dryland villagers who either had small plots or no land at all, and supported the implementation of the proposed system with the hope of getting some land. There was a serious problem of communication among farmers and between farmers and Agritex (see Manzungu's critique of the Block System as advocated by Agritex, 1996).

PART FIVE: Development Intervention, Group Identity and Social Difference

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Sociological issues in smallholder irrigation development in Zimbabwe

Introduction

This chapter locates the theoretical issues raised in the foregoing chapters within the field of rural development and research in Zimbabwe. In doing so, I call for a more thorough-going, micro-focused and detailed understanding of social processes (at local level) in situations of development intervention. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that literature on smallholder irrigation development in Zimbabwe is quite thin on sociological issues, and that irrigation studies have focused mainly on the economic and technical aspects of design and performance. Consequently, there has been a lack of concern for how smallholder irrigation development affects and is affected by the different social actors involved. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to discuss, from an actor-oriented theoretical perspective, the construction of multiple (irrigation and other) realities in Nyamaropa.

My starting point is that smallholder irrigation intervention, especially as it develops over time, is generally characterised by multiple realities. Irrigation development creates situations wherein various social actors and groups must of necessity co-ordinate and co-operate with each other, to attain their farming and livelihood objectives. In Nyamaropa, an analysis of its process demonstrates how different groups of people defined ethnically, religiously, politically, and in terms of their geographic origin, develop flexible arrangements for dealing with the many diverse situations they face.

An awareness of social actors' capacities to 'formulate decisions, act upon them, to innovate and experiment', even under severely restricting environments (Long, 1992: 24-5), helps one to appreciate the unpredictable nature of the outcomes of development intervention. It also helps one to acknowledge the negotiated character of most of these outcomes, something that has only been marginally explored in irrigation studies in Zimbabwe.

Many researchers and writers take the view that individual actors are simply constrained by the larger social or cultural environment of which they are part. For example, while Cook and Wheatmeyer (1992) acknowledge that human beings have the capacity to create or negotiate whatever they can at any moment in time, they conclude that "they always act in a structured situation, so that the consequences and conditions of their creativity and negotiation are nevertheless patterned by larger relationships beyond their control" (Cook and Wheatmeyer, 1992: 123). Such a contention tends to subordinate the individual to the collective, thus maintaining that collective normative frameworks and group membership control or determine what the individual does.

In contrast to this standpoint, the present study emphasises the need to seek and employ "[a] more dynamic approach to the understanding of social change ... one which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of 'internal' and 'external'

factors and relationships, and which recognises the central role played by human action and consciousness" (Long, 1992: 21).

Here we should note the shift in theories and writings about social development, towards a more actor oriented perspective. Booth (1995: 3), for example, observes that there has been a 'shift [from macro, policy-oriented, or structuralist research] towards thorough investigation of diversity in development since the early 1980s'. He adds that 'recent research has assumed the task of exploring variation and ... illuminating the scope for choice in development' and that 'new research questions are sensitive to difference, particularity and the local dimensions of global processes' (Booth, 1995: 7). This is neither 'a celebration of difference' nor just 'a recognition of diversity' (Booth, 1995: 14), it is actually, in a sense, both. This is borne out by the increasing ways in which both 'difference' and 'diversity' among groups of people at various locales in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme shape the outcome of the intervention.

Two related theoretical issues arise out of this: firstly, the diverse ways in which different farmers' groups, such as immigrant irrigators, construct and continuously reshape their groups over time in order to effectively negotiate their interests in the encounters with other groups. Groups are here treated as constantly changing social units, with conflicts and conflicting strategies emerging within them.

The empirical material presented here shows that people, rather than always presenting themselves as individuals in direct competition with others, sometimes conceive of themselves as members of particular sub-groupings. Hence, the analysis of how people use processes of group formation and reformulation remains not only relevant, but fundamental to the present study of 'cultural or group identities'. Social groups among the various peoples in Nyamaropa were thus not treated as rigid and fixed categories, but as highly flexible and manipulable.

Second, there is the concept of '*strategic difference*', which characterises how people consciously devise strategies based on their dissimilarities from others and use them in their negotiations or bargaining. Strategic difference is concerned with how social actors mobilise notions of distinctiveness from their rival contestants, claimants or opponents, in order to gain access to particular resources, such as land, water, leadership positions, status, or positions of power. Their claimed *difference* from others is what strengthens their cause in pursuit of their goals, and this will change under different conditions of contest. This process is best understood in specific contexts, in encounters between different groups of social actors, such as between immigrants and local irrigators when it comes to issues of accessing resources or generally addressing the interests of the group.

The constructedness and resultant fluidity of these terms made me hesitant at first to use them here as the main analytical tools for the material in the study. This scepticism about the analytical flexibility of terms such as 'strategy', 'difference', and 'identity' did not make the task any clearer, but their analytical potential became apparent in the course of repeated discussions. A crucial stage at this point was the realisation that 'cultural or group identity' and strategic difference were effective analytical tools when used in the analysis of specific social contexts where the 'different' actors, with their changing identities, interact.

The term 'strategy' also presented some problems. There was always the need to clarify the perception that, although social actors were often rational and goal-

oriented, they also acted in illogical ways that appeared unstrategic. Strategy is used here following Graham Crow who discusses it (in analyses of household enterprises' survival strategies) as concerning the unpredictability of the environment in which they operate and the 'rationality of risk-minimisation in such circumstances' (1989, in Wallace, 1994: 95). Crow argues that the concept of strategy is linked to questions of choice and power, and to those of interaction. He contends that the theoretical underpinning of the concept of strategic action lies in theories of rational choice, in particular game theory (Crow, 1989; in Wallace, 1995: 97). The perception is that social groups, especially individual actors within them, formulate strategies to achieve their goals, especially where they have to compete with others.

My initial concern while working with groups was that their flexibility, and the fluidity of their membership, would make their identities difficult to capture. This problem was solved by the realisation that group identity was contextual, shaped by the conditions from which it emerged. On group's identity, there is the concept of culture. Here culture is dealt with in terms of it being a generic part of human practice.

A useful conceptualisation of culture is given by Ingold (1994). He points out that earlier conceptions saw culture as synonymous with the process of civilisation, or as embodied in custom and shared mental representations. Now, there is an approach that seeks the generative source of culture in human practices located in the relational context of people's mutual involvement in a social world. Thus we should regard culture as something that is embodied in structures of signification wherein that [social] world is represented (Ingold, 1994: 329). Ingold's (1994) conceptualisation of the concept of culture dovetails with the usage of the concept in the actor-approach used here. The cultural differences and identities of social groups in Nyamaropa were replete with conflict and tension, swinging between harmony and social discord, while remaining embedded in leadership, land and water issues.

The differences discussed here include how representations of people's lifestyles differ from those of others (Yon, 1995). Yon argues that the use of difference unsettles tendencies to fix identities on the overarching categories of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. This opens up different dimensions in working with social categories, and recognising sources of differential responses to rural development intervention such as the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. Human social lives in development situations are 'shaped by a multiplicity of differences, differences which may be perceived categorically but are lived relationally' (Moore, 1994: 20). This relational nature of differences between and among people in the same social, economic and geographic context is at the centre of the analysis in the Nyamaropa study.

Case studies from the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme show that group cultural identity and difference from other groups is a social construction. It is an aspect of identity assembled and manipulated to serve specific group interests. Difference manifests itself especially when the group must defend its interests. In the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, with all its multiple realities of competing groups, one's group identity was an important resource in the negotiation process. For example, when the popular leader Mpesa wanted to challenge one of his rivals, Samunda, for an irrigation management position, he directly used the immigrant identity and status of his colleagues to his advantage and won.

The relational quality of group identity means that social actors who emphasise their group identities, and differences from others do so with the idea of gaining leverage. In other words, identifying one's social group as different from another is seen as having tangible benefits, and therefore manipulated to maximise returns. A practical example from the Nyamaropa study is when registered irrigation farmers in the irrigation scheme always emphasised that they were in business in the irrigation scheme and should not waste time in observing sacred traditional rest days which local villagers (non-formal irrigators) outside the irrigation scheme regarded as crucial for the provision of rain water from ancestral spirits.

Formal irrigators in Nyamaropa regarded local customs, and local people themselves, as unresponsive to change, and as retrogressive. This was largely because irrigators had joined Churches and some had publicly jettisoned their own traditional practices.¹ They had established themselves as a unique group with a new identity, removed from the locals by their Christian values and exposure to new farming methods. These group identities, strategic differences, and diversities in the development intervention context of Nyamaropa shed light on the behaviour of members identified at different times among the social actors in the project. These concepts are seen as particularly relevant in the analysis of unexpected rural development outcomes, and indeed help clarify some of the dilemmas often unexplained in modernisation and neo-Marxist theories. The same applies to dependency schools of thought and the technical approaches found so far in irrigation literature in Zimbabwe.

