



The colonial state, land-use policy and local responses in Seke Reserve, Rhodesia: 1935 to 1958



Authors:

Eric K. Makombe^{1,2} 
Clement Masakure² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of History, Heritage and Knowledge Systems, Faculty of Arts, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

²Department of History, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Clement Masakure,
masakurec@ufs.ac.za

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From the late 1920s onwards, the state in colonial Zimbabwe began reordering African areas to arrest an impending ecological disaster while increasing their carrying capacity. The state introduced far-reaching land-use measures anchored on several immutable tenets, such as that African reserves had to finance their own progress and sustain themselves within the demarcated boundaries. The reordering within Seke Reserve began with centralisation in 1935 and was reinforced following the passage of the Natural Resources Act of 1941 and the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) of 1951. This article is one of the few studies that grasp these three colonial policies simultaneously and highlights the knock-on effects each had on the other. It sheds light on these land-use measures, explores their implementation and impacts and shows how the locals responded to these changes. The period under review in this article has generally been given cursory attention as a fleeting backdrop to why the colonial state implemented the NLHA. Nonetheless, this article maintains that the critical factors that led to the demise of the NLHA are certainly discernible in this period. Hence, we assert that the colonial state's insistence on proceeding to enact the NLHA was just another classic example of colonial arrogance and the scapegoating of Africans for the agroecological problems in the reserves. The article made extensive use of archival material from the Native Affairs Department as well as from the phenomenological recollections of several elderly inhabitants within the Seke Reserve captured through oral history interviews.

Contribution: The clarification of the interdependence of the three colonial programmes regarding existing land-use policies, their implementation, impacts and local responses significantly adds to the limited body of knowledge currently available.

Keywords: Seke; colonial; land; centralisation; Natural Resources Act; Native Land Husbandry Act; African; indigenous farming practices; cattle; conservation.

Introduction

Using the case of the Seke (formerly Seki)¹ Reserve from the 1930s to the 1950s, this article examines the implementation of land use measures, beginning with the centralisation of the Reserve in 1935 and continuing with the implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) in the 1950s. As what happened in Seke Reserve and other areas, the measures intended to bring lasting change in African agricultural systems by enforcing new land use measures and conserving the environment. It is essential to highlight that beginning in the 1920s, population and livestock pressure started to increase in many African areas, putting short-term survival at stake. The passage of the 1930 Land Apportionment Act (LAA) exacerbated the situation further as African reserves had to absorb another influx of Africans evicted from alienated lands. Hence, protecting land resources and sustainable use of arable land received high priority.

However, complex social, cultural and economic factors caused Africans to apply 'inappropriate' agricultural technologies, eventually leading to physical degradation, which made using 'appropriate' husbandry methods challenging. Key among these factors was increasing rural population pressure, which led to a shortage of land and poverty in all its manifestations. Therefore, the article emphasises how the abrupt change in land use practices following centralisation and the introduction of the Natural Resources Act (NRA) of 1941 and the NLHA produced a variety of new challenges for Africans in Seke Reserve, one of the first reserves in modern-day Mashonaland where such new practices were applied. These measures made it impossible to grant the standard holding or any area large enough for successful farming or a decent living standard, to all who had a claim. Furthermore, using the case of cattle control in Seke Reserve, the article reveals that the pursuit of these measures intending to protect the

¹We have used current place names for this article. Colonial names appear in brackets at first citation: Harare (Salisbury); Nyarushezhe (Nyarushehe); Seke (Seki); Chihota (Shiota); Mupfure (Umfuli); Shurugwi (Selukwe); Chinamhora (Chindamora).

environment from the effects of the hitherto 'old slapdash methods'² of African agricultural practices, only managed to expose the environment to the harmful effects of the weather.

The article primarily relies on archival documents and interviews³ on implementing these policies and the African response. It argues that the measures were bound to fail because the institutional framework upon which they were passed was all wrong. As we show below, the policies were imposed upon people who could only respond to them through apathy or with some degree of hostility. This hostility manifested in various covert means, such as the continuation of 'traditional' farming practices in specific designated fields and compliance with the 'good husbandry' methods in other fields. The state realised when it was approaching the end of the decade following the passage of the NLHA that it had failed and started issuing statements retracting or ordering the stoppage of some of the so-called conservation work they had been carrying out since the entry of agricultural demonstrators in the late 1920s.

