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**81a. FRAGMENTS AND SENTIMENTS:
WHY IS 'THE COMMUNITY' THE FOCUS OF DEVELOPMENT?**

Roger Blench

**81b. GROUNDWATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT
OF FARMING SYSTEMS INTENSIFICATION AND CHANGING
RAINFALL REGIMES: A CASE STUDY FROM SOUTH EAST ZIMBABWE**

P.B. Moriarty and C.J. Lovell

edited by Roger Blench

The two papers in this volume (together with those in the accompanying Network paper 81) were originally presented at a conference held at ODI in June 1997. The objective of the conference – which was entitled 'Ghana and Zimbabwe: options for change' – was to bring together and discuss various aspects of the studies of rural livelihoods which are currently in progress in these countries. The papers dealing with Ghana will be published in book format in 1998.

At the conference a particular emphasis was placed on semi-arid areas; in Zimbabwe many of these are only now beginning to recover from the prolonged drought of the early 1990s. Paper 81a takes on a conceptual point in the debate over community-based development. It reviews the definition of community and the often unexamined assumption that such a 'community' must be the focus for social action. The argument is illustrated with material from field research in the Rwenya basin in north east Zimbabwe. Paper 81b describes an approach to water-point development in Zimbabwe, arguing for the need to develop both community and individual access points to patchy water resources.

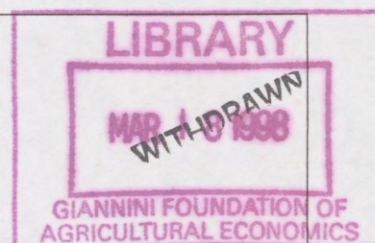
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Acronyms

AGRITEX	Agricultural Technical and Extension Services Department
BUN-Zimbabwe	Biomass Users' Network - Zimbabwe
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Central Statistical Office
DDF	District Development Fund
GIS	geographical information system
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
IRWSS	Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation
ITDG	Intermediate Technology Development Group
MRDC	Mudzi Rural District Council
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRDC	Nyanga Rural District Council
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
RDC	Rural District Council
RWMA	Rwenya Wildlife Management Area
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
VIDCO	Village Development Council
WADCO	Ward Development Council

FRAGMENTS AND SENTIMENTS: WHY IS 'THE COMMUNITY' THE FOCUS OF DEVELOPMENT: A ZIMBABWEAN CASE

Roger Blench

ABSTRACT

The growth of 'the community' as a major focus of development through which collective social action can take place has spread rapidly through development ideology since the 1970s. Yet the existence of communities and their structure and degree of coherence is an empirical matter, to be described through ethnography, rather than something that can be assumed a priori. The paper takes the view that uniform notions of community are often imposed on diverse rural populations both for administrative convenience and for sentimental reasons: outsiders would like to see communities in the developing world precisely because they appear to have become fragmented in the North. To this end they may find it necessary to construct communities where none exist through various 'participatory' approaches.

The reasons why communities may not exist are diverse: this may be the result of climatic uncertainties and thus a patchy resource base; it may result from war and insecurity; or it may simply reflect changing economic opportunities. Individuals and households are obliged to seek subsistence opportunistically and cannot afford the luxury of a stable community. The paper takes the example of the situation in the Rwenya Basin in north east Zimbabwe, where elements of all the above factors are present, to suggest that interventions can only be effective when the notion of community is deconstructed and a greater level of ethnographic realism is introduced.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the more curious enthusiasms of developers in recent decades has been the growing emphasis on the ideology of community. Communities are entities able to come together to manage existing common property resources such as woodland and grazing as well as to take responsibility for introductions such as boreholes or woodlots (see e.g. Berkes, 1995). More importantly, communities are also places where NGOs can focus their work and try out new ideas. Larger agencies, such as branches of the UN, and the multilateral banks have also been drawn into this conceptual world. The British government, despite being led for eleven years by a Prime Minister who declared 'there is no such thing as society' continued to press simultaneously for greater 'community participation' in its foreign aid programmes.

Yet the existence of communities and their structure and degree of coherence is an empirical matter, to be described through ethnography¹, rather than something which can be assumed *a priori*. Uniform notions of community are often imposed on diverse rural populations both for administrative convenience and for sentimental reasons. At a practical level, such communities represent a convenient locus for action. Working with individual farmers is neither emotionally nor numerically satisfying. Agencies and NGOs prefer to 'possess' whole villages and keep intruders out. They can dig wells or set up farmers' organisations or woodlots and mark their territory with coloured signs. There is frequently neither time nor resources to establish the complex social map of those with whom they work so the community represents a useful shorthand.

At a sentimental level, communities seem to represent a release from the dispiriting world of the North with its indifference, its hard-faced cities and cash economies. As the four-wheel-drives speed by on the laterite roads, they pass neat assemblages of thatched roofed houses, reminiscent of postcards of 'best kept villages' in southern England. Surely these must be the communities everyone is talking about?

Yet groups of old men sitting under trees every dry season recall images of rural harmony derived as much from received images as from any genuinely remembered situation. The reasons why communities may not exist are diverse: this may be the result of climatic uncertainties and thus a patchy resource base; it may result from war and insecurity; or it may simply reflect changing economic opportunities. When individuals and households are obliged to seek subsistence opportunistically they can rarely afford the luxury of a stable community.

Is there such a thing as society?

Are collective or corporate institutions real? In other words, do they represent a genuine urge within human beings to collaborate and work together or are they simply ephemeral unions of individuals joined by momentary self-interest? Although the inhabitants of streets of houses in the developed world may join

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I am particularly grateful to officials of Mudzi Rural District Council (MRDC), Kotwa, especially the CEO, Mr Maxwell Makombere, the Councillor responsible for CAMPFIRE, Mr David Pangaya, and in particular Mr Frederick Manyangarirwa who accompanied me on all the field trips. Maree Drury, a Resource Planner working with MRDC, kindly provided me with several important documents and described many of the planning issues relevant to ecology and environment in the district. In the three wards, the Councillors made themselves available for discussion and also recruited enumerators familiar with their area.

together to hold street-parties every quarter-century, it is not usually assumed they form a community in any but the strictly geographical sense. Is there then any justification for thinking that 'communities' in developing countries are more than collections of people, that they are made coherent by a common language and set of values and are likely to work together towards shared goals? Or is this an *a priori* assumption that needs to be challenged like any other?

Critiques of oversimplified assumptions about the community have been made elsewhere. Leach *et al* (1997) have recently reviewed some of the literature and remark that a common assumption of the otherwise diverse approaches to community-based sustainable development is that 'a distinct community exists'. They relate this to narratives of restoring a lost harmony with the environment and use this to build up their concept of 'environmental entitlements'. But crucially, they do not in the end discuss the consequences if the community itself does not in fact exist.

Social anthropology (the abstract discipline, as opposed to ethnography, the process of description) probably has a longer record of approaching these questions than any other discipline and its findings are profoundly ambiguous (see e.g. Barth, 1992). Anthropologists have wanted to find communities for the same reasons as others, the social and emotional fragmentation of their own lives. Yet all too often the communities they sought have proved elusive. Human society is diverse in many ways and, needless to say, shows a wide variation in structures for collective social action. Some communities are made coherent by kinship structures, geographical proximity and a common language. Elsewhere, these are largely absent and settlements are little more than dispersed collections of households with their own individual agendas.