Juggling development intervention, differentiation and group identity

On a broader level, there is a multiplicity of cultural differences among the world's regions and nations. This is true in spite of the growing evidence on globalisation trends and the creation of a virtual world system in terms of international trade networks, shared cultural tenets, and hi-tech communications systems (Wallestein, 1978; Bonanno, *et al*, 1994; Featherston, Lash and Robertson, 1995; Friedman, 1994). For example, there are differences in wealth for example, and in levels of industrialisation, between the North and the South. This explains the continued use of terms such as 'developed' and 'developing' worlds. When we study development intervention in specific rural development contexts such as Nyamaropa, we encounter the reconstructions and adaptations of local values and beliefs. What often emerges are reformulated ideas or new relations among the different groups such as immigrants and locals in Nyamaropa. Negotiated outcomes of development intervention are part of the social lives of the people affected, and this means that external ideas of change assume new meanings once they confront local perceptions of change. Although some local villagers in Nyamaropa believed that their irrigation farming success derived from their conversion to Christianity, they still identified with their local roots (as in the case of Samunda's respect for local tradition and local leadership).

Development intervention often presents to different social actors a range of new methods of achieving their objectives. It offers new ways of dealing with local problems. Local Nyamaropa farmers learnt that irrigation farming was tougher and more labour demanding than their normal single cropping system. They also learnt,

however, that it was more productive than rain-fed cultivation during poor rainy seasons. As a social process, intervention introduces unexplored problems among local people. It leads to new social categories and identities based on how different groups relate to the new situation. Irrigation intervention introduces new values of resources such as land and water, and this leads to different perceptions of crop value.

Long and van der Ploeg (1989: 228) comment that "[development] intervention never is a 'project' with sharp boundaries in time and space as defined by the institutional apparatus of the state or implementing agency". This was the case in the Nyamaropa story, especially seen in the way different farmers related to the project over time. The 'timelessness' and lack of boundary aspect of the Nyamaropa irrigation intervention was played out in the way local farmers turned round in 1980 and began to seek ways of entry into the project which they initially opposed. Although it was still the same project after over thirty years, they sought to relate to it in a new way. The war against colonial rule had been won, and land, including that under irrigation, was now 'theirs'. However, their levels of involvement and participation had to be negotiated with those farmers who had joined the irrigation scheme earlier.

In development intervention, the meanings and implications of different social backgrounds are critical in the definition and construction of specific roles. Relating to intervention over time implies changes in perceptions and various forms of adaptations by social actors. The Nyamaropa case study clearly shows that in this particular set-up there are different levels of 'knowledgeability and capability' (Giddens, 1984), different agents of change, with different motives, yet co-existing in the same social situation, in similar structural conditions. This is where the need to identify social groups and their various roles, 'differences' or 'identities' in Nyamaropa becomes important. Members of the local Barwe ethnic group had stayed true to their political cause of opposition to colonial projects. In the process they lost an opportunity for potential improvement to their livelihoods. Thus they assumed, or were allocated the label of being poor, less responsive to change and 'backward'.

Fairhead says that 'identifying certain social groups as proprietors of certain types of knowledge' is crucial. He warns, however, that 'categorisations' carry the risk of isolating social groups at the expense of understanding social relations (1994: 75). Identifying social groups in the first place, as representing particular identities, not necessarily embodying them, highlights differences among groups operating in the same social context. Some pestering questions during the research were: 'How are groups of farmers constituted in the irrigation scheme and its immediate surroundings?'. What distinguishes one group from another? Are their differences based on their social relationships alone, on material things (such as number of cows per household), or on labels they stick onto each other's backs? Answers here included the following: group membership fluctuated as members' interests shifted and were best served by aligning themselves with another group (or reconstituting the present group). For example, when locals finally realised that there were positive outcomes from being part of the irrigation project, they changed their attitudes, made friends with some irrigators, joined Churches and leased part of the land to irrigate. This way the groups' horizons merged, resulting in a situation where opposition to the project was both seasonal (rain making ceremonies and *chisi* conflicts) and diluted.

Long and van der Ploeg contend that "interventions are always part of a chain or flow of events located within the broader framework of the activities of the state and the actions of different interest groups operative in civil society" (1989: 228). This contention emphasises that interventions are not only processual, but also have no time limit and are not restricted by life-cycle conceptions. They are part of a continuous network linked to other events and other actors which include the multi-faceted character of agricultural development described by Long and van der Ploeg (1989: 228) as "...many-sided, complex and often contradictory in nature". In the Nyamaropa case, this was illustrated in the way externally introduced ways of relating to land were adapted by farmers over time to assume a local character, a new identity. For example, irrigation plots, which could easily be regarded as household fields in the same way as dryland farmers related to their lands, began to be treated as family farm ventures, as business enterprises.

Some of the contradictions in development intervention are the way different parties relate to each other at the development interface, where they negotiate the outcomes of development objectives. The way different types of Nyamaropa farmers developed relations of mutual co-operation over time showed how innovations could foster new relations through processes of negotiation at the local level. These relationship changes take place informally among people as they transform the way they regard each other in relation to their respective needs. Among Nyamaropa farmers, it was their different backgrounds that made such encounters at interaction levels engaging: the groups' identities, and the subsequent relations social actors created around each other in changing contexts, made up the diverse character of Nyamaropa as a development project with unexpected outcomes and multiple realities. Examples given by Arce in his study of a Mexican development situation show how agricultural development is a negotiated outcome. His study showed how entanglements of bureaucrats and peasants at various development interfaces produced a different reality from that envisaged by the bureaucrats (Arce, 1993). Similar entanglements were found in Nyamaropa, especially between irrigators and extension staff. The latter wanted to run the irrigation project as a commercial venture while farmers regarded it as different things at different times when it suited them: a business venture, dryland field, government farm, or family asset.

Intervention involves interactions of different social influences originating from international, national, regional and local sources. For Long and van der Ploeg (1989: 37) 'the interplay of these various forces generates specific forms, directions and rhythms of agricultural change'. These are sometimes influenced by changes that take place outside the context of development, but are often generated at the local level where the action takes place and rival actors clash. Long and van der Ploeg (1989) argue that "we need to identify the specific patterns of interaction and accommodation that take place between the different actors (individual and collective) and to analyse the ways in which their particular histories, memories and time-space conceptions shape outcomes" (p. 237). The perception of interaction and accommodation has its analytical advantages: for example social actors with different social backgrounds recognise the potential of achieving positive outcomes from accommodating to each other's differences.

The process of mutual accommodation accounts for why there are groups of people in Nyamaropa identifiable as separate 'communities' living together, in the same manner as Crow and Allan (1994), and Cohen (1995), show that 'community' is 'a construction'. Interactions between the Headman and irrigation farmers, especially those who were identified as immigrants in Nyamaropa, were often conflictual, but there were accommodations of these conflicts which created situations where there seemed to be peaceful understanding of each other's lives. Still, conflicts would emerge in other arenas, either over water issues, or leadership in general. The situation offered a rich field of emergent relations of conflict and negotiation, coupled with mutual accommodation of each other's differences.

Nyamaropa farmers might not have imagined the communities which they lived in as such. Instead they constructed them in their relations with others, and communities 'came alive' in processes of interaction with different groups. They believed in their small groupings, and sometimes pointed them out in aggregates of group members subscribing to a particular idea or form of practice. Anderson (1991: 6), in Crow and Allan (1994: xvii), suggests that 'all communities larger than the primordial (and perhaps even these), are imagined'. What is relevant to the Nyamaropa study is the idea that community ties are sometimes 'structured around links between people with common residence, common interests, common attachments, or some other shared experience generating a sense of belonging' (1994: 1). Although the perceptions of community put forward by Crow and Allan (1994) are interesting in that they do not portray communities as 'givens', I find the use of group cultural identity more amenable to use in development intervention studies such as the Nyamaropa case. Yes, boundaries of a community are not fixed, but fluid, and the period of residence in a geographic area and acceptance of an outsider as a local varies (Crow and Allan, 1994: 8). However, there are still times when the outsider is let in on local 'secrets' and treated as belonging to the social unit.

On the important issue of social differentiation, White (1989) says that 'agrarian or rural differentiation, is a dynamic process involving the emergence or sharpening of 'differences' within the rural population. He points out that this does not in itself consist of (and in some cases, at least in the short term, may not even involve) increasing income inequalities. It is not about whether some [farmers] become richer than others, but about the changing kinds of relations between them ... in the context of the development of commodity relations in rural economy' (p.20). As a process emerging out of development, differentiation creates other processes such as a gradual emergence of identifiable social groups in local relationships. These groups emerge out of types of identifications that arise out of different people linking themselves or aligning their interests with others with whom they feel their interests can be better served. Similarly, some local villagers around Nyamaropa went as far as jettisoning their traditional religious practices in order to identify with newcomers and their ways of life. Newcomers were also busy adapting themselves to their new social environment by learning the local dialect and observing local religious rites.

The crucial stage of the process of differentiation in the Nyamaropa case analysis was not just the creation and composition of the social groups that lay claim to crucial resources such as land and water. The process included attempts at the manipulation of resources (and their access) over time. Group members' shifting identities, and the

different ways in which they negotiate their status as stakeholders in the local politics of accessing resources. A further point on this, also raised by White (1989: 26) is that 'the process of differentiation [emphasising the proliferation of differences] concerns shifts in patterns of control over means of production and the accompanying social division of labour'.