The land issue in Zimbabwe has generated a sizable body of scholarly literature, of which detailed discussion falls outside of this scope.⁴ This article is particularly interested in the literature on land use measures in African areas and closely linked to the colonial implementation of conservation measures through various policies. Scholars such as V.E.M. Machingaidze, I. Phimister, E. Kramer, M. Nyandoro and E.K. Makombe, for example, have examined the genesis of colonial policies such as the NHLA and how the Rhodesian state deployed such policies in its efforts at reorganising African areas in colonial Zimbabwe.⁵ Furthermore, I. Phimister and J. McGregor, for example, have analysed the reasons behind the formulation and implementation of conservation policies such as the NRA and African response to state intervention.⁶

While most works take a broad nationwide overview of the implementation of colonial programmes, Kramer, Nyandoro

and McGregor, for example, examine such programmes through specific case studies. Using the case of the Shurugwi (Selukwe) Reserve, where the colonial state implemented the first centralisation scheme in 1929, Kramer identifies the passage of the LAA and the increased population pressure that saw Africans being compelled 'to abandon their time-honoured extensive methods of rotational cultivation and adopt a system of permanent allocation of land'.⁷ In other words, permanent arable and grazing lands were created. The reorganisation was meant to increase the carrying capacity of the Reserve. Kramer argues that this scheme's short-lived success had to be revised in the 1930s.⁸ Also focussing on Shurugwi Reserve, McGregor examines the implementation of environmental legislation and policies from the 1920s onwards. Just as with centralisation, Shurugwi was the testing ground for the NRA, and McGregor notes that the model of the developmental scheme implemented in Shurugwi was to be adopted elsewhere.⁹ Using the case of the Sanyati Reserve from the 1950s onwards, Nyandoro examines the evictions and resettlement of Africans in the Reserve and notes how the NLHA was to ensure that land was available for newcomers.¹⁰ For Nyandoro, the late 1940s and 1950s marked the height of planned modernisation aimed at converting colonial Zimbabwe into a white man's country rather than uplifting Africans.¹¹

The literature from these authors reports that the reactions to these colonial programmes in Shurugwi and Sanyati were undoubtedly mixed. On the one hand, the coercive administration of environmental policies and legislation spurred significant African resistance. Yet, on the other hand, some traditional chiefs welcomed these interventions because they wanted to reassert their control. These results underscore the need to conduct case-specific research in different African areas to capture the specificities and nuances of the area under investigation.

In addition, the above scholarship – national and the one that is localised – demonstrates the state's intervention capacity in the guise of development and conservation in African areas in colonial Zimbabwe. The intervention was not only to arrest the impending ecological disaster in such areas but also to increase the reserves' carrying capacity and, in the process, ensure enough arable land for white agriculture. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates Africans' resistance to this continued marginalisation to the extent that some scholars like Machingaidze argue that such policies, especially the NLHA, became one of the recruiters for nationalists.¹²

2. National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), S235/514, District Annual Report, AN Commissioner, Goromonzi, 1936. (cf. Appendix 1).

3. The interviews cited in this article are part of many interviews conducted by one of the authors at various intervals starting in 2002 up to 2011. We declare that consent was sought from the informants to use the material for research.

4. See, for example, R. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); H. V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984); S. Moyo, *The land question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES Trust, 1995); L. Tshuma, *A Matter of (in)justice: Law, State and the Agrarian Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES Trust, 1997).

5. V.E. M. Machingaidze, "Agrarian Change from Above: The Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African Response", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 3 (1991), 557–88; I. Phimister, "Rethinking the Reserves: Southern Rhodesia's Land Husbandry Reviewed", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993), 225–9; E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies: Early Centralisation Efforts in Colonial Zimbabwe", *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83–98; M. Nyandoro, "Land Use and Agrarian Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe: Re-ordering of African Society and Development in Sanyati, 1950–1966", *Historia* 64, no. 1 (2019), 111–39; E. K. Makombe, "Developing Rural Africa: Rural Development Discourse in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1944–79", in *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism*, edited by J. Hodge, G. Hödl and M. Kopf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 155–78.

6. I. Phimister, "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas about Development in Southern Rhodesia 1930–1950", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986), 263–75, and J. McGregor, "Conservation, Control and Ecological Change: The Politics and Ecology of Colonial Conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe", *Environment and History* 1, no. 3 (1995), 257–79.

7. E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

8. E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies ..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

9. J. McGregor, "Conservation, Control and Ecological Change..." *Environment and History* 1, no. 3 (1995), 257–79.

10. M. Nyandoro, "Land Use and Agrarian Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe..." *Historia* 64, no. 1 (2019), 111–39.