A rather extreme case has recently been advanced by revisionist historians of Africa, namely that 'the village' is a colonial construct and that in the precolonial era households were more geographically dispersed, i.e. with more ready access to farms and wildland resources. This should be considered a rather extreme position, since villages can form for other reasons, such as defence. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there is a strong correlation between settlement size and ecology in sub-Saharan Africa. Settlements are 'small in ultra-high rainfall zones where farming is difficult (for example, they tend to increase in size in the humid forests and grow smaller again in the arid areas of Africa).

Short spells spent in rural villages often make it plain that 'communities' are not as common as might have been hoped. The developer must decide how to deal with this, both psychologically and practically. One response is to see if a community can be conjured into existence. If people are not used to working together then perhaps this can be remedied by social engineering, i.e. trying to introduce new or expanded social structures that are not part of their existing repertoire. In developmental terms this is identifying the 'social conditions for participation in planning' (see e.g.

discussion in Mosse, 1995). Organisations and co-operatives can be constructed where none previously existed and these can then form a channel for social action. In some cases the agency in question has such a strong template of the organisations that it wishes to see that the constitution and other structural aspects are worked out in advance. Needless to say, it is easy to convince any group to adopt these models if the material lure is sufficiently strong.

This might seem wholly contrary to another aspect of current strategies: client-orientation, listening to farmers etc. Those who purport to listen to villagers must also hear what they are saying, even when it runs precisely counter to their own ideology. The temptation to find a community anyway for reasons which are essentially sentimental must be avoided. If people say they are not going to co-operate with their neighbours there is every reason to believe them. Like second marriages, 'community development' can sometimes be a triumph of hope over experience.

This paper argues that 'community' is a concept of limited validity; it can be valuable in specific ethnographic situations but it should not be generalised to all settlements, regardless of their social organisation. The main factor which limits the coherence of a community is the patchiness of subsistence resources. When local people rely on a variety of different resources (e.g. patches of pasture) and opportunities (e.g. temporary day labour) to maintain their livelihoods collective action becomes increasingly improbable.

This has at least one major consequence for agricultural extension. Coherent communities which draw the greater part of their income from agriculture or animal husbandry represent an effective focus for interventions. It is usually in the economic interest of most members of a community to attend meetings and to gather news and information about new technologies. But if agriculture plays only a limited part in the subsistence strategies of individual households then interest in learning about new technologies may be correspondingly reduced.

The specific example used to illustrate this point is drawn from a continuing study of a dry woodland savannah in north east Zimbabwe. The study, which is financed by the UK Department for International Development, is exploring the existing mechanisms of community management of common property resources, and their interface with state institutions. The overall purpose is to draw out policy implications both for this specific region and more generally for semi-arid areas of Africa. Part of the stimulus to the present paper was the difficulty encountered during the survey in identifying coherent communities.

2 SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION AND COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATION

Notions of social coherence tend to be constructed by those who live in nation-states; the boundedness of states and the enforcement of common cultural values which are necessary to make the state function effectively are often generalised to a wide range of societies which are, in reality, very different. The attributes of the village then become those of the nation-state in miniature.

One of the well-known strategies of colonial rule in Africa was the construction both of ethnic identity and chiefship institutions. In many areas, ethnic identity had previously been fairly fluid, with individuals defined more by residence and language than by some notional tribe. Chiefs existed in some areas but elsewhere societies managed without them in the pre-colonial era. Such societies were known as 'tribes without rulers' (Middleton & Tait, 1956). However, this lack of hierarchy and of the desire to define ethnic identity was perceived by the colonial rulers to be unstructured and therefore a potential threat to good governance. Censuses were taken and households were forced to declare their 'tribe' and name, something that previously went uncategorised. Communities without leaders were required to produce chiefs who were duly invested, despite having no traditional authority. This allowed the colonial authorities to regard the territories they ruled as having a convenient homogeneity.

In reality, no such homogeneity existed. Every gradation from the extreme social fluidity of changing band composition in the case of hunter-gatherers to rigid hierarchical structures such as those of the savannah Emirates of West-Central Africa persisted. In fact, if anything, fluidity increased: expanding economic opportunities and the high levels of urban migration acted to break down existing communities while cheap transport and soil exhaustion encouraged internal migration even for arable communities.

3 A CASE STUDY: THE RWENYA BASIN, NORTH EAST ZIMBABWE

General background

The management of dry woodland savannah in eastern and southern Africa has been described by a number of authors (e.g. Bradley & McNamara, 1993; contributors to Pierce & Gumbo, 1993; Stiles, 1995). Indeed some regions, especially in Zimbabwe, have been the focus of considerable research (Scoones *et al.*, 1996). Nonetheless, a remarkable innocence about production systems in some parts of the communal lands of Zimbabwe remains. This is the legacy of a colonial research system in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe which focused heavily on the production of cash crops by commercial farmers in the higher rainfall uplands.

The concept of village and district management of natural resources has been developed further in Zimbabwe than in most other African countries, especially in relation to

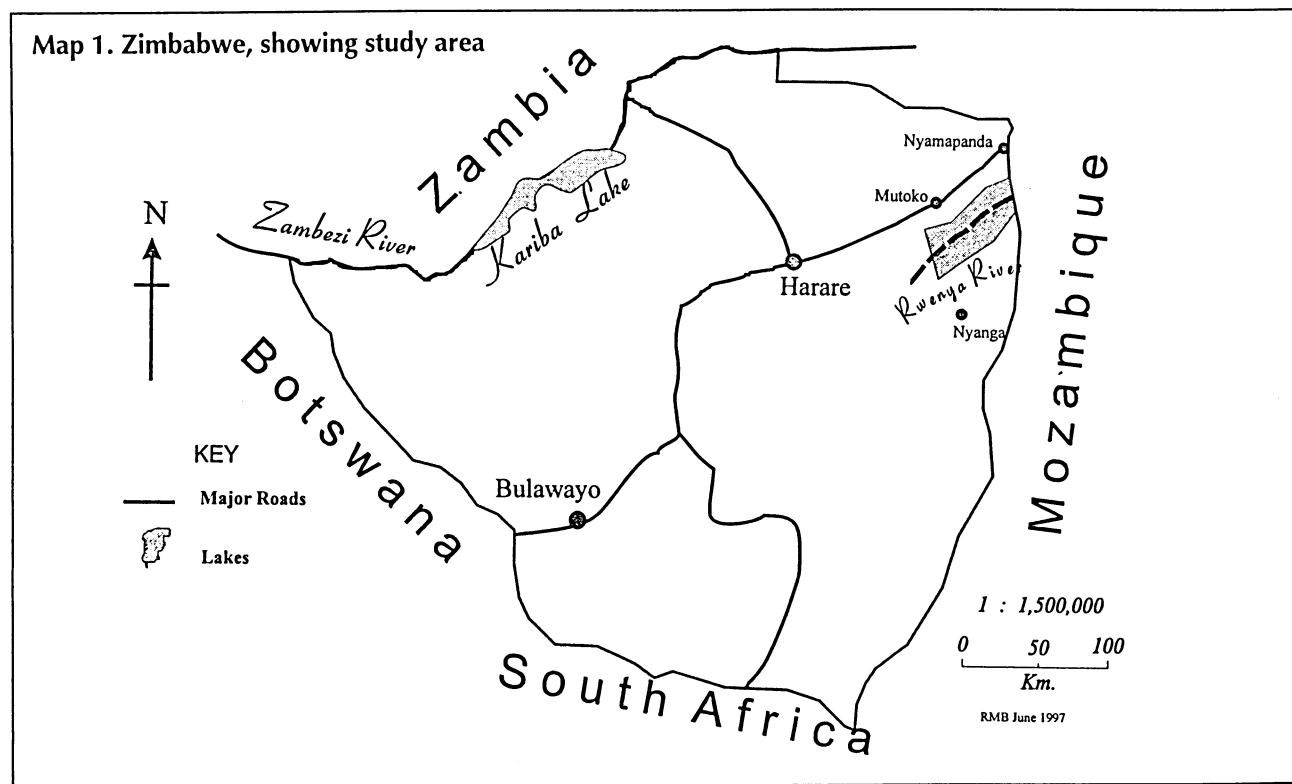
wildlife. The CAMPFIRE programme, established in the early 1980s with funding from USAID, was designed to evolve participatory mechanisms to return income from the exploitation of wildlife areas to the adjacent communities, principally through fees for hunting large mammals but increasingly from other types of tourism as well. The programme has generally been positively evaluated (Nyamapfene, 1985; Murphree, 1990; Hamkes, 1991; Madzudzo, 1996). Effective management of large mammal resources in game reserves has created a surplus of animals which can be sold to benefit the communities whose land has been requisitioned for reserves.