Unlike social differentiation, group cultural difference and identity implies looking at aspects of dissimilarity that different actors ascribe to each other and may not be accepted by the person(s) identified with it. For example, in Nyamaropa, a group of dryland farmers near the irrigation scheme identified as lazy by irrigation farmers did not believe themselves to be lazy. They, however, did not have immediate means to defend themselves from the label attacking their identity. This can be seen as a strategy to crystallise differences, and thus use difference as a tool in negotiations over access to resources.

Sometimes cultural differences, or different identities between groups, may lead to questions of the existence of symbolic boundaries, such as those set by religious and ethnic groups (Cohen, 1994; Barth, 1994). Differentiation, unlike identity and strategic difference, tends to be linked up to processes of class formation in more or less the same manner that Cheater (1986), for example, wrote about it in her study among small-scale farmers in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. This was a situation whereby a person's economic assets and level of market involvement were significant in allocating them a status or class: a category in an imaginary structure or hierarchy. Looking at groups' differences and individuals' identities tends to shift the analysis away from the pre-determining, institutionalised and restrictive sense of class and structures found in references to differentiation and in neo-Marxian work in general. The shift is towards a more flexible micro-level interest in local diversity. The emphasis here is on processes that constitute and shape identities and differences between social actors or groups of actors, looking at how they use these identities, and how they change them, or are changed by them in the process of on-going negotiations with others. This is where the actor perspective is particularly important in analysing development intervention situations. In Zimbabwe in general, most analyses have taken on either a macro approach or a technical one that seeks to find generalisations. The actor-oriented approach certainly charts a new path in understanding local level development dynamics.

In selected case studies in this book, while there are processes of differentiation, and highlighted issues of group cultural identities, the shifts in patterns of control over means of production that White (1989: 26) talks about, do not occur automatically, or at all. There are changes that are part of the unexpected social outcomes of development intervention, such as increasing numbers of formerly dryland farmers coming into the irrigation scheme to rent land as part-time irrigators. One of the reasons they succeeded in doing that was because there was a need for their services. They sold their labour in return for pieces of irrigated farmland, and that way secured access to water and land. The query then was whether that should eliminate, or at least diminish, the one major difference they had with formal irrigators. This was not the case. There was no substantive shift in the control of the means of production (as in land, labour and water). But there were major shifts in strategies that the different actors employed to relate to these resources and to each

other. Material conditions of the poorer groups improved with more access to irrigation resources.

On heterogeneity, diversity and cultural identity in development intervention

The Nyamaropa story was not always going to be easy to tell, especially with all the mixed and overlapping groups of social actors, with conflicting and multiple identities of individuals and groups. The way social and cultural lives of Nyamaropa farmers had evolved over time created a complex mix of people who either wanted to share identities or sought to separate themselves and their new identities from others in order to gain from new situations that were suited to particular identities. The last point is related to local villagers who joined the irrigation project and lost regular contact with their dryland relatives who initially opposed their idea of being part of a hated external project. Targeted communities in rural development are often either expected or encouraged to work together, to co-operate in pursuit of some so-called community or collective development objectives. What does not get sufficient attention is that even in close social units such as villages or close knit irrigation compounds (with most households sharing fences around their homesteads as in the townships) there are divergent interests among the 'same group of people', that these same people constitute a heterogeneous mix of various actors, even though they may be in a common situation sharing similar resources.

Heterogeneity here implies some kind of framing, or a kind of framework, a common 'structure', or diversity within similar structural circumstances, with particular 'norms' and 'values'. The structure can have a political, economic, ecological or religious form, but it still remains important in different actors' lives and projects in spite of their social, political, religious and economic differences. Heterogeneity refers to the existence of structural circumstances impacting on, but not necessarily shaping social relations of different actors. It is thus a structural feature of agrarian development. Yet it does not emerge as something casual, but rather as an outcome of development being designed and realised from 'below' and within the local setting (van der Ploeg, 1986).

The existence of structural forms here implies that there are common backgrounds to the situations that different actors share. But there is an emphasis on individual choice and difference. For example, in Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, the structure is embodied in the irrigation domain, the reality of the irrigation scheme and its rules and regulations, together with the unwritten rules surrounding irrigation life. Most farmers, including part-time irrigators from the surrounding dryland area, acknowledge the existence of differences among themselves, that is, they are aware of the heterogeneous character of the irrigating community in which they play a part.

Long and Villarreal (1994: 47) argue that "farming populations are essentially heterogeneous in terms of the strategies adopted for solving problems", and add that "[a]dopted technology is forever being reworked to fit with the production strategies, resource imperatives and social desires of the farmer or farm family". It is the individual strategy (or 'individualness') of each farmer's strategy that helps bring out the heterogeneous nature of farming populations sharing the same structural conditions. Although there are linkages, exchanges of knowledge and information,

and networking among farmers living close together, each farmer processes information separately and devises his/her own strategies based on the ways in which the knowledge or information is processed. What s/he constructs out of that is probably a result of various inputs reflecting the merging of both individual characteristics and external influences. It is (should be) also a reflection of individual identity, influenced by social and cultural background, and economic or political conditions.

Torres puts the previous argument another way. He argues that 'heterogeneity should be used to denote variations in self-organised strategies that develop in concrete situations' (1992: 111). The 'self-organised' strategies, it should be noted, emerge out of a mix of local and other influences to which the particular actor has been exposed over time. Variations among actors may include such differences as access to both material and non-material resources, such as land and ethnic or group identity. Michael argues the same point in a different but related way when he talks about the relationship or process that links identity and heterogeneity. He says that human identity emerges from associations with heterogeneity of other actors (1996: 156).

The heterogeneity of social actors in development contexts in general, has already been noted significantly in many studies. For example, by Long and van de Ploeg in their 1989 article. It is the emergence of group and individual identities in specific development intervention situations that still has to be closely investigated. The 'associations with a heterogeneity of actors' that Michael (1996) talks about would in Nyamaropa mean the relationships that different groups of farmers establish and continuously change to suit their different projects in the social, economic and political scene of the area. The element of association becomes paramount especially in the irrigation scheme where groups of different actors have little choice but to co-ordinate their activities for their individual farming goals to stand a chance of success. What emerges from the Nyamaropa situation is a diversity of groups of people from different backgrounds. These social actors often have conflicting interests, but also coinciding values in some respects, such as the critical importance of water in their farming lives, and the need for co-operation in order to sustain access to scarce resources, joining forces to ensure they all benefit.

What the common need for co-operation in water sourcing did to group formations was that farmers got to meet regularly and discussed their common problems in such a way that they shared some of the suggested solutions to their problems. In the process they got to know each other better, thereby forming new social networks and alliances. However, such regular contact did not always lead to formation of cohesive groups. There were situations where interests did not coincide. Some of this was partly because of the different ways in which individual farmers or their households had different ways of handling their commonly identified problems, a point that goes back to the idea raised by Torres (1992) of 'self-organised strategies'.

Closely related to the concept of heterogeneity is the issue of diversity, which can be operationalised as dealing directly with what can be termed 'lack of sameness'. De Vries (1992: 66) says that '[ethnographers and social anthropologists] are not interested in developing generalisations but in contextualising diversity'. This is a useful premise to start off from in the analysis of social life in specific contexts, especially because

starting off with the aim of creating generalisations is bound to focus on general issues in people's lives which will not bring out the dynamism in farmers' decision-making processes. Thus, it may not adequately explain the continuing existence of diversity in responses to innovations or change from external sources. Diversity partly refers to the (co)existence of different forms of social life and social responses under similar structural circumstances. These 'forms' are often likely to be a creation by some of the actors expecting benefits from the same situation. In Nyamaropa this is illustrated in local irrigators' support for Block Committees and their hopes for access to more land through the new structures.

Discussions of diversity and heterogeneity may drift into analyses of specific issues that make social actors respond differently to similar circumstances. This may relate to discussions of individual identity or individual difference from others. This too may lead on to a discussion about labelling and name-calling, which are related to issues of how actors perceive themselves and are perceived by others, that is, the social construction of identity. Such concepts as labelling hover close to the issue of stereotyping, which Allport (1972: 102) refers to as an exaggerated belief associated with a category'. Allport (1972) adds that the function of a stereo-type is to justify or rationalise conduct in relation to that category.

A relevant aspect of a stereo-type for the analysis in this study is that of what the stereo-type actually does. Allport says that it plays the role of 'a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and is a screening or selective device to maintain simplicity in perception and in thinking [and in acting]' (1972: 102). It is the purposive aspect of stereo-typing, labelling or identification that is crucial for the analysis given in the examples here. In a similar manner, terms used by irrigation farmers in Nyamaropa to describe dryland farmers relate to their own constructions of what they would like to see the 'targets' of their labels as, and it also refers to the responses they get from the labelled. If an irrigation farmer says that he is not going to lease out part of the family plot to a dryland farmer because the latter is said to be lazy, then the irrigation farmer is using a stereo-type or name, an identity, a label, to base his/her judgement and action upon. And the reverse is true of dryland villagers who argue that all irrigators have no respect for local traditional rules.

On the notion of identity, an important point is that it is a construction by both the actor and those who note his/her difference. And there are different aspects of what makes one person socially different from others. A look at perceptions of group identity among people living together or sharing resources in Nyamaropa revealed that identity was a social construction based on what was seen as identifiable with the particular actors concerned.