11. M. Nyandoro, "Land Use and Agrarian Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe..." *Historia* 64, no. 1 (2019), 111.

12. V. E. M. Machingaidze, "Agrarian Change from Above..." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 3 (1991), 557–88.

This article builds on the impressive literature discussed above. However, our entry point seeks to spotlight the implementation of centralisation, the NRA and the NLHA in one specific case study. Hence, the article uses the case of the Seke Reserve to further engage with the land use measures following the centralisation of the Reserve in 1935 and the implementation of the NRA and NLHA to reorganise African areas to ensure the maximum exploitation of resources. Although the Seke Reserve was one of the first reserves in Mashonaland to be targeted for centralisation, it has received little attention in the literature. Located just 12 miles away (19.3 kms) from the capital, Harare (Salisbury), at its closest point, an examination of what transpired in the Seke Reserve from the 1930s to the 1950s gives us a good entry point into examining the implementation of state-led land use policies and measures to bring out the continued obsession of the colonial state with reordering and intervening in African areas. For the most part, the literature focusses on either centralisation, the NRA or NLHA, yet we demonstrate, in this article, how the three are intimately connected. Of course, like some of the other literature, we also privilege African initiatives by relying on interviews with the locals, demonstrating how Africans within a particular locality, in this case, Seke Reserve, responded to these interventions and initiatives over time.

We divided the article into four sections. The first section is the historical background of Seke Reserve. The second section examines the implementation of the centralisation scheme in the Reserve. The third section analyses the implementation of the NRA, and the fourth section explores the execution of the NLHA in the Reserve. Overall, this article highlights the manifestations of policies passed by the settler regime as they affected one aspect: the environment the government wanted to protect in a more defined area, the Seke Reserve. In other words, the article shows the intricacies of those measures as they ensued at a micro-level. In addition, the article will show how those policies were received by revealing how the people of Seke responded.

Historical background: From demarcation to centralisation

The Seke Reserve was demarcated in 1899. It initially comprised land between the Hunyani River to the north and northeast, European land to the northwest and the old Charter Road to the west (cf. Map 1). An imaginary line from Old Charter Road to the Hunyani River served as the Reserve's southern boundary, separating it from the Chihota (Shiota) Reserve in the south.¹³ In 1911, Seke's boundaries were redefined, with Seke and Chihota reserves now having a common boundary along the Nyatsime and Nyarushezhe (Nyarisheshe) rivers.¹⁴ With the new boundaries, Seke 'gained' a large piece of land measuring 15000 morgen (31754 acres). Still, the area was, according to Geoffrey Burnes, the Land Inspector, 'rather poor sand veldt with a lot

of bush on the Northern portion, and ...inferior veldt to that south of the [Mupfure] (Umfuli) River'.¹⁵ In all, the total area of the Reserve was now 77780 acres, of which 77440 were considered arable and grazing land, while the remainder was considered wasteland.¹⁶ The Reserve was located in the agroecological Natural Region II, within the 32'' to 36'' (813 mm to 914 mm) rainfall belt except for the southernmost portion, which was in the 28'' to 32'' (711 mm to 813 mm) rainfall belt.¹⁷ But in terms of effective rainfall, the Reserve's rainfall fell between 20'' to 25'' (508 mm to 635 mm).¹⁸ This variance resulted from the loamy sands or sandy loams throughout the Reserve, which had high soil moisture deficiencies.

Seke experienced moderate dry spells in summer. Its mean annual temperature ranged between 60°F and 70°F (16°C and 21°C).¹⁹ In common with all the other regions, the hottest period of the year was from September to October. However, the outset of the main rains in November alleviated temperatures. During this period, hot desiccating winds were common, and the vegetation severely felt their effect.²⁰ As a result, as Gibson Gerema recalled, 'trees like the *Muhacha*, *Muzhanje*, and *Mutamba* species were not cut down, but other tree species such as the *Mushava* and *Mukuyu* could be cut down'.²¹ The reason is that trees like *Muhacha* could shade the emergent crops and protect them from the sun's direct rays. Furthermore, those working in the fields could obtain some fruits while carrying on with their work.²²

It is important to briefly outline the prevailing farming and animal husbandry practices before the government's intervention via agricultural demonstrators. *Sabhuku* (Headman) D. Besa of Besa Village remembered that 'before the demonstrators came, we would throw our seed all over our land. At the time, it made sense because it gave us ample time to dedicate to other tasks'.²³ Crops like sugar cane, cucumbers, maize and Bambara nuts were mixed during cropping. Besides maize, which provided grain for *sadza*