As CAMPFIRE has developed, so has the realisation that valuing forest and reserved land simply in terms of wildlife potential seriously underestimates the diverse benefits such land has for the community. Moreover, almost by definition, areas without substantial wildlife resources have been excluded from the programme. Recent studies have therefore tended to emphasise the overall benefits to local people of managed wildlands and in particular the benefits to women. Women are often the principal users, both as a consequence of male labour migration and because fuelwood and non-timber products are usually their domain (Campbell, 1987; Campbell & du Toit, 1988; McGregor, 1991; Pierce & Gumbo, 1993; Hot Springs Working Group, 1995).

CAMPFIRE has begun to explore ways of handing back control of both plant and animal resources to administrative structures at the local level (wards or villages). In administrative terms this can now be done through the granting of 'appropriate authority'. This broadly means that districts exploit resources by granting licences (for example to shoot elephants) where it is agreed that animal populations are sustainable and this does not conflict with national policy (Murphree, 1991; Matose, 1992; Hofstad, 1993). Applications for grants under CAMPFIRE were made by the Rural District Councils of Mudzi and Nyanga with the assistance of BUN in 1994, but doubts about the viability of Rwenya, because of the low mammal populations, have held up the applications. However, in mid-1997, it seemed that these licences were on the point of being granted, at least for a first tranche of funding.

The Rwenya Basin

The case-study area is in the basin of the Rwenya River, the lower end of the Nyangombe River which has its headwaters in the Nyanga National Park in north east Zimbabwe. The Rwenya River runs west-east into Mozambique directly south of Nyamapanda. The total area is some 80,000 hectares (BUN-Zimbabwe, 1995). The basin consists of an area gazetted in 1987, the Rwenya Wildlife Management Area (RWMA) and six adjacent wards, immediately north and south of it. The RWMA has been largely, but not entirely, cleared of permanent settlement, but is still exploited regularly by the local people for grazing and woodland resources. Map 1 (overleaf) shows the location of the study area.



The lands adjacent to the Rwenya river have been gazetted as a Wildlife Reserve, giving them legal status but no infrastructure or protection. Map 2 shows the site in more detail.

Rainfall and climate

Zimbabwe is conventionally divided into five 'natural regions' defined principally by rainfall (Vincent & Thomas, 1961). The Rwenya region is classified as Natural Region IV, which implies an erratic annual rainfall of <600 mm and periodic droughts. The rains fall between October and March in a broadly unimodal pattern. There are often some showers in June, just after the harvest, although these are not sufficiently reliable to use for cropping.

The period 1990-95 saw very low levels of precipitation, especially in 1992, when great numbers of livestock died. The seasons 1995-97 represent a clear recovery, although inter-annual variability is so high that neither the pattern nor quantity of precipitation in any given year can be predicted.

The drainage systems flow approximately west-east across the region with the Rwenya river and its tributaries in the centre. The Rwenya flows perennially, although many watercourses only flow in the wet season. The natural vegetation is dryland forest, consisting of a mixture of *mopane* and *miombo* woodland (i.e. woodland dominated by *Brachystegia* sp. and *Jubernardia* sp.). The granitic sandy soils underlying the forest are infertile, highly leached and with low mineral reserves. The region is quite mountainous with rocky outcrops and granitic inselbergs dotting the landscape, especially south of the river. Most of the rivers have deposits of alluvial gold.