These concepts (heterogeneity, group identity and difference) have much broader theoretical implications than the way in which I treat them here. However, although they all, in the various ways, refer to how one can treat variations in outcomes of strategic negotiations in processes of pursuing social actors' projects in rural development contexts, there are critical aspects of local specificity and contextualisation of development that each one serves to unravel. The use of cultural identity as a strategic resource (or tool) in everyday interactions may mean exaggerating the extent of factors that distinguish or differentiate between actors, such as, in the case studies in this book, the irrigator or non-irrigator status. Recognition,

acknowledgement of, and acting upon group identity and differences between actors may involve reference to one's identity as one's distinctiveness from others. For example 'isu wemudambo/ thina abe irrigation' (us from the irrigation scheme), stresses the actor's irrigator status as against those who cannot so readily identify with it, and places the irrigator at a different level apart from the non-irrigator, if anywhere, at least in the irrigator's cognitive reality. Often the purpose of emphasising either one's own identity or the immediate other's (rival's) difference, is to place one's interests before those of others, except in cases where one is a representative of a group of actors. Then a new, or hitherto subsumed reality (re)emerges.

'Strategic difference' and power in development intervention

In this section we revisit the concept of '*strategic difference*' and its use as a strategic resource in negotiations and struggles over resources at rural development interfaces, among local actors and between local actors and external intervenors. The strategic nature of difference as a local and contextual construction is especially evident where different actors meet and negotiate over terms of relating to or accessing new or old, shared resources. Power features in this section as one of the crucial resources, and a fluid one that tends to be slippery to many a local actor. Power is discussed and seen here (like identity) in a discursive way, as a relational concept. Latour (in Michael, 1986: 276), says that "No matter how much power one appears to accumulate, it is always necessary to obtain it from others who are doing the action..." (1986: 276). This is the analytical attribute that, quite unexpectedly to me, power and *strategic difference* appear to share.

We have already mentioned the role of group cultural identity and *strategic difference* in specific contexts of negotiations over accessing resources in Nyamaropa. Social actors are regarded as agents for promoting, suppressing, and negotiating their group identities and differences among themselves. Using group cultural identity and *strategic difference* as a negotiating strategy with outsiders and other intervenors can be said to be a common thing for many local groups in development studies. This is sometimes given different names. For example, it can appear, as a form of peasant resistance to change or merely termed peasant incorrigibility, poor people's intransigence, farmers' non-participation and unwillingness to co-operate, or lack of innovativeness in projects meant for their own benefit. These are some of the ideas used in Modernist or neo-Marxist approaches to development intervention. The 1990s, however, have seen major shifts towards approaches that emphasise bottom up approaches instead of the top-down focus.

The Nyamaropa study promotes the idea that it is the detail involved in differential responses to change and innovation that is critical for explaining social processes emerging out of local development contexts. Strategic difference is at the centre of the analysis because social actors' identities and contextual cultural differences emerge out of their bargaining processes or negotiations with either outsiders or among themselves over different resources (land, water, power, status, etc). It is among themselves and between themselves as local social actors and local groups that role players in development contexts like the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme negotiate and

shape their power relationships in competition with others, be they local or external agents.

There are multiple identities and multiple realities in any one particular changing community at any one time. The notion of co-existence of different groups with different interests brings up not only the prospect of conflict in clashes of interests, but embedded in it is the idea of accommodation and mutual acceptance. The idea of the co-existence of conflict, power relations and accommodations, their inter-mingling as it were, conjures up images of chaos and confusion in development interfaces. Rural development by its very nature is not neat or orderly, unless technical experts attempt to. The identities and differences of one group distinguishes it from the other because one is in a more powerful position than the other in accessing resources crucial for securing their livelihoods. However, the whole process is not as automatic as this representation may portray it. Power relations and identities, as well as the extent of difference in specific instances or contexts, are always undergoing changes as different actors continuously re-negotiate their lives and social positions in relation to each other. This is also in view of the fact that some crucial resources continue to change as they assume new meanings to different actors at different stages of their 'lives', and in this case of the life of the irrigation project.

To illustrate the above point, during the early years of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, it was not common for irrigators to engage dryland farmers in their farming enterprises because they were still young and able to do most of the work themselves. Besides, there was the local opposition to the project anyway. Thirty years down the line the same irrigators now rely on the same dryland farmers or their children for labour in their same irrigation fields. What has substantially changed is not the physical condition of the irrigation scheme as such, but the social conditions surrounding how farmers relate to each other and to the physical artefact that shapes their relationships, or around which they shape their relationships.

Different actors attach new meanings to their resources, and new actors may come into the scene and redefine the way they relate to each other and to resources that they rely on, hence the development of new strategies to cope with changes. Some of the new strategies can be used as weapons against other farmers in new situations. Age among young irrigators in Nyamaropa was one issue that could make one an irrigator or not. The Nyamaropa youth were using age as a criterion entitling them to land, and this against their parents whom they claimed were too old to hold on to land that they could hardly utilise.

On a related note, but more with regard to development practitioners, Long and Villarreal argue that "particular development intervention models (ideologies) become strategic weapons in the hands of the agencies charged with promoting them" (1994: 48). They also become strategic weapons in the hands (and minds) of local actors charged, or putting themselves in charge of the task of representing local interests to outsiders, or those local actors who can manipulate new situations to their advantage. An example of some of the 'active agents' or prominent individual actors within groups in Nyamaropa was that of Mpesa (in Chapter 6). Mpesa was a politically astute farmer who knew how to manipulate the social and political scene around him. He knew how to play the political game to his advantage, and for the benefit of either his group of supporters, or for the expected benefit of farmers in the project in general.

His actions were calculated appropriately depending on whether the challenge was from external agency staff or other farmers within the irrigation scheme.

The rural development sector in Zimbabwe has for a while revealed a lack of in-depth sociological studies that describe the interactions of external developers and the so-called beneficiaries of the development. Interface analyses will certainly go a long way towards bringing the development scene under scrutiny in ways not yet done. Long and Villarreal (1994: 43) say that "social interface is a critical point of intersection between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found. It is concerned with the analysis of discontinuities in life". They further point out that 'interfaces typically occur at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds or social fields intersect'. Long's (1989) work on interfaces emphasises the importance of these 'critical arenas' for analysis of different actors from different lifeworlds meeting and negotiating their interests and livelihoods. These arenas are the nodal points of interaction where multiple realities and social actors' differences are played out. Long and Villarreal argue that "interface analysis, ... entails not only understanding the struggles and power differentials taking place between the parties involved, but also an attempt to reveal the dynamics of cultural accommodation that make it possible for the various 'world views' to interact" (1994: 44).

My findings from the Nyamaropa case study point to the fact that it is at the meeting points of the social actors where group identities and differences among them are exhibited, be they ephemeral appearances (such as labels of *nyope / amavila*, the lazy ones), or seemingly permanent characteristics (for example, ethnic affiliation). The interface situation brings out the differences between actors, and a large part of the identities are negotiated at these meeting points where the relational nature of social difference (like power and knowledge) comes into the open in actual contact with others. It was through the irrigation farmers' meetings that one of the powerful local leaders (Mpesa) revealed his strength to his colleagues and rivals alike. It was in the same meetings that he was challenged, and intervening agencies got approval, rejection or half-hearted support. It was in these same meetings that I received my approval to go ahead with the study, and where during the course of the research I was subjected to questions and doubts about my allegiance. It was at such an arena that I held my last feedback meeting and was given the go ahead to write this book by the Nyamaropa people, about their irrigating lives.

A relevant conceptualisation of power for the analysis here is found in the following quotation from Long and Villareal (1994). They contend that,

"The analysis of power processes should not ... be restricted to an understanding of how social constraints and access to resources shape social action. Power ... is fluid and difficult or unnecessary to measure, but important to describe more precisely. It is not only the amount of power that makes a difference, but the possibility of gaining an edge over others and using it to advantage. Power always implies struggle, negotiation and compromise" (Long and Villarreal, 1994: 51).

Interactions that took place between different actors at the same place and who potentially regarded each other with suspicion engendered a situation where power was at the centre of their relationships. The continuous reference to what each one of them represented, stood for, was aiming at, or identified with, implied that they played on each other's differences and used those same differences to gain leverage over each other. One group might emphasise its difference from the other as a strategy to secure a more powerful or influential position or relationship.

The way immigrants referred to themselves as locals and then as immigrants in specific circumstances reflected their strategic use of different identities to suit their interests. This is part of what is here referred to as *strategic difference*. It probably has other names such as the manipulative use of one's identity (or its strategic use). Furthermore, the analysis of power processes should extend to how social action is constructed, what it emerges from, and the social basis of local action. Strategic interactions, at least in the sense of rationally initiating contact with someone or a group, reflected power processes in that so-called 'powerful' actors played leading roles in influencing social action in such a way that their interests were served. But such relationships were also partly shaped by how they helped to serve the interests of the less powerful, who had to yield power to those who then wielded it (Villarreal, 1992, 1994; Latour, 1986). For example, the Headman wanted to 'play tough' with what he believed were deviant immigrants in the irrigation project. To effect this strategy he had to re-assert his authority among them somehow. The meeting in Chapter 3 shows his efforts to do just that.