13.NAZ, L2/2/117/42, Seki and Shiota Native Reserves, 1912. A morgen is a former unit of measurement equal to about 2 acres. (cf. Appendix 1)

14.NAZ, F458/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

15.NAZ, F458/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. Zimbabwe is classified into five agro-ecological zones, referred to as natural regions, based on a variety of characteristics, including vegetation, soil quality, and rainfall patterns. From Natural Region I to V, the quality of the land resource decreases. See: V. Vincent and R. G. Thomas, *An Agricultural Survey of Southern Rhodesia: Part 1, Agro-Ecological Survey* (Harare: Government Printer, 1961); R. N. Timberlake, N. Nobanda, and I. Mapaire, *Vegetation Survey of the Communal Lands, North and West Zimbabwe* (Harare: R. & SS Information Services, 1993).

16.Effective rainfall is the sum of climatic factors expressed in one practical term after incorporating the reducing effects of excessive falls resulting in runoff, percolation and the effects of temperature.

17.NAZ, F458/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

18.J. M. Rattray, "Vegetation types of southern Rhodesia," *Kirkia* 2 (1968), 68–93.

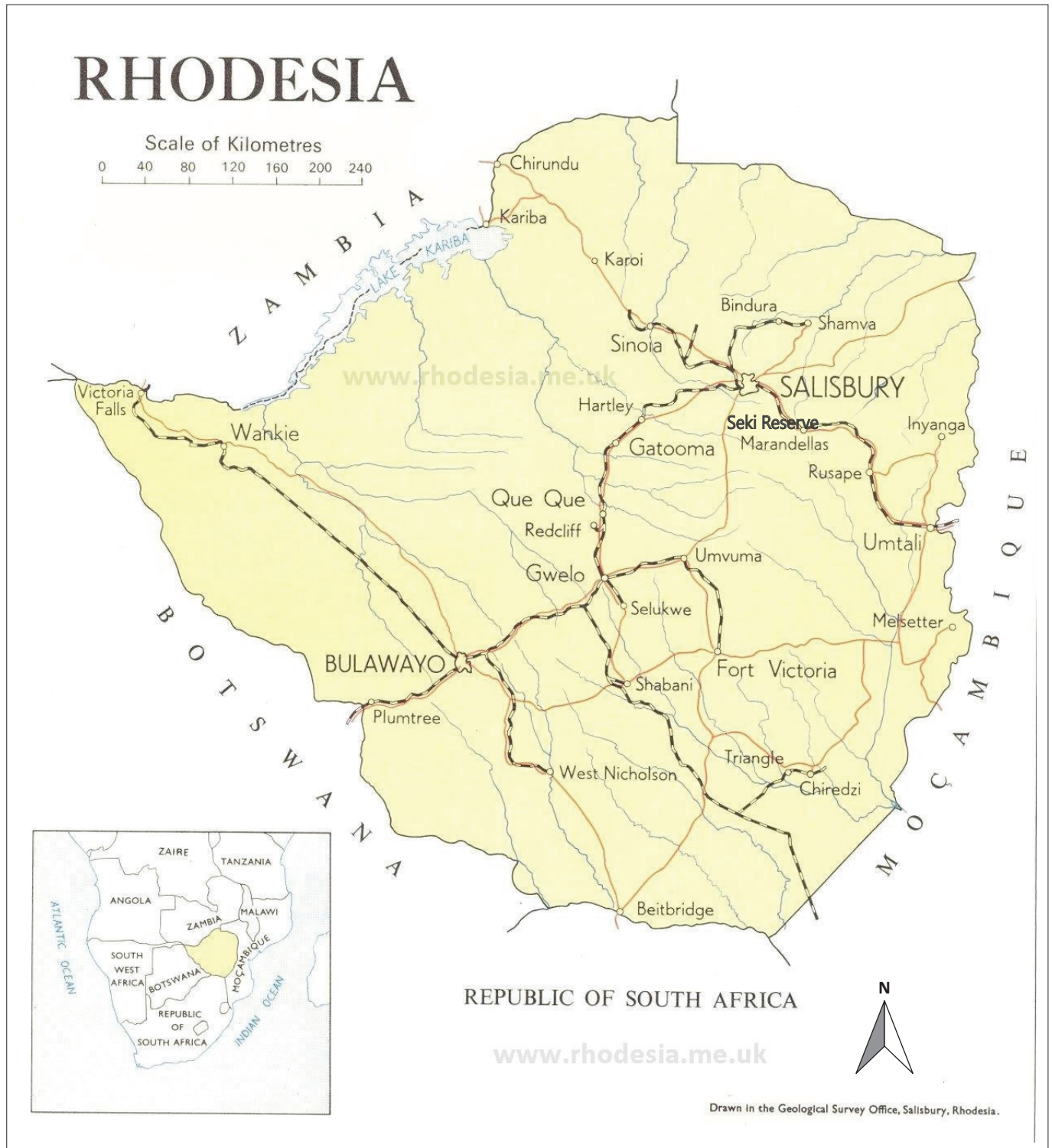
19.Interview with G. Gerema on 16/8/2002 in the Mushangwe Line of Seke Communal Lands.