Administrative structures

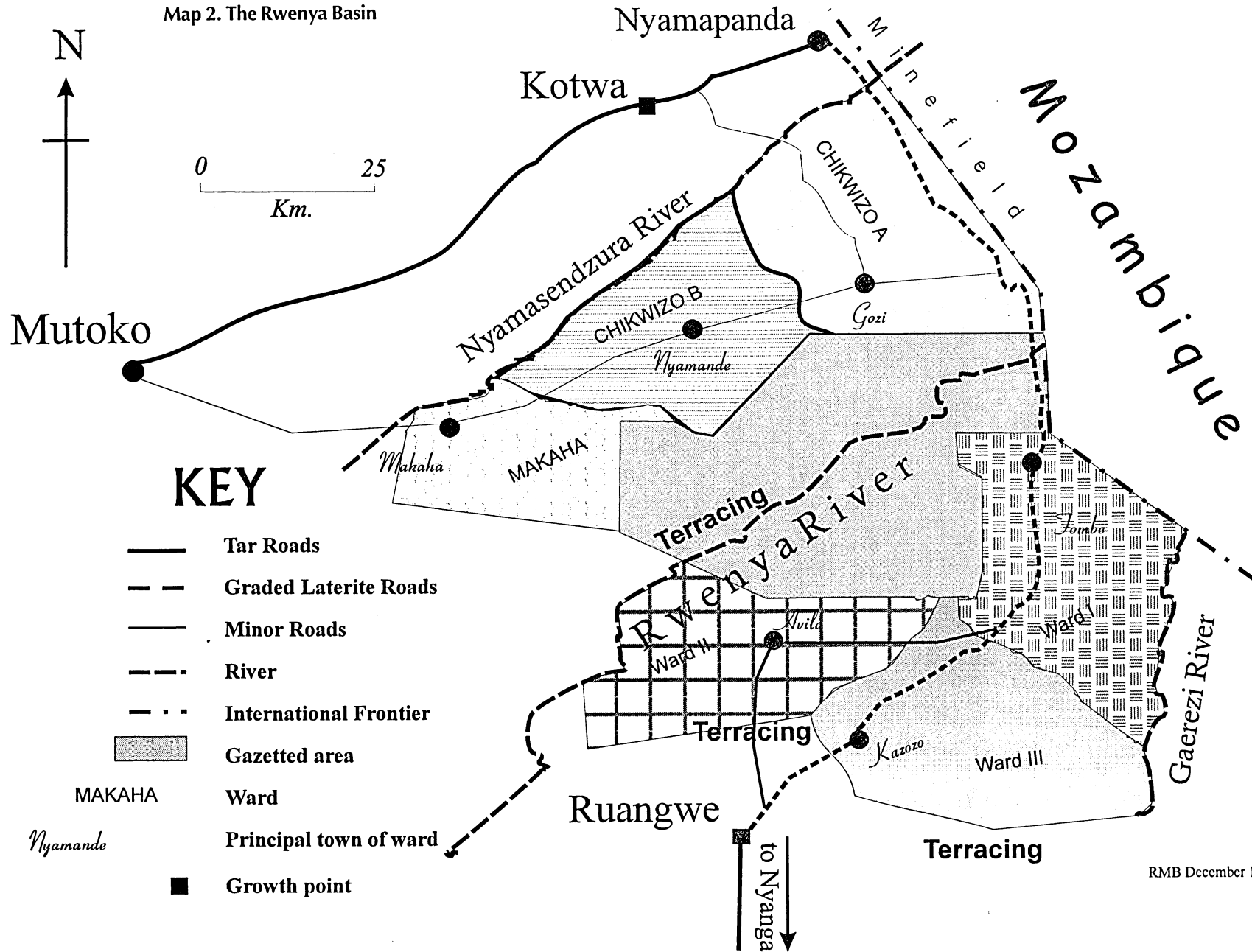
Institutionally, the region is split between two provinces, Mashonaland East (north of the river) and Manicaland (south of the River). The two areas abutting the Rwenya are controlled by Rural District Councils, Mudzi and Nyanga, respectively north and south of the Rwenya proper. Each district has three wards that fall into the river basin as follows:

Province	District	Wards	Acronym
Mashonaland East	Mudzi	Makaha A, Chikwizo A,B	RN
Manicaland	Nyanga	Wards I, II, III (formerly Marowo, Sanhani, Mutambwe)	RS

Each ward elects a councillor who attends Rural District Council (RDC) meetings and also leads the WADCO (Ward Development Council).

Wards in turn are divided into 'villages', which may be villages in the sense of groups of residential units, but which are more often arbitrary collections of compounds grouped geographically, sometimes with considerable spaces between them. Each 'village' has a VIDCO or Village Development Council, whose leader is supposed to report to the WADCO. However, the VIDCOs have no economic function and no resources to allocate, and the key institution remains the District Council. The 'villages' are in turn divided into 'kraals', led up by a kraal-head or *sabuku*, usually the most senior man in the community. Kraals consist of 6-15 compounds, *musha*, the majority of which house a single family with additional relatives. Only the *musha* and

Map 2. The Rwenya Basin



RMB December 1997

sabuku can be said to correspond in any way to traditional structures and even the *sabuku* is a fluid entity. Compounds can join or leave according to their perception of the prevailing political winds.

The notion that there should be a chain of collective structures which take responsibility for local action derives from the socialist ideologies of the ruling ZANU-PF government. However, the attempt to call into being intermediate levels of authority, the VIDCOs and WADCOs, has been largely a failure in this region, due to the dispersed settlement patterns and the absence of traditional structures to create coherence. Individual householders are often uncertain under which VIDCO they fall. On the other hand, they are almost always aware of their WADCO Councillors and Members of Parliament since they represent them on bodies with actual resources to disburse.

Slightly cross-cutting this arrangement is the system of chiefs and headmen. Chiefs are generally those whose authority derives from precolonial society and their power reflects their importance in traditional society, albeit somewhat modified to map against ward boundaries. The splitting of wards as part of administrative reorganisation has not been accompanied by the creation of more chiefs so, presently, a single chief can have authority over more than one ward. The colonial system added 'headmen' who are appointed by government and are usually responsible for ward-level administrative units. Thus, if a ward is split, another headman is appointed. Chiefs and headmen are awarded badges of office and attend WADCO meetings. However, their real authority is very limited, although individual chiefs may exercise spiritual authority.

The responsibilities of the RDCs have varied over time. In the 1980s many departments, such as health and education, were transferred back from the RDCs to central government. Thus every District Headquarters has two offices, the Council Office and those of the District Administrator, the representative of central government. At present, the District Administration is responsible for most key services, including health and schools, and so has larger offices, and considerably greater funds at its disposal. It is not uncommon for the RDC and the District Administration to be sited at opposite ends of the town. As part of the current process of decentralisation, a plan is under way to return responsibility for many areas of administration to the RDCs towards the end of 1997, but no details are yet available.

4 POPULATION, SETTLEMENT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Survey background

As part of the background to the study of mechanisms of community management of wildland resources, a large-scale household study was conducted in May-June 1997. Some 610 households were sampled in the six wards adjacent to the RWMA. Enumerators were identified through Ward councillors and trained to administer a questionnaire covering basic social and economic parameters of household structure. The intention was that

a similar number of questionnaires should be completed in each ward, but the dispersal of households in some areas meant that access was a constraint. Table 1 shows the number of questionnaires per ward:

Table 1. Household questionnaires: distribution by ward

Ward	Questionnaire Numbers	n = 610 Percentage
Chikwizo A	112	18.4
Chikwizo B	72	11.8
Makaha A	83	13.6
I	107	17.5
II	100	16.4
III	136	22.3

Ethnic composition

The population of the Rwenya basin is broadly homogeneous, ethnically speaking; it consists largely of subgroups of the Shona people. Other Shona subgroups and even Ndebele from the southwest of Zimbabwe have also come into the area in the wake of the early 1990s drought. The main Shona groups are:

- *Budya/Toko*: around Mutoko and in Makaha ward;
- *Hweza*: Chikwizo and all wards south of the river;
- *Manyika*: Ruangwe and scattered through the southern wards.

Table 2 shows the ethnolinguistic affiliation of the households in the survey. Those households reporting 'Shona' are essentially identifying with the country as a whole rather than defining themselves of local clan affiliation. The Hweza are dominant throughout this region. They speak a type of Shona markedly at variance with the central speech of the media in Zimbabwe.