Linked to this argument is the issue of social and physical space. Differences between irrigators and other social actors, and among irrigators themselves in Nyamaropa were often based on definitions of who belonged where and how. In most cases, it was a matter of who was an irrigator? Or on which irrigators mattered in particular situations? For example, when there were divisions within the irrigation community and an opportunity for dryland farmers to gain access into the irrigation scheme (details in Chapter 6), questions were raised on the loyalty of some local irrigators to the rest of the irrigation community. Farmers started asking each other questions related to their origins and ethnic identities. I came to believe that social boundaries were constantly shifting and being negotiated among irrigators and between irrigators and other farmers from around, including extension staff working with them. Some questions remained unanswered: what purpose did the social boundaries serve? Was it to protect what the group had, or to create social worlds exclusive to them? The social boundaries were never clear-cut, and they had become less clear over the years as the two groups became interdependent. It could be said that there was fusion of horizons among the various groups interacting on the irrigation scheme's social stage, to the point that some of the groups' differences had gradually become unclear. The differences did threaten to explode under conflict and social tension where groups seemed to check each member's next moves. These social differences were embodiments of the multiple realities found in the Nyamaropa social scene.

In Nyamaropa, a group's identity or difference was not institutionalised, which gave it the flexibility and fluidity that allowed it to shift when it was necessary. A group's identity could take place when another group gradually identified more with

a contested critical resource or political position, or when attention shifted to another resource where another group of social actors gets more attention as being more knowledgeable about another crucial resource. The manipulation of identity and difference in this way goes on among groups of actors as processes of change in the economic environment induce further changes in the social realm of their lives.

An actor-oriented perspective, group identity and *strategic difference*

Some shortcomings of structuralist or macro theories of development such as Modernisation and neo-Marxist approaches have been discussed in a number of works recently (for example, in Booth, 1995; Long and van der Ploeg, 1995: pp.62-3), and I already mentioned them earlier. In this sub-section I do not go into a discussion about shortfalls in theoretical foresight of these approaches. However, a recap is necessary. Long and van der Ploeg (1989: 238) say that 'Modernisation and Marxist theories of development, and of rural transformation in general, are geared towards the understanding of the 'integration' and 'submission' of the rural world and its actors within the global framework of capitalism. In both approaches, centrist and determinist tendencies prevail and are reified, thus obscuring the nature and potential of individual and/or collective strategies and responses (also in Long, 1984 and 1988)'.

This section focuses on the importance of the actor-perspective especially in rural development research as promulgated by Long (1984, 1989, 1992), (and others in the same school at Wageningen Agricultural University). This section also shows why I think it is crucial for development practitioners and policy makers to have such an alternative in their attempts to 'make development work', or to explain why development efforts often turn out to have many unexpected outcomes. Again, *strategic difference* features as a conceptual tool for the analysis of different groups' identities and the ways in which they change their lives. But first, a look at the actor perspective used here should help indicate which aspects of the theory are found useful for the Nyamaropa case study.

Basically, an actor perspective begins with the idea that different social forms develop, change or are redirected in the same or similar structural circumstances (Long, 1992: 27). Such differences reflect variations in the ways in which social actors attempt to come to grips, cognitively and organizationally, with the situations they face. A main task for analysis, then, is to identify and characterise differing actor strategies and rationales, the conditions under which the strategies arise, their viability or effectiveness for addressing issues or solving specific problems, and their structural outcomes. In using an actor-perspective, one often notices the role of structural and organisational factors, and micro-macro linkages, in shaping local development factors. Long and van der Ploeg say that,

"The advantage of using an actor-approach is that one begins with an interest in explaining differential responses to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous' (1995: 64).

Interest in explaining 'differential responses' to similar circumstances, or in why there are differences in perceptions of similar situations among groups of people sharing the same resources (an irrigation canal for example), is sustained by a variety of factors.

Among these factors is the constant urge among intervening agencies in some development quarters (especially in some government departments in Zimbabwe), to carry on with a prescriptive approach to rural development problems in spite of vast evidence that farmers or rural people in general resist, adapt and transform external interventions. Although this has changed dramatically in some sections, there is evidence that extension staff, for example, still believe that they know how to solve farmers' problems (for farmers).

The common view concerning differential responses to change was that there were varied responses to similar interventions because farmers did not fully understand the meanings and implications of the innovation. Officials were not keen to find out why farmers perceived things differently, or whether they were essentially different themselves and aimed at achieving goals different from those of farmers. There were times within sections of Agritex, the national Extension agency in Zimbabwe, when a farmer's being different was seen as being deviant. When there was a lot of unexpected (different) responses, such as local villagers rejecting irrigation development almost *en masse* in the 1960s, they were openly called names labelled stupid or ignorant. There is increasing urgency in development research circles in Zimbabwe to go beyond descriptive analyses or accounts that lack depth or a critical perspective. The trend that is already directly benefiting from this and similar studies is that of getting to grips with details that constitute development situations or interfaces. This trend interests itself in understanding the dynamics of micro and interactional processes where different development stakeholders meet (such as Nyamaropa irrigation project) and negotiate their stakes and roles in the development process.

On agency, Long and Villarreal, 1994: 48) say that it (agency) is central to the notion of social actor. They contend that agency is that which attributes to the actor (individual or social group) the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme conditions of coercion. Agency is composed of social relations and can only become effective through them; it requires organising capacities. Social actors have different abilities based on their different ways of processing information, and the social, religious, political and other influences on their responses to similar situations. The knowledgeability and capability of social actors gives them the capacity to act differently because they are 'different', and being different is not necessarily wrong, but just different, in the sense of varying identities. In the Nyamaropa area, the acknowledgement of being different, and the use of one's difference from others, and the subsequent accommodation of differences were all part of the social mould called the Nyamaropa community.

A further argument on the concept of agency is that agency (and power), depend crucially upon the emergence of a network of actors who become partially, though hardly ever completely, enroled in the 'project' of some other person or persons. Effective agency then requires the strategic generation or manipulation of a network of social relations and the channelling of specific items (such as goods, claims, orders, instruments, information) through certain 'nodal points' of interaction (cited in Clegg, 1989: 199). In order to accomplish effective agency, it becomes important for actors to win struggles that take place over the attribution of specific social meanings to particular events, actions and ideas.

Strategising actors in development situations such as Mpesa in Nyamaropa, who are able to either generate or manipulate social relations or events (such as meetings) to serve their group or individual interests can be seen as capable of effective agency. Development arenas such as Nyamaropa irrigation scheme represent situations where new forms of social relations emerge and different actors enrol each other into their different micro projects. Such places become contesting grounds for definitions of meanings, of what is appropriate for whom and when or why? The struggles for meanings may be won by actors who are able to manipulate events, actions and their own ideas or those of others they may or may not be in competition with. There is an element of manipulating each other's or their own identities among social actors living together, and this is an ever-present characteristic of development intervention situations such as the Nyamaropa project.

Researchers doing work in the same or related manner as I did, spending long periods of time with the same people one is researching about, tend to look for patterns in the mix of group identities, differences and conflicting versions of stories from and about the same place. These patterns may, in many respects, reflect our own constructions of the reality that we encounter on the ground. This is done often as an attempt to fulfil some scientific requirements within the confines of our disciplines, and patterns may obscure or leave out some of the dynamism of social life in development contexts we attempt to understand. Villarreal (1992) says that 'the opportunity to find patterns in social behaviour while doing research is often looked upon as an achievement, probably leading to generalisations. It can be reassuring to recognise 'prime movers'. She adds that in everyday life, however, we encounter a different -often chaotic- panorama. We find great variations in the way social constituencies are assembled and organised; diverse behaviour in apparently similar circumstances' (Villarreal, 1992: 248). It is apparently this 'mix of contrasts, contradictions and accommodations that has been referred to as, in great measure the outcomes of the different ways in which actors deal, organisationally and cognitively, with problematic situations and accommodate themselves to others and to others' interests and designs for living' (1989: 222). This shows how intertwined the lives of farmers in the same development situation can be.

Long reinforces the point on the usefulness of the approach he uses by the contention that 'an advantage of the actor approach is that one begins with an interest in explaining differential responses to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous' (1992: 21). A similar view on the usefulness of the actor approach is offered by Booth, who maintains that "actor-oriented work aspires not so much to explore the limits of structuralist constraints as to uncover through interactionist investigations the very processes that produce and reproduce particular forms; the micro-foundations of the macro-frameworks (Long, 1989; Long and van der Ploeg, 1995)' (1995: 13).

The contradictions that I found among groups of social, political and cultural actors in Nyamaropa, especially in relationships among immigrant and local irrigators in the irrigation scheme, were typical of examples of the complexities of rural development situations. But the conditions under which they existed, and the ways in which they exploited their situations, were specific to their particular conditions in the specific social and cultural environment in which they encountered each other. There was

more to the groups that they kept referring to than the open relationships could show, and the categories of immigrant or local did not bring out the dynamism of the interrelationships as it was portrayed in changing irrigation intervention circumstances.

A final note

On the whole, this study offers a different voice in literature on irrigation development in Zimbabwe. It is a detailed and in-depth sociological case study of a technical project constructed without the services or input of a sociologist.