20.Interview with G. Gerema on 16/8/2002 in the Mushangwe Line of Seke Communal Lands. It must be noted that the dominant tree species in the reserve were the *Musasa* and *Munondo*, and there were traces of many other tree species scattered in their distribution such as the *Mutamba*, *Muhacha*, *Mufute*, *Mushava* and *Muzhanje*. The *Munondo* that was a more hardy tree gradually assumed dominance. Trees like the *Muhacha* were not many in the eastern portion of the reserve but tended to increase in distribution westwards.

21.Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

13.NAZ, L2/2/117/42, Seki and Shiota Native Reserves, 1912. (cf. Appendix 1)

14.NAZ, L2/2/117/42, Seki and Shiota Native Reserves, 1912. (cf. Appendix 1)



Source: Map retrieved and adapted from https://www.rhodesia.me.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/RSRMap1973b_final2.jpg

MAP 1: Rhodesia map indicating the location of the Seki Reserve.

(thick porridge), Bambara nuts were the main crop as they provided relish in their fresh and dried form and could also be used to make 'mutakura [samp and legumes mixture]'.²⁴ According to D. Besa, sugarcane and cucumbers had a vital role to play in that they provided food for those working in the fields, and this, in turn, minimised journeys back to the

²⁴Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands. (cf. Appendix 1).

house in search of food. Such practice proved to be particularly beneficial in the morning when labour was at its peak, and as a result, most of the fields could be worked in one morning. Mixed cropping had other benefits as well. As noted by H. L Moore and M. Vaughan, besides mixed cropping ensuring higher yield, it was also an insurance against crop failure, a method of disease control and an assurance of efficient use of physical resources by plants with

different needs and characteristics.²⁵ White Native Affairs Department (NAD) officials regarded the Africans' mixed cropping practices as 'old slapdash methods of agriculture'.²⁶ Even though each household had its field, a community field was also worked by the community known as '*zunde*'. The produce from this field would go to the Chief's silos for use in times of hunger.²⁷ Harvesting in the *zunde* was done communally in rotation from household to household.²⁸

Related to animal husbandry, D. Besa also remembered that back then, 'we used to treat our cattle by feeding them with a mixture of herbs mixed with the 'fibrous insides' of a cactus-like plant'.²⁹ He stated that the mixture was used to treat a cattle disease called *Chigwadara* [foot-and-mouth disease].³⁰ Another practice that D. Besa remembered was the slashing and burning of dry grass following the dry season so that their cattle would graze on fresh grass known as '*ruswiswi*', which emerged after the first rains fell.³¹ The early Native Commissioners (NCs) were not particularly amused by these practices and found them disappointing. In 1923, the NC of Goromonzi could not help hiding his irritation, saying:

The Natives have made no real attempt to improve the productive power of the soil; they are loath to use manure as this tends to increase the growth of weeds, which would mean more work for them in keeping their gardens clean.³²

The settler government later moved to ban the farming practices outlined above and imposed fines to curb their continuation.

From centralisation to fragmentation: 1930s–1940s

The NAD rejoiced when agricultural demonstrators descended upon Seke Reserve in the early 1930s. As elsewhere, the demonstrators received mixed responses from the African people. K.T. Mangwadu noted that the people of Seke generally welcomed the demonstrators and their instructions as he says that 'the Demonstrators were well received because they brought with them 'civilisation'. As a result, people from Seke and Chihota became the best farmers'.³³ Mangwadu's opinion was shaped by his experiences because:

As a boy child, my parents sent me to various places where our relatives resided, and I would observe their farming techniques.

25.H. L. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting down trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890–1990* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), 35.

26.NAZ, S235/514, District Annual Report, AN Commissioner, Goromonzi, 1936. (cf. Appendix 1).