Table 2. Ethnolinguistic affiliation of households in the Rwenya Basin

Language	Number	n = 610 Percentage
Zezeru	1	0.16
Nyanja	1	0.16
Chungwe	1	0.16
Toko	4	0.66
Budya	6	0.98
Manyika	31	5.08
Shona	262	42.95
Hweza	304	49.84

No households claimed to be of Mozambican origin, but this is a sensitive question as farm households without Zimbabwean identity cards are not entitled to state services. Around Nyamapanda there are settlements of Sena people

Table 3. Populations and households in the Rwenya Basin

Ward	Total Population	Total Households	Ratio Female/Male	Mean Household Size
Nyanga				
Marowo	3,601	791	1.22	4.6
Sanhani	6,924	1,391	1.28	5.0
Mutambwe	4,560	974	1.19	4.7
Subtotal	15,085	3,156		4.8
Mudzi				
Chikwizo A	3,644	782	1.20	4.7
Chikwizo B	4,321	863	1.20	5.0
Makaha A	8,661	2,193	1.06	3.9
Subtotal	16,626	3,838		4.3
Total	31,711	6,994		4.5

Source: CSO data quoted in MRDC, 1997

whose main concentrations are in Malawi and Mozambique. One effect of the insecurity associated with raids, both during the Mozambican civil war and then with postwar banditry, was to attract Sena into Zimbabwe. Many of these people have now settled semi-permanently. The pattern of settlement is extremely dispersed, with compounds forming nuclear villages only along roads or where there is pressure on land, mostly north of Kotwa.

Social organisation, household size and structure

The basic element of Shona social organisation is the clan, an exogamous (i.e. where women customarily marry outside their own clan) unit bound together by respect for a totemic animal (a species with spiritual attributes for a given social group). Clans are large, and thus not very corporate entities. Shona-speaking populations are strongly patrilineal and it is common for sons to continue to live in their fathers' compounds or to form adjacent new compounds (Bourdillon, 1976: 37 ff.). In the case of Rwenya, where land is relatively abundant and the constraint on subsistence is the soil fertility and unpredictable precipitation, sons building a new compound may move quite some distance from the original site.

The human population of the region is relatively sparse compared with elsewhere in Zimbabwe, and indeed with other wards in these RDCs (see figures in MRDC, 1997 for Mudzi). Table 3 shows the population by ward, recorded by the Central Statistical Office in 1994. Table 4 shows the mean resident household size recorded by the survey:

Table 4. Household size in the Rwenya Basin

	n	Mean	Range
Household size	610	7.25	1-60
Manicaland	343	6.99	1-60
Mashonaland East	267	7.57	1-33

Source: Field data May-June 1997

Mean household size as recorded by the survey is markedly different from the CSO data (Table 3). The reasons for this are unclear, but the number of children visible in each household suggest that the survey figures are closer to reality. It may be that there is under-reporting in Government surveys, but CSO surveys would also record single individuals in schools and running small businesses which would reduce effective household size.

Table 5 shows the household composition as recorded by the survey.

Table 5. Household composition in the Rwenya Basin

	Mean	n = 610 Range
Wives	1.19	0-5
Children	5.06	0-44

Source: Field data May-June 1997

Polygyny (the practice of one man having more than one wife) remains widespread in this region but it is not very common (82.6% of the households sampled were monogamous). It appears to be unconnected with religious affiliation. Table 6 shows the frequency of polygyny in the Rwenya Basin.

Table 6. Frequency of polygyny in the Rwenya Basin

Number of wives	n = 610 Frequency
0	14
1	504
2	68
3	14
4	5
5	5

In the sample, there were 48 (7.9%) female-headed households, in almost all cases widows. Fourteen (2.3%) households were headed by widowers (Table 6). Such figures would not be remarkable in a North-based economy, but pressure to remarry is usually quite strong in rural African communities and significant numbers of widowers therefore suggests the nuclearisation of the social system.

The frequency of nuclear households is very high, with the great majority consisting of a man, his wife and children with no additional dependants. This is a relatively unusual pattern in rural Africa, where extended families with complex patterns of resident relatives are common. The reasons for this atomisation of the social structure are unclear, but the isolating effects of the protected villages is clearly important (see Section 5). The high incidence of labour migration is also relevant, since there are much stronger pressures militating against polygyny in towns (notably the greater influence of Christianity and the high cost of accommodation).

The predominance of women in every ward (Table 3) supports the notion that labour migration is preferentially male. Semi-permanent labour migration is common throughout the region, but particularly north of the river. Of the sample, some 333 (55%) households had no labour migrants. Table 7 shows the average numbers of migrants per household, both overall and by province:

Table 7. Migrants per household in the Rwenya Basin

	n	Mean	Range
Overall	610	0.91	0-14
Manicaland	343	0.72	0-12
Mashonaland East	267	1.17	0-14

Source: Field data May-June 1997

The difference between Manicaland and Mashonaland East appears to reflect the mean household size which is considerably larger in the latter than in the former (Table 4).

The effects of migration on social structure are difficult to assess. The fact that so many younger men migrate to work for cash both in urban areas and on large agricultural enterprises makes them unavailable for much of the farm work. This in turn creates problems for technologies that have high labour demands, such as soil conservation. Although migrants come back to visit they do not necessarily contribute except in terms of cash (which usually has the effect of increasing rural dependency).

Religion

Religion reflects the patterns of socio-economic change found in other spheres of social life. Shona religion has been described by Lan (1985) and Bourdillon (1976). Essentially it is based round an annual cycle of agricultural rituals that acknowledge the key role of the

ancestors in assuring rain and good harvests. Essential to its maintenance are the *waDzimu*, sometimes translated 'spirit-mediums', individuals within the community with enhanced spiritual powers. It is widely believed that chiefs cannot make major decisions without consulting the *waDzimu* and that the *waDzimu* punish those who transgress traditional prohibitions.

Christianity, especially Catholicism, has made an important impact south of the River. A series of missions was established in the 1950s and these have now become nuclei of settlement (especially Elim, Regina Coeli and Avila Missions). More recently, ecstatic churches such as ZAOGA have been established in larger settlements such as Kotwa, but they attract principally floating populations and they have yet to make much impact in rural areas.

Recent social change has led to the customs and conventions that control both farming and bush exploitation becoming more problematic to enforce. For example, the sacred forests *dzimbawe* throughout this region are the burial place of chiefs and it is forbidden to gather wood, cut trees or otherwise disturb them on pain of spiritual sanctions. However, many outsiders, unaware of these restrictions, have been making incursions into the forests both to cut wood for charcoal and to hunt game. Such conflicts have become more frequent in recent years.