Empirical material and theoretical discussions in this chapter aimed at showing the relevance of some local level analyses of development processes and outcomes among rural dwellers faced with external intervention. The contention throughout the case study, as I hope to have shown, is that there is need in the research and development sector in Zimbabwe, for a recognition of the existence and importance of multiple realities among social actors in development contexts. A fuller understanding of the local dynamics within development situations requires multi-disciplinary and actor perspectives to investigate and understand them closely before making policy recommendations.

The actor-oriented approach, while maintaining its sociological (or rural development) relevance, helps to get to grips with the complex processes of the transformation of rural areas in situations of external intervention that mean to assist improve their livelihoods in one or several ways through which development intervention is managed. Starting with group cultural identities and differences between individual and group social actors is certainly not the only viable option in attempts to fully understand rural development processes. However, there is no denying that this is indeed a start. It is one that hopes to provide wide analytical windows through which we can get to know more about different social and other actors in the unpredictable environment of development intervention.

It is my hope that future studies in rural development in Zimbabwe, especially in small holder irrigation development, will pay significant attention to the co-existence of a multiplicity of social groups and multiple realities. Nyamaropa people, in my years among them, showed me that as outsiders, who either want to understand, or to assist them to assist themselves (or both, and hopefully in that order!), we must first acknowledge their capacity to create and shape their own livelihoods, lifeworlds and world-views, their own lives. They find their ways through negotiations around the conflicts, clashes, differences and subsequent accommodations that characterise their relationships.

I hope that through these pages development practitioners in Zimbabwe and in similar circumstances in Southern Africa, will be better positioned and equipped to confront rural development challenges. Especially important is the need for development practitioners and extension officials to recognise the fact that rural people in development intervention situations internalise and process interventions and create their own interpretations and meanings, while at the same time positioning themselves strategically to benefit from the intervention. Nyamaropa people showed me that they did that over and over again, over thirty-years in fact. More in-depth and

long-term multi-disciplinary studies of the traditionally technical field of irrigation development in Southern Africa are a necessary pre-requisite to rural development, but only a small part in the development puzzle.

Notes

1 On the extent to which those farmers who joined Churches rejected their previous belief practices, I found that among immigrant irrigators, and among some local irrigators who went to Church, a majority of them still believed that their ancestors played an important part in their lives. Quite a lot of the families still held secret family rituals to 'communicate' with their ancestral spirits. This was a part of their identity that they could not disclose, or one that was difficult to use in bargaining.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Data on institutions, structures, infrastructure and other resources in Nyamaropa area

One Agritex office
One Veterinary office
One clinic
Two primary schools
One secondary school
One police camp
One Department of Roads depot
Five bottle-stores
22 General Dealers' Shops
Seven grinding mills
Two butcheries
One bakery
One wholesale shop (Redstar)
One Cotton Company of Zimbabwe depot
One cattle dipping tank
14 churches (4 with building structures)
Three pre-schools (creches)
One Headman
10+ Village Heads
Six villages
One Councillor
One on-and-off army camp
One DA'S Rest Camp, and
One big irrigators' compound or cluster of homesteads

Appendix 2

Seasonal rainfall figures, Nyamaropa Area (1988-1995)

season	rainfall(mm)
1988/89	869.1
1989/90	1147.2
1990/91	491.6
1991/92	228.6 ⁱ
1992/93	1045.6
1993/94	561.5
1994/95	709.9
Average	721.9

Source: Agritex and Met office records, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme.

The seven seasons were arrived at for the simple reason of wanting to pick an equal number of seasons on either side of the poorest rain season in the history of the irrigation scheme (1991/92).

Appendix 3

General notes and figures on Mai Hakutangwi's farming enterprise

For the 1992/3 season Mai Hakutangwi got the following from her crops: from 3 acres of cotton she got 16 bales which she sold for Z\$9 000. She had taken a Z\$900 credit from the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (CCZ), she paid out Z\$600 to the people she hired to help her pick cotton, she herself did not pick cotton because she was concentrating on her tobacco crop. From an acre of maize she got 25 bags and sold 13 of them, earning herself Z\$1 053. She had applied 4 bags of fertiliser costing on average Z\$90 each.

From an acre and a third of tobacco she got 53 bales which gave her Z\$12 900 at the auction floors. She had taken credit worth Z\$500 in fertilisers from the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC). She paid out Z\$300 for labour on tobacco. She had two acres under beans and got 16 bags which sold for Z\$6 560, she applied 6 bags of Compound D and 2 of Ammonium Nitrate fertilisers which had cost her nearly Z\$400. She did not use any hired labour on beans. For wheat she had one acre and a third, from which she sold 15 bags and sold 8x50kg bags for Z\$600, she had applied 4 bags of fertiliser.

For the 1993/4 season she had 12 bales of cotton which gave her Z\$8 000, she had taken Z\$1 500 worth of credit for fertilisers from the CCZ. She paid Z\$600 for cotto-picking labour. On tobacco, she had an acre which gave her 62 bags which brought her Z\$16 950, she had taken no credit for tobacco that season. She bought her fertilisers with cash, and she paid out Z\$350 for hired casual labour. From an acre of beans she got one bag which she sold for Z\$600.

She had one and a half acres of wheat from which she got 16 bags and sold 6x50 kg of the crop at Z\$75 each which gave her Z\$450, with six bags of fertiliser. From one acre of maize she got 24 bags, she used some of it to pay some of the workers, and kept the rest for home consumption. In 1996 Mai Hakutangwi had serious problems with labour because she grew more tobacco than the previous year, and her barn could not take the amount, she also had problems getting tobacco chemicals, and had been removing pests by hand, crushing the pests literally between her fingers.

Appendix 4

Plot sizes per farmer in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, as of 2nd March 1995.

Plot size category	No. of holders per category	Ranking
0,3 < 0.4	1	13
0.4 < 0.5	29	4
0.5 < 0.6	3	11
0.6 < 0.7	5	10
0.7 < 0.8	53	3
0.8 < 0.9	153	1
0.9 < 1.0	2	12
1.0 < 1.2	11	8
1.2 < 1.4	16	6
1.4 < 1.6	22	5
1.6 < 1.8	83	2
1.8 < 2.0	1	13
2.0 < 2.2	11	8
2.2 < 2.4	15	7
2.4 < 2.6	6	9

Source: Unpublished Agritex records, Nyamaropa irrigation scheme, 1995.

Appendix 5

Sakubende: production figures, 1993

Cotton, maize and beans production on Sakubende's plot for the 1993 season was as follows; Sakubende got Z\$1 000 credit on his account from the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (CCZ) for fertilisers and spraying chemicals. Sakubende grew four acres of cotton and got 22 bales, from which he got Z\$9 600 net after paying his creditors. He paid about Z\$270 to the hired workers who picked cotton for him, and got seven bags of dry beans from two acres, and he had used six bags of fertiliser. He sold seven bags and got Z\$2 870, he had not hired any labour for harvesting beans, his family did all the work.

He spent Z\$420 on fertilisers. From his maize crop he got 68 bags, and did not sell any of it, he said that it was for family consumption, and he put aside 14 bags for feeding broiler chickens that he was raising for sale and for his family. He mixed broiler feed purchased from town with maize meal. He sold 70 of the chickens and kept 30 for his family, from the sales he got Z\$1 750. He had spent almost Z\$570 on feed and chemicals, his net profit was Z\$1 180. He also got 18 bags of wheat from one acre, and sold eight 50 kg bags of the crop at Nnyamurundira's store at the local business centre and got Z\$492. He put aside 14 bags of wheat for his family's bread and sadza / isitshwala. He also sold five buckets of wheat (20 kg each) and some extras to various people from dryland for Z\$200 a bag, and got a total of Z\$692 from the local deals.

i. This was one of the worst seasons in the history of the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme. It saw the beginning of a quest by farmers for a solution to their water woes. The same year they went to the Murozi catchment area to try and negotiate with the 'illegal irrigators' for a 'fairer share' of the water. They got advice from the ancestral spirits there not to fight over water, an effective strategy used by catchment villagers to secure their water right, or their right to access free flowing river water as they saw it.

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SUMMARY

This study is about rural agricultural development and social processes of change in rural Zimbabwe. It is aimed at understanding how irrigation intervention in a remote rural context changed the cultural, social, political and farming lives of people. It is a study of people coping with changes in their livelihoods which had been introduced from outside by development intervention. The study was sustained by the realisation that irrigation is not just a matter of technical artefacts, but has much to do with people, especially the people it is meant to benefit. Development practitioners and researchers should be interested not only in irrigation performance, but also in how people manipulate the irrigation resources available to them. How does irrigation development change the lives of the irrigators over time? How is it transformed and adapted by them? How does it change their perceptions of each other in view of their local social identities and differences? What do irrigation farmers use to gain improved access to irrigation resources? How do they manipulate their social, political, technical and management environments to their benefit? What lessons can we derive from "targeted" beneficiaries' analyses of how their lives have been transformed by development intervention?