27.Interview with K. T. Mangwadu on 5/8/2002 in Hatfield, Harare.

28.Interview with K. T. Mangwadu on 5/8/2002 in Hatfield, Harare.

29.Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

30.Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

31.Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

32.NAZ, S235/501, District Annual Report, NC, Goromonzi, 1923. (cf. Appendix 1).

33.Interview with K. T. Mangwadu on 5/8/2002 in Hatfield, Harare.

For instance, in Nyanga, where my sister had been married ... the people didn't even know what using our methods was about.³⁴

However, M. Mukundwa revealed that 'even though we accepted the instructions from the demonstrators, we nonetheless also stuck to the practices that we were used to'.³⁵ They would then practice the 'good' farming methods in one field known as '*Munda wechidhomini* [the field for the demonstrators]', which, as the name implies, was meant for the demonstrators' eyes' only. Interestingly, D. Besa fondly recollected that the demonstrators taught them to 'grow each seed on its own as a pure stand instead of just broadcasting seed all over the field'.³⁶

While the demonstrators had been received with much zeal by the people of Seke, by 1933, ironically, only 11 plots were being worked in Seke, 4 years after the demonstrators set foot.³⁷ From the demonstrators' point of view, this was frustrating, especially considering that eight people had opted out during that time. The demonstrators were further infuriated that only two original plot-holders had endured the entire 4 years. The Assistant Native Commissioner (AN Commissioner) for Goromonzi that incorporated the Seke Reserve reckoned that 'new lessons and new methods make a ready appeal in the beginning but are found to be tedious'.³⁸ He further advised that the demonstrators had to:

Endeavour complaisantly to keep a plot holders' interest till the full cycle of crop rotation is completed so that the productivity of the soil should not depend only on the supply of manure, but the advantage of the benefits of legumes and fallowing have to be taken.³⁹

However, while the NAD initially welcomed agricultural demonstrators from the Department of Native Agriculture (DNA), they were less welcoming of centralisation. The AN Commissioner, L. Powys Jones, grew increasingly sceptical of the demonstrators' approach and practices. In 1933, Powys Jones reported on the activities of a certain demonstrator known as Mhlanga, writing that:

The chief and people (of Seke) have been persuaded by a government official to ask for something [centralisation], the full implication of which they cannot understand and the practicability of which may be uncertain.⁴⁰

Powys Jones, who had been previously posted in Chinamhora (Chindamora), witnessed the people's traumatic experiences, making him sceptical about the benefits of centralisation. He noted that after centralisation had been implemented in

34.Interview with K. T. Mangwadu on 5/8/2002 in Hatfield, Harare.

35.Interview with M. Mukundwa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

36.Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/02 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

37.NAZ, S15/A/47, Correspondence General. (cf. Appendix 1).

38.NAZ, S15/A/47, Correspondence General. (cf. Appendix 1).

39.NAZ, S15/A/47, Correspondence General. (cf. Appendix 1).

40.NAZ, S15/A/47, Correspondence General. (cf. Appendix 1).

Chinamhora, the inhabitants were '... almost unanimous in saying that the new arable allotment was smaller than the old'.⁴¹ Despite the protestations, centralisation commenced in 1935, emanating from an experiment conducted in 1929 in the Shurugwi Reserve.⁴² Ostensibly, centralisation was introduced to ensure the use for habitation, grazing, agriculture and afforestation of the area best fitted for these purposes.

Powys Jones had nonetheless made three critical observations and recommendations in his 1933 report, which would have made the state reconsider going ahead with centralisation and other technical development policies that followed. Firstly, the observation was that:

... [I]n ... areas where insufficient or poor land has been set aside for occupation by the African section of the population, I have been favourably impressed by the naturalness and ingeniousness of Africans...and by their greater willingness to co-operate in activities directed to their advancement.⁴³

Secondly, he recommended that if centralisation was implemented, the areas allotted had to be in proportion to the present and probable future standard of living and needs of the people.⁴⁴ Thirdly, the observation was that 'wholesome and lasting change must be brought slowly in African societies. Transatlantic methods are not always the best for all types of people'.⁴⁵

However, despite the initial apprehension that NAD officials expressed in the early 1930s, they soon began to appreciate how they could use such a system as a cheap and effective way of protecting the arable lands from stray animals as problems of wandering animals destroying other people's fields intensified in Seke. Because of the lack of funds for fencing, the grazing and arable lands were separated by erecting huts in a row between them. Fencing, therefore, became unnecessary after Seke was centralised. More importantly, the NAD realised that centralisation made their work much easier in controlling villagers and administering the territory.