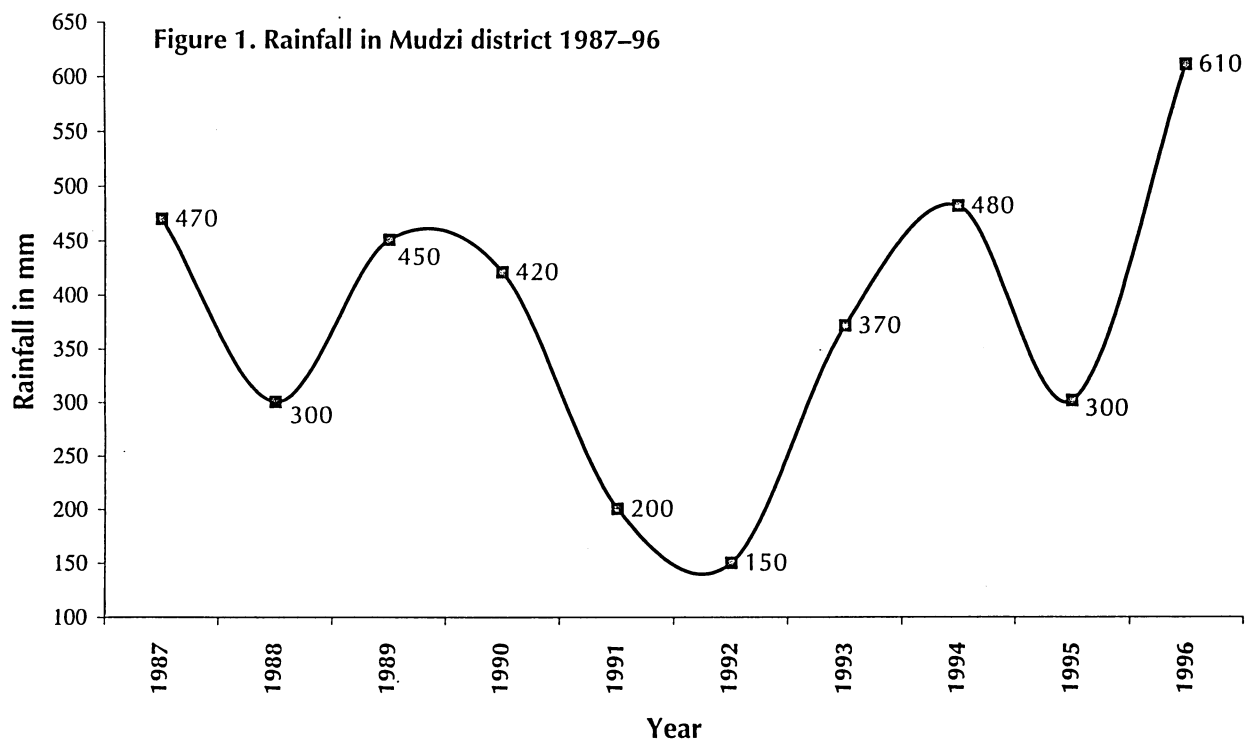
5 SOURCES OF CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

This section considers the causes of changing demographic patterns in the Rwenya Basin and their more general relevance.

Changing ecology

As social structure reflects ecology, especially in drier regions, changes in that ecology can sometimes lead to major shifts in the relationship of population to the environment. One classic transformation that has been much discussed is the prolonged drought which often leads to the loss of pastoral herds and consequent sedentarisation. Drought, however, can have an inverse effect on settled communities, making them more mobile. When livestock die and farms fail, as in the early 1990s in Zimbabwe, households are forced to scatter. Figure 1 indicates how serious the rainfall deficits were in Mudzi district during 1990-91.

During this time some individual cattle-owners moved with their cattle, trying to preserve them by taking them close to perennial rivers. Other cattle-owners were forced to depend more heavily than usual on bush resources for fodder and thus to move closer to the RWMA or the Nyatana Reserve north of the Kotwa-Nyamapanda road. The alluvial gold deposits in the area attracted both migration from outside the region and internal migration to streamside sites. Although there is always a small flow of incomers hoping to become wealthy from gold, in periods of drought the number increases as this livelihood option is not affected by the climate.



War and social disruption

War and social disorder represent another major source of social fragmentation. During the Zimbabwean war for independence (1965-80), one strategy of the UDI (the Unilateral Declaration of Independence) government was to create 'protected villages' in areas of low-density settlement. The 'protected villages' were settlements to which dispersed rural populations were relocated, both so they could be protected from attack and to restrict potential dealings with the guerrillas. During this period 'families' were allocated standard areas of land regardless of their size and there was a clear incentive to split up large kin groups to fit the definition of family encouraged by the authorities. Each household was given approximately 0.5 hectare of land on which to farm (about one-third of a typical landholding), and the result was soil degradation (from farming too long in the same place) and severe depletion of woody vegetation in the hinterland of the settlement. At the end of the war, the 'protected villages' were allowed to disperse. However, inhabitants did not immediately return to their original farmlands, as some had by that time adapted both socially and economically to the relatively attractive infrastructure provided in these settlements. The consequence was that the social composition of prewar settlements changed very radically throughout the region.

The Rwenya Basin was a zone of major insecurity during the UDI period. An uncleared minefield remains along the Mozambique border. The minefield continues to prevent the free passage of people, goods, livestock and wildlife to Mozambique. Even after independence in Zimbabwe the conflict between the RENAMO guerrillas and the Mozambican government continued to spill over the border into the Rwenya area, with

guerrillas hiding out from the army and kidnapping Zimbabwean citizens to work for them. After the ceasefire was officially signed, ex-RENAMO bandits continued to plunder settlements around the Rwenya on the Zimbabwe side for some time. The last major incursions are locally dated to 1992. The result was a significant depopulation of all border areas, a pattern that is only now beginning to be reversed.

More positive motives for reshaping the demography of the region can be attributed to the Kaerezi Resettlement Scheme, established in 1980. This was part of the National Resettlement Scheme, initiated at Zimbabwean Independence, to provide land for peasants dispossessed either by the war or by white farmers (Moore, 1993). Kaerezi is situated along the Mozambique border in high-rainfall undulating hill country about 75 km south of the Rwenya Basin. Each household in the scheme was allocated 3.5 hectares as well as access to a grazing commons; some 1,200 families have been settled there. A number of families previously resident in the Rwenya Basin have relocated there and the Nyanga District Council has pressed others to move on the grounds that they are less likely to experience crop failures and other drought-related problems. Most households have resisted moving, however, on the grounds that they will be separated from the graves of their ancestors.

Economic opportunities: the case of gold

The alluvial gold in north east Zimbabwe has been famous throughout this region from the end of the Middle Ages and Portuguese traders on the Mozambique coast made strenuous efforts to reach and capture the sources of the gold (Ellert, 1993). Gold-panning in the Rwenya River, along with other rivers in the area, has traditionally

been an important source of income for some individuals, going back to the precolonial era. Phiminster (1974, 1976) has described the panning for alluvial gold in this region in some detail. There is also reef gold which has generally been considered uneconomic to exploit, although one mine at Cluff's Hill (Makaha A) was open for some years during this century. Illegal vertical shafts have been dug at various sites near the rivers by those seeking reef gold; although these are prohibited, enforcement has proved difficult.

Recession and drought have recently stimulated an increase in panning and the opening of illegal trenches. Outsiders from many regions came to seek alluvial gold in the rivers during the drought of the early 1990s. In principle, permits for panning rest with the Department of Mines but recently authority has been given to MRDC to peg and allot permits for 50 m stretches of river. The sale of panned gold is in the hands of a relatively restricted circle of gold buyers, so that those actually working the river rarely earn significant sums from their efforts. Nonetheless, the potential to find a piece of gold large enough to make a substantial profit continues to attract panners, regardless of the system of permits.

Gold can either be worked all year round or as a dry-season activity. In the case of the latter, some members of a family may relocate to a temporary dwelling close to the rivers for part of the year. However, those who come from outside the region tend to make permanent houses and farms, especially if they are reasonably successful in the first year after moving. Gold is therefore a stimulus both to relocation within the region and to drift in from outside, often of dispossessed families.