The study focuses on social constructions of cultural identities, on social interaction and change among smallholder farmers in the context of irrigation development intervention in Eastern Zimbabwe. It shows how the introduction of an irrigation scheme not only created, but also nurtured and promoted processes of cultural identity and social differentiation among groups of rural producers who had previously had but few distinguishing social characteristics (such as ethnic affiliation). It is a study of how the irrigation context helps to highlight their social and cultural differences and leads to social conflicts and leadership struggles, and to how different individual actors devise strategies, such as enrolling outsiders into local struggles, to achieve their often conflicting group and individual objectives. The analysis portrays the irrigation scheme as a social and political 'domain' in which different groups of farmers and outsiders engage each other in negotiations over resources, and the meanings attached to these resources. In some instances, the irrigation domain is seen as an arena, a contested area where struggles take place over a diversity of livelihood resources such as water and land.

The study used the actor-oriented perspective as the theoretical basis for the analysis of research findings. An actor-oriented approach helps one recognise the agency of social actors in interactive situations. It requires a full analysis of the ways in which different social actors manage and interpret new elements in their life-worlds. The capacity of social actors to influence and shape their social surroundings is one of the salient features of the approach used in this Nyamaropa study.

The study is also about the omnipresence of encounters and clashes of different 'world-views' at the local level in the irrigation scheme. The clashes take place in the social, technical, administrative, managerial and political domains. It looks at how the different 'life-worlds' accommodate to each other in actors' daily interactions to give a semblance of harmony and attraction, co-existing with conflict and rejection. It is an analysis of the dynamism of social differences in irrigation intervention, and in any

development intervention for that matter, that reveals the multiplexity of actors' interactions, and how their multiple relations and interlocking projects generate potentially explosive social exchanges. The study starts from the bottom, as it were, in its analysis of how different people in a specific rural development context create and live with complex social relations where daily interaction is characterised by strategic negotiation and mutual enrolment in other actors' projects. The analysis focuses more on local level dynamics, and does not deal, for example, with the politics of decision-making at higher levels of administration, such as the province or central government departments under which smallholder irrigation development falls. The study does, however, acknowledge the inevitable, sometimes useful role of macro-policy structures in influencing development outcomes at the local level.

As a sociological study, this research work focused on how people interacted, worked together, settled differences and used community resources in their daily struggles for survival. Irrigation literature in Zimbabwe has only recently begun to pay specific attention to the fact that irrigation development is essentially a social process. Part of the objective here is to contribute to the debate about how rural actors manage their differentiated irrigating lives, discourses, struggles and negotiations, conflicts and accommodations in their constantly changing social environments. In order to examine this complex social process, it was proposed to undertake a detailed analysis of one irrigation scheme and its impact both on farmers practising irrigated agriculture and on surrounding dryland communities.

The thesis is divided into four parts. Part One gives 'the story behind the study'. Then there is a background to the study in the form of Chapter 2. This chapter provides what I have called *The Setting*. This is Zimbabwe's agricultural history, the history of smallholder irrigation development in the country, a background to Nyamaropa irrigation intervention, and an introduction to the different social and political actors who appear throughout the book.

Part Two is about the embeddedness of social, political and power relationships, social and economic differences, in land and water resources. Chapter 3 deals with struggles over land and water among irrigation farmers. There is a debate on water ownership from the different actors' standpoints in the Nyamaropa area. This chapter is central in the sense that it introduces the crucial issues of cultural and social identity in relations between formal irrigators and non-irrigators, between original inhabitants of the now irrigated area and immigrants to the same area. These are some of the issues that set the scene for case analyses of the dynamics of development intervention, constructions and reconstructions of cultural and social identities and differences.

Chapter 4, also in Part Two, is about the issue of different claims to water use, between irrigation farmers in the Nyamaropa project, and villagers in the catchment area who use river water which is the source of water for the irrigation scheme downstream. Here the argument is that spatial distinctions, cultural identities, and a strong sense of communal existence, constitute a crucial entry point for the analysis of ways of assembling claims to resource use by different actors. Differences in community organisation feature as competing aspects of claims to resource utilisation.

Part Three is about the irrigation domain as a shared life-world. Chapter 5 is on gender images and irrigation life. There are cases of widows who struggle to survive

in a tough and competitive irrigation environment. A salient feature of this chapter is how women relate to the irrigation scheme through their families or individual plots. Walking through the irrigation scheme one is struck by a common feature of the area: over seventy percent of people one sees working or meets in the fields are women and children, with the majority of them being women. A surprising, yet refreshing, phenomenon in the Nyamaropa irrigation scheme is that almost thirty percent of registered plottolders are widows! Some of them registered as widows when their men worked in town, so that they would have access to irrigated plots. This was a stratagem to beat the rule prohibiting those with wage-earning spouses from having access to irrigated land. It worked, to their advantage.

Chapter 6 focuses on irrigation extension specifically. This provides cases of farmers' encounters with Agritex (the national extension agency), and reveals the different views of similar situations between farmers and outsiders, and among farmers themselves in the presence of outsiders. This chapter focuses on one of the central issues in the study: that of how social differences among people impact on their responses to new knowledge and information. In this case, it is a matter of how farmers relate to Extension Workers as promoters of change, improvement and innovation.

Part Four is on official (and unofficial) regulations and practices, looking especially at government practice through Agritex and the traditional institution through the Headman. Chapter 7 deals with a delicate and sensitive subject of age, inheritance, sub-leasing and renting, and the irrigation rules which were ignored. The average age of plottolders in Nyamaropa was approximately 55 years, though there were plottolders as old as 84 years. Most of them were first generation plottolders. These were farmers who cleared the plots themselves when the project started in the late fifties. Most of the elderly irrigators were too old to fully utilise their irrigation plots, but still retained their names in the register. They regarded irrigation land as their family asset, against the official rule that they were lessees on state land. To maintain productivity, they sub-leased their plots to dryland farmers who needed irrigated land for food. Some of them had established networks with local businessmen who rented part of their land in return for paying irrigation fees for the plottolders. There were some long-term relationships of mutual assistance between the different types of farmers. Rules and regulations are seen here as among the tools at farmers' disposal in their constant negotiations for 'better deals' among themselves and with their resident Extension Workers.

Chapter 8 is the only chapter in Part Five. This section provides conclusions and theoretical analyses of research findings. It contextualises social difference and cultural identity in the life-situations of irrigators and drylanders in Nyamaropa. Discussed here are issues of how the different social groupings fit into the whole story of social dynamics of development intervention, and what some social theorists say on the issue of cultural identity and social difference (which is not much so far). This chapter brings together different theoretical issues raised in case material in the chapters before it. Chapter 8 also looks into problems facing 'irrigating lives' in smallholder irrigation schemes in the context of external intervention, and the issues and contradictions surrounding concepts such as cultural identity, and *strategic difference* in rural development.

One hopes that such a study will initiate a process that will lead to bringing out and appraising differences among development programme beneficiaries to make interventions not merely effective (by externalised criteria), but also meaningful to the range of people whose lives are unavoidably affected by its introduction. The study will help in the general understanding of social dynamics of rural development, of land reform and of poverty-reduction strategies in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region.

SAMENVATTING

Deze studie gaat over landbouw, rurale ontwikkeling en sociale veranderingsprocessen op het platteland in Zimbabwe. Het doel is om te begrijpen hoe irrigatie projecten het sociale, politieke en culturele leven van mensen verandert en beïnvloedt. Bestuurd wordt hoe mensen omgaan met veranderingen in hun dagelijks leven die voortvloeien uit interventies van buitenaf. De studie bouwt voort op het gedachtegoed dat irrigatie niet slechts technische artefacten behelst, maar veel te maken heeft met mensen en vooral met hen die ervan zouden moeten profiteren. Ontwikkelingswerkers en onderzoekers zouden niet alleen geïnteresseerd moeten zijn in irrigatie per se, maar er ook oog voor moeten hebben hoe mensen met de hulpbronnen die bij irrigatie een rol spelen omgaan of deze zelfs manipuleren. Belangrijke vragen in dit verband zijn hoe irrigatieontwikkeling het leven van de betrokkenen verandert en beïnvloedt; hoe irrigatie wordt herontworpen en aangepast door de betrokken actoren; hoe de percepties die men van elkaar heeft met betrekking tot sociale verschillen en identiteit worden bijgesteld; welke activiteiten mensen ontplooiën om toegang te krijgen tot de irrigatiehulpbronnen; hoe de sociale, politieke, technische en beheersomgeving worden gemanipuleerd ten eigen bate; en welke lessen er zijn te trekken uit een analyse hoe projecten en programma's het leven van de doelgroepen voor wie ze worden uitgevoerd hebben veranderd.

Centraal staat hoe in de context van irrigatieontwikkeling in het Oosten van Zimbabwe, identiteiten worden geconstrueerd, mensen met elkaar omgaan en veranderingen plaats vinden binnen een kleine boerengemeenschap. De studie laat niet alleen zien hoe de aanleg van een irrigatiestelsel sociale verschillen en verschillende identiteiten tussen groepen producenten, die voorheen nauwelijks onderling verschilden, creëerde, maar hoe deze de verschillen juist ook voedde. Hoe accentueert irrigatie sociale en culturele verschillen en hoe kan zij allerlei conflicten aanleiding geven. Hoe ontwikkelen verschillende actoren strategieën, zoals het betrekken van buitenstaanders bij lokale conflicten, ten einde hun conflicterende groeps- en individuele belangen te verenigen. De analyse schetst het irrigatie stelsel als een sociaal en politiek domein waarin verschillende groepen boeren en buitenstaanders onderhandelen over hulpbronnen. In bepaalde gevallen is het irrigatie domein een arena, een betwist gebied waarin gestreden wordt over tal van hulpbronnen, zoals land en water, die van essentieel belang zijn om de eindjes aan elkaar te knopen.