However, other concerns influenced the adoption and implementation of this policy. Centralisation was also driven by the incessant pleas from the DNA and its demonstrators, who were better able to carry out their tasks in a cadastral setting they were more accustomed to since this was what informed their training.⁴⁶ Besides just making it convenient for the demonstrators who had to instruct the whole Reserve, the underlying concept behind it was to redress what the settlers

41.NAZ, S15/A/47, Correspondence General. (cf. Appendix 1).

42.Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, *An Agricultural Survey of Southern Rhodesia* (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1960), 95; E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

43.E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

44.E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

45.E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

46.T. Taringana and P. Nyambara, "Negotiated Cultural Identities? Missionaries, Colonisation and Cultural Transformation in Chipinge, 1894–1965", *Chiedza: Journal of Arrupe Jesuit University* 21, no. 1 (2018), 45–59.

saw as 'deficiencies in the traditional system of landholding', according to Kramer.⁴⁷ The settlers had for long viewed African agrarian systems as wasteful and low-yielding. Despite these views, the AN Commissioner still felt that indigenous farming practices tended to be more appropriate when measured against 'Transatlantic methods' and warned on the possibility of involution taking place. According to the anthropologist C. Geertz, agricultural involution occurs when smallholder farmers progressively subdivide inherited plots over generations owing to natural increases of the population such that later descendants eventually have unviable plot sizes and decreased per capita wealth.⁴⁸

When Seke was centralised, 3200 acres of its 77780 acres were already under some basic infrastructure such as roads, schools, among others.⁴⁹ The remaining 74580 acres were redistributed among its population. The NC recommended that each tax-paying male, with or without a wife, be allotted a minimum of 4 acres.⁵⁰ He suggested that each tax-paying unit receive two additional acres as pastures for their livestock. However, such allotments would have only accommodated 1090 family units, and the acreage had to be revised as there were 2450 units.⁵¹ It was, therefore, decided to reduce the residential plot of each tax-paying unit to a quarter of an acre and reduce the arable and grazing land per family unit. Even then, the Reserve could not carry the 14500 head of cattle, reducing the herd to just 12810.⁵²

In 1938, the AN Commissioner for the Goromonzi sub-district reported that he had already started to attain remarkable results 'due almost entirely to Native Demonstrators and Centralisation' for the reserves in the sub-district in general. But he was particularly pleased with Seke saying:

... [T]here is an object lesson [in Seke] for those interested in grass and grazing problems. The grass is close-cropped throughout the year. The cattle in this reserve, numbering 13700, keep [sic] the best condition. The country round about Manyere is open and bleak like the downlands of England. Couch has asserted itself everywhere, and the good condition of cattle may be attributed to the higher feeding value of this grass.⁵³

However, a few years later, the NAD sang a different tune.

Accompanying centralisation was the requirement that Africans now had to follow the 'good farming practices' taught by the agricultural demonstrators to combat further soil loss. Such practices hinged on two key steps: using the plough for tillage and practising monoculture. With the country's 'newfound vigour to protect nature's' endowments, *cultivates*

47.E. Kramer, "A Class of Economies..." *Zambezia* 25, no. 1 (1998), 83.

48.See C. Geertz, *Agricultural Involvement: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia*. Vol. 11. Univ of California Press, 1963.

49.H. V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land...*, 88.

50.H. V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land...*, 88.

51.H. V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land...*, 88.

52.H. V. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land...*, 88.

53.NAZ, S235/516, District Annual Reports, NC, Salisbury, 1938. (cf. Appendix 1).

were introduced into the Reserve for weeding the fields regularly.⁵⁴ The demonstrators encouraged early and late crop weeding to keep the fields clean of any weeds smothering and consequently choking off their potential yields.

The administrators and Africans came into constant conflict regarding this issue. M. Besa noted that the administrators misconstrued what they were trying to do when they came into conflict over weeding issues. He argued that they were not against weeding their fields but only deferred this task.⁵⁵ Instead, the people of Seke preferred weeding their fields just after the end of the rains to ensure a weed-free harvest as the weeds would not have a chance of re-growing to their original height as the main stands of crops would have effectively shielded the sun away from the sprouting weeds, and this would inhibit growth as the weeds would shrivel off as a result. However, G. Gerema blamed the misunderstanding on the *culvates* introduced around this time. He said:

We couldn't weed our crops early using the *culvate*, as it would also unearth the crops together with the weeds. As a result, we had to wait for the crops to grow [stronger] for us to be able to move into the field with the *culvates*.⁵⁶

The demonstrators also introduced ploughs and insisted that the fields be kept free of weeds. As ploughs substantially reduced the required labour, this method was widely accepted and used in Seke, even by individuals who did not own livestock. To receive the same benefits as stock owners, non-stock owners negotiated agreements with the former in which they tendered their grain after harvesting in exchange for tillage services. The gardens in the yards and wetlands, mainly used for growing sweet potatoes, were the only places where hoes or mattocks were still used.