6 PEOPLE VERSUS AGENCIES

NGOs

Just as missions compete for souls, so non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may compete for communities. NGOs in the Rwenya Basin are comparatively few in number compared with other communal lands in Zimbabwe, reflecting both fashion and overall population density². Nonetheless, the agendas of NGOs and the money they bring into the region have an important impact on the way individual householders present themselves. Table 8 shows the major NGOs operating in the Rwenya Basin and their areas of responsibility. The Table divides NGOs into two categories: those which require the involvement of entire communities, however defined, and those involved in large-scale or district-wide activities, such as proposal preparation, training for animal power, or paying individuals to work on road projects.

The great majority of NGOs function north of the river in the Mudzi area and most are not actually operative in the remoter wards. Activity in Nyanga is concentrated in the highlands area; the inaccessibility of the lowlands has left the wards there with limited outside assistance.

The conventional wisdom is that solutions to community problems are worked out with the participation of stakeholders in PRA-type exercises. Through a process of prompting, NGOs encourage farmers to identify problems for which the solutions are available because they have 'worked elsewhere'. Throughout much of Zimbabwe there is a high density of NGOs pressing householders to conform to their agendas. For their part, householders may have an

Table 8. NGOs operating in wards adjacent to the Rwenya Basin

Name	Wards	General Area of Concentration
Require community action		
CADAC	Mudzi	Boreholes
Christian Care	Nyanga	Boreholes
Genesis	Nyanga	Blocks for school buildings, toilets
Foundation ITDG	Nyanga	Process analysis
Monstrud	Mudzi	Agricultural development
Red Barnar	Mudzi	Nutrition gardens
World Vision	Mudzi	Nutrition gardens
Do not require community action		
BUN-Zimbabwe	All	Proposal preparation, solar energy
COOPIBO	Mudzi	Donkey promotion
DANIDA	Makaha A	Financial support to road maintenance
European Union	Mudzi	Financial support to road maintenance
Zimbabwe Trust	All	Umbrella organisation for CAMPFIRE

interest in convincing the NGOs that these solutions are acceptable because of the injection of resources which this implies. In order to do this, they may need to construct an appropriate community.

The nutrition gardens are an interesting example of this. These gardens are intended for the community to grow vegetables, so that mothers can feed these to their malnourished children. A certain amount of time is invested in communal plots and the income from the sale of vegetables is to be put to community projects. According to the organisers, the gardens work when the irrigation system is gravity-fed, i.e. no collective investment in maintenance of the irrigation system is required. Even then, there is a tendency for the irrigated areas to be turned over to maize for sale or subsistence, leaving behind the original purpose to improve the health of infants. At the same time, gardens fed by mechanical pumps of any description usually run into problems because the 'community' cannot agree to contribute for fuel and pump maintenance.

An interesting issue arises with respect to extension-type activities promoted by NGOs or others (mostly NGOs in the Rwenya area as AGRITEX is not active). In regions of uncertain precipitation and low population density such as the Rwenya Basin, farming is one component of a complex subsistence system. Labour migration, the purchasing of food with money sent by those in the city and the exploitation of 'wild' resources are also of major significance. To intervene effectively in such a system it is necessary to take account of the contribution of all these elements to the maintenance of livelihoods.

Yet agricultural extension is, by definition, aimed at farmers. Farmers are conceptualised as individuals who make their livelihood from cultivation and as such are interested in both cultivars and technologies that can

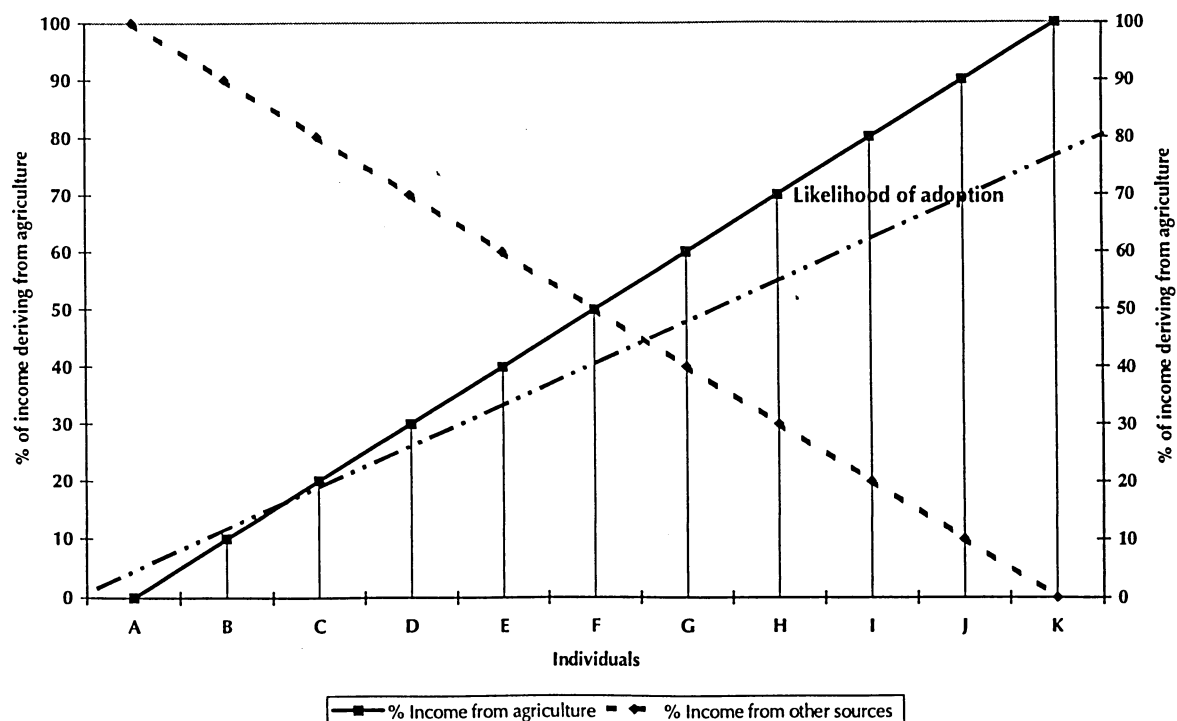
improve the yield of their farms. Nevertheless, farmers have a long record of being disinterested in many of the bright jewels of research stations. In some cases this is because the new technologies do not work or are inappropriate. But another quite different factor may be the relative importance of farming in many individual householders' lives. For example, a household that gets less than 50% of its income from farming will be far less interested in investing in testing, or even learning about a new crop or tillage technique. The opportunity cost of spending time doing this, weighed against other sources of possible income, rises as the proportion of household income derived from cultivation or animal husbandry falls.

Figure 2 is intended to represent this dilemma graphically. The X-axis denotes a series of individuals, A-K, whose sources of incomes vary from those deriving 100% of their income from agriculture to those deriving none. It suggests that the likelihood of considering or testing new technology relates to the assumed cost³ of that technology and to the proportion of the householder's income deriving from agriculture. This would also depend on two further rather unlikely assumptions:

- (i) perfect access to credit. (a farmer has to believe credit will be available for a technology that will require a cash outlay); and
- (ii) the technology is sufficiently attractive not to have a negative reputation running ahead of it.