De studie maakt gebruik van het actor georiënteerde perspectief waarin het vermogen van actoren om te handelen centraal staan. Het vereist een volledige analyse van de manieren waarop actoren nieuwe elementen in hun leven beheren en interpreteren. Het vermogen van actoren om hun eigen leefomgeving te beïnvloeden en vorm te geven is een van de meest herkenbare elementen van deze benadering in deze studie.

De studie betreft ook de alom aanwezige ontmoetingen en confrontaties van verschillende discoursen op het lokale niveau van een irrigatiestelsel. De confrontaties manifesteren zich in de sociale, politieke en technisch-administratieve

domeinen. Geanalyseerd wordt hoe de verschillende leefwerelden de dagelijkse interacties helpen vorm te geven aan harmonie en samenwerking en tegelijkertijd aan conflict en afwijzing. Het is een analyse van de dynamiek van sociale verschillen in irrigatie projecten die de complexiteit van de interacties tussen actoren bloot legt, en hoe de verschillende sociale verhoudingen en samenwerkingsverbanden potentieel explosieve situaties kunnen voortbrengen. De studie begint daarom, als het ware, aan de basis ten einde te laten zien hoe actoren in een ontwikkelingscontext omgaan met sociale relaties die gekenmerkt worden door interactie en strategische onderhandelingen en het telkens pogen om anderen voor de eigen doeleinden te gebruiken. De analyse concentreert zich daarom meer op het lokale niveau, en niet op de beleidscontext van bijvoorbeeld de provincies of centrale overheid die verantwoordelijk zijn voor irrigatie. De studie onderkent echter wel de onvermijdelijke en soms belangrijke macro-politieke structuren die ontwikkelingen op het lokale niveau beïnvloeden.

Als een sociologisch onderzoek betaamt, richt het onderzoek zich vooral op de wijze waarop mensen met elkaar omgaan, samenwerken, conflicten beslechten en gemeenschappelijke hulpbronnen gebruiken in hun dagelijkse strijd om het bestaan. De Zimbabwaanse literatuur over irrigatie is slechts recentelijk aandacht gaan schenken aan irrigatie als een in essentie sociaal proces. Onderdeel van de doestelling van het onderzoek is om bij te dragen aan de analyse van irrigatieontwikkeling vanuit het gezichtspunt hoe actoren hun leven organiseren, de discoursen die worden gehanteerd, de conflicten en de onderhandelingen en de pogingen om conflicten bij te leggen. Om dit complexe geheel uit een te kunnen zetten is gekozen voor een gedetailleerde analyse van één irrigatie stelsel en de invloed die het heeft op zowel de boeren die irrigeren als op de boeren die zich bezig houden met 'droge' of regenafhankelijke landbouw.

Het proefschrift bevat vier delen. Het eerste deel beschrijft de achtergronden van de studie en de historische context van het irrigatiegebeuren plaats vindt. Het behandelt de agrarische geschiedenis van Zimbabwe, de geschiedenis van kleinschalige irrigatie en die in Nyamaropa in het bijzonder, en gaat ook in op de verschillende actoren die een rol spelen in het irrigatie project in Nyamaropa.

Deel twee is een verhandeling over de inbedding van sociale, politieke en machtsverhoudingen in hulpbronnen land en water. Hoofdstuk 3 gaat over de conflicten over land en water zoals die zich afspelen tussen irriteerders onderling. Een van de cruciale debatten in en rondom het irrigatiestelsel in Nyamaropa is wie nu het eigendomsrecht van water heeft. Dit hoofdstuk introduceert de belangrijke zaken zoals de culturele en sociale identiteit in de verhoudingen tussen diegenen die irrigeren en zij die niet irrigeren, tussen de oorspronkelijke bewoners en de immigranten. Deze onderwerpen spelen een grote rol in de analyse van de dynamiek van ontwikkelingsinterventie, de constructie maar ook de deconstructie van culturele en sociale identiteiten en verschillen. Hoofdstuk 4 handelt over de verschillende aanspraken op water die zowel door de irriteerders als de diegenen die in het stroomgebied van het irrigatiestelsel wonen worden gelegd. Het centrale argument is dat het ruimtelijk onderscheid, culturele identiteiten en een sterk gemeenschapsgevoel, in belangrijke ingang vormt tot de analyse van de verschillende aanspraken op water door de verschillende actoren. Verschillen in

gemeenschapsorganisatie komen naar voren als contradictoire aspecten van aanspraken op het gebruik van hulpbronnen.

Deel Drie analyseert het irrigatie domein als een gedeelde leefwereld. Hoofdstuk 5 behandelt *gender* in een irrigatiecontext en beschrijft hoe weduwen worstelen om hun bestaan in een harde en competitieve omgeving. Een bezoek aan irrigatiestelsel maakt onmiddellijk duidelijk dat diegenen die de velden bewerken voor het overgrote deel vrouwen en kinderen zijn. Bijna 30 procent van de geregistreerde irrigeerders zijn weduwen! Om toegang tot het irrigatiestelsel te krijgen, registreerden sommige weduwen zich terwijl hun partners in de stad werkzaam waren. Dit was een list om de regel te omzeilen die zegt dat diegenen die een betrekking in de stad of elders hebben geen land in het irrigatiestelsel mogen hebben. Hoofdstuk 6 concentreert zich op de voorlichting op het vlak van irrigatie. Het hoofdstuk bevat een aantal cases van ontmoetingen tussen boeren en staf van Agritex (de nationale voorlichtingsdienst). Het maakt de verschillende gezichtspunten duidelijk tussen boeren en buitenstaanders, en tussen de boeren onderling in het bijzijn van buitenstaanders. Dit hoofdstuk belicht een van de hoofd thema's van de studie, namelijk hoe sociale verschillen de reacties op nieuwe kennis en innovaties beïnvloeden. Het blijkt van belang te zijn om aandacht te schenken aan de relaties tussen boeren en voorlichters als bevorderaars van verandering ontwikkeling en innovatie.

Deel Vier gaat over de formele (en informele) regels en praktijken. Dit wordt begrepen vanuit het perspectief van de overheid middels Agritex en de tribale instituties zoals het hoofd. Hoofdstuk 7 handelt over een delicaat en gevoelig onderwerp, namelijk leeftijd, vererving, onderhuur en verhuur en de irrigatieregelgeving die niet wordt nageleefd. De gemiddelde leeftijd van de irrigeerders was ongeveer 55 jaar en sommigen waren zelfs 84 jaar oud. De meeste onder hen behoorden tot de eerste generatie irrigeerders die zelf het land bouwrijp heeft gemaakt vlak na de aanlag van het stelsel aan het einde van de 50er jaren. Velen van hen zijn nu eigenlijk te oud om het land volledig te bewerken, maar staan nog steeds geregistreerd. Een geïrrigeerd stukje land vertegenwoordigde voor hen een familiebezit hetgeen tegen de regelgeving van het stelsel is. Om de productie te handhaven verhuren ze hun land geheel of gedeeltelijk aan 'droge' landbouwers die graag toegang tot het stelsel willen ten behoeve van de eigen voedselproductie. Sommigen hebben relaties met lokale handelaren die in ruil voor een stukje land de irrigatiekosten betalen. Sommigen van deze relaties bestaan reeds jarenlang. Regels en regelgeving worden hier gezien als een van de middelen die boeren gebruiken in hun continue onderhandeling met andere boeren en voorlichters.

In het Vijfde deel worden conclusies getrokken en wordt een theoretische analyse van de onderzoeksresultaten gepresenteerd. Hoofdstuk 8 plaatst sociale verschillen en culturele identiteiten in hun context van het dagelijks leven van irrigatie en regenafhankelijke of 'droge' landbouw in Nyamaropa. Hier wordt uiteengezet hoe de verschillende sociale groeperingen passen in het geheel van de sociale dynamiek van ontwikkelingsinterventies, en wat sociale wetenschappers te zeggen hebben over culturele identiteiten en sociale verschillen (hetgeen niet zoveel is tot nu toe). Dit hoofdstuk verbindt verschillende theoretische thema's met de onderwerpen die naar voren zijn gekomen in voorgaande empirische hoofdstukken. Hoofdstuk 8

bezieet ook de problemen die voortkomen uit extern aangestuurde interventies waarmee de irrigeerders in hun dagelijks leven als irrigeerders worden geconfronteerd. Ook worden de contradicties rond concepten als culturele identiteit en strategische verschillen in rurale ontwikkeling besproken.

Het is te hopen dat studies als deze bijdragen aan een goed begrip van sociale verschillen tussen de beoogde begunstigden van ontwikkelingsprogramma's en dat dit zal leiden tot een meer effectieve (volgens externe criteria), maar ook meer zinvolle programma's voor diegenen die op een of andere manier door interventies worden beroerd. De studie draagt aldus bij aan een algemeen begrip van de sociale dynamiek van rurale ontwikkeling, van landhervormingprocessen en van armoedebestrijdingsstrategieën in Zimbabwe en de Zuidelijk Afrikaanse regio.