The two do not run exactly in parallel, however, as otherwise adoption rates would be 100%, which they never are in the real world. The likelihood of actual adoption runs in parallel with the assumed cost of the technology, but at a lower level to account for contingent uncertainties.

Figure 2. Considering investing in new agricultural techniques



Householders are often defined as 'farmers' for the purposes of agricultural extension narratives. This enables them to be stigmatised as recalcitrant if they refuse to adopt or even consider an economically attractive new technology. But if the 'farmers' are considering the attractiveness of such a technology in terms of their overall livelihood strategies, their lack of interest can be perfectly rational.

An extreme case of this situation is the temptation of ultra-high returns - the 'lottery' case. Farming never offers high returns even under the best conditions. Some other activities of householders, such as seeking alluvial gold, usually only return a very small reward for the labour invested. However, occasional finds of substantial quantities of gold make the search for it far more alluring than planting a drought-resistant sorghum. The fantasy of wealth can displace the rationality of the quotidian, the common-sense strategies of daily life.

Aid dependency

Migration of younger males reduces labour available to produce food. In years of deficit families must then either purchase staples with cash or depend on drought relief (Palmer & Parson, 1977; Whitlow, 1980; Bratton, 1987). In the past, households were often able to subsist by buying maize with the money sent home from their migrant members. However, as the wages/prices ratio has changed - partly through persistent drought but also because of higher levels of urban unemployment - so the money remitted has become inadequate to meet food needs and more households request food aid in a given year. Up to 1995, drought relief supplies had been made available to poorer households in the Rwenya Basin for 8 of the previous 11 years. Records from the Department of Social Welfare suggest that the absolute number of households requesting supplementary food aid has been increasing every year (BUN-Zimbabwe, 1995). It appears that chronic aid dependency is developing, even in years when the precipitation is not especially low.

As one farmer observed before the harvest in 1996: 'Now people are roaming about looking for food'. His implication was that poorer households were casting about for sources of food aid, whether government or NGO. Food aid, free tillage, seed-packs and grain 'loans' that are not usually repaid contribute to smallholders' impression that an effective survival strategy is to extract as much as possible from government or other external agencies. Rural households in this area are tempted simply to build assistance into their budgeting; hence requests for drought relief are always increasing.

The structural consequences of this are interesting. If there were no relief flooding into the system, households would be forced either to restructure themselves to become viable, or to be extinguished. They would migrate out of the area, intensify their agriculture, call back family members who could contribute to the economic wellbeing of the family but are working out of the area or otherwise find a solution. As it is, drought

relief serves to maintain structurally dysfunctional households.

This has an impact both on the absolute human population of the area and on changing social cohesion. Although there is no reason to suppose that the rainfall regime has deteriorated substantially over the last century, the human population settled year-round in the area has certainly increased substantially. The effect has been both to deplete wild animal populations and to decrease the amount of grazing available for livestock. The classic system of exploiting semi-arid areas such as this was to farm small, fertile pockets of land and to depend heavily on cattle and hunted and gathered resources. Households in the past were almost certainly much larger, incorporating extended families, and they could call on all the labour resources of young men and children, who did not attend school. The present situation is that many households are cultivating areas which are not really suitable for cropping without substantial investment in infrastructure. Since many of the more able-bodied family members are absent, few improvements are made. At the same time these households have insufficient numbers of cattle to accommodate the inter-annual variation in availability of farmed cereal staples, hence the increased dependence on external assistance in the area.

With the institutionalisation of assistance from government and other agencies, householders factor in these elements in assessing their subsistence options. Deriving subsistence from a composite of sources militates against social cohesion, because individuals scatter to seek food and subsistence resources. For example, in parts of Africa with higher rainfall regimes, for example in Central Nigeria, whole-village labour parties are regularly mobilised for collective work either on farms or community projects, such as road maintenance. Institutions of this type are now wholly absent from the Rwenya Basin. Householders compete rather than collaborate to exploit patchy resources.

7 CONCLUSIONS

It is generally accepted that nomadic and migratory populations, especially those in arid and semi-arid zones, inevitably have a fluid sense of community because of their need to pursue patchy resources opportunistically. This applies particularly to pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. However, in some areas, especially those with poorly distributed rainfall, this can equally well apply to agricultural communities. Community fragmentation and resource patchiness go hand-in-hand in all types of society.

Beyond strictly ecological factors, war, social change, rural-urban migration and specific economic opportunities such as mining can lead to highly fragmented social structures. Societies without strong leadership to enforce social norms are more prone to crumble in this way.

No matter how ethnographically true this might be, it is administratively inconvenient. Development

agencies require order and structure to function effectively. The whole notion of developing technologies - be they social or technical - that can be applied across a range of sites is crucial to the persistence of an agency and indeed to the narratives of 'success'. In such cases, the temptation is therefore to rebuild the community as a locus of social action. Genuine communities grow like coral reefs and this process cannot be simulated. Bogus communities can easily be concocted, and are as easily shattered.

Much has been written on working with communities and listening to farmers; it may be there is little more to be said on the theoretical side, although there is clearly much practical work to be done. Perhaps more interesting would be to start understanding what can usefully be done where communities are not an effective channel for social action and where 'farmers' may have a limited interest in agriculture. Some might argue that the most appropriate first step would be to try to develop leadership institutions, and build up communities. The argument of this paper is that this would be unlikely to be sustainable in the long term without accompanying ecological or technical change.

Two consequences would seem to flow from this. The first is that external agencies should place a greater emphasis on designing technologies that are appropriate for individual (rather than community) adoption. The second is that there should be an increased focus on off-farm activities in rural areas. So, for example, if you breed a better bean that matches cultivators' planting strategies and is adapted to local ecological conditions then it will spread to farmers (as individuals) who are interested, as indeed new varieties of beans have spread in the Rwenya valley. Similarly, if more creative attention were to be paid to the sources of off-farm income in rural areas so that interventions more obviously matched the sources of rural livelihoods, then the migratory trends that have clearly had negative effects in so many areas might be reversed.

Theory and ethnography should move on to the 'un-community' - the accidental Thatcherites, constellations of social atoms - to understand their pattern and identify their incidence. Humpty-Dumpty observed that birthdays were poor sorts of things as you only had one every 365 days, but noted that all the other days were suitable for un-birthday presents. Which is to say, sometimes we function in terms of mainstream conceptual structures, ignoring alternative ways of looking at the world and perhaps ignoring a range of possible different experiences.

ENDNOTES

1. Ethnography can be defined as a type of social anthropology, the detailed description of social, material and spiritual life in small-scale societies. It was formerly applied to village communities in developing countries, but is now used of small social groups anywhere.
2. NGOs cluster in Zimbabwe in ways that do not appear to reflect the needs of communities, but rather the proximity of other NGOs and other factors that may include access. For example, in the Chivi area, south of Harare, in a not dissimilar rainfall regime, NGOs and other types of aid project are extremely dense, so much so that teams engaged in surveys and PRA exercises have to 'book' with communities to avoid clashing with studies from other agencies.
3. 'Cost' here is defined in the broadest way as a composite of finance, labour and psychological time spent weighing up the benefits of innovation.