However, despite the benefits that weighed heavily in favour of the plough as a tillage implement, it paradoxically aided rapid soil loss through erosion.⁵⁷ The plough caused the soil to lose its natural structure as the regular turning over of the soil destroyed many of the organisms that were present in it. Ploughing made the soil 'fluffy' and ideal to be washed away. In contrast, the system of mixed cropping that was still being secretly practised ensured that the soil remained compact as different rooting systems exploited different levels in the soil profile, thus ensuring that air moved freely and aggregated the soil particles at the same time.⁵⁸ Sub-surface compaction characterised by plough pans formed by the heavy load exerted from the base of the plough limited the amount of water infiltrating into the soil,

and this, in turn, promoted surface sealing, which in turn resulted in the top layer of the soil developing into a crust.⁵⁹ The incrustation, over time, encouraged lateral surface runoff of rainwater. The water loss in this manner may have been negligible to crop yields.

Nevertheless, soil loss had longer-term consequences, as runoff gradually washed away the superior topsoil, leaving the inferior and less fertile sub-soil for cropping purposes. What was particularly tragic about Seke was that sheet erosion was usually not visible until losses were in the region of two to four tonnes per acre because the landscape was primarily flat sand veldt.⁶⁰ In the meantime, while the silt was washing away, the remaining clay fractions of the soil tended to thicken more and would thus effectively choke off the seeds from access to the sun and water before they would have been able to germinate.

The Natural Resources Act in Seke: 1941–1950

The NRA of 1941 gave the NAD and the DNA the much-needed reprieve to make their methods enforceable by policy.⁶¹ At the same time, farming in the reserves became further restricted by the NRA's conservationist concerns. Part IV of the NRA dealt with African areas hinged on two particular tenets: de-stocking and constructing soil conservation works to maintain the delicate balance between crop production, pastures and livestock production.⁶² These were coupled with what the settler government defined as good farming practices, such as the use of the plough and crop rotations. M. Yudelman views the passing of the NRA as a turning point because '... for the first time, there was legal sanction for compulsion rather than persuasion as a means of improving production methods'.⁶³

In Seke, practices such as burning grass, which were initially frowned upon, were now made illegal. The demonstrators effectively channelled some of their energies towards fighting this practice, prompting the AN Commissioner to write in 1946 that 'Propaganda to fight this evil [burning grass] is maintained although it is feared with little success. One comes to the reluctant conclusion that punishment is the only deterrent which is effective'.⁶⁴ However, by illegalising the practice of burning veldt just before the outset of the rains, the NAD had also effectively increased the prevalence of stock diseases in the area as the system not only provided fresh graze for the stock after the rains but also killed off any disease-

59.B. Oldrieve, *Conservation Framing* (Prestige Business Services (Pvt) Ltd, 1993), 18.

60.NAZ, F448/1/3, Correspondence from Provincial Agriculturist, Letter from A.F. Carlaw the Provincial Agriculturist. (cf. Appendix 1).

61.W. E. Bond, "Soil Conservation and Land Use Planning in Native Reserves in Southern Rhodesia," *Tropical Agriculture*, 25, no. 1 (1948), 5. For more on the genesis of the NRA see J. McGregor, "Conservation, Control and Ecological Change..." *Environment and History* 1, no. 3, (1995), 257–79.

62.NAZ, S160 DMN 2/9/51-22/33/53, General Report of the Second Inter-African Soils Conference, 1954. (cf. Appendix 1).

63.M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land* (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1964), 16.

64.NAZ, S235/518, NC's Annual Reports, 1946. (cf. Appendix 1).

54.The *Culvate* was a similar implement to the *Cultivator* designed to facilitate weeding made from symmetrical bough tree branches.

55.Interview with M. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

56.Interview with G. Gerema on 16/8/2002 in the Mushangwe Line of Seke Communal Lands.

57.See for example, C. Conz, "Wisdom Does Not Live in One House: Compiling Environmental Knowledge in Lesotho, Southern Africa, C. 1880–1965," PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2017, 81.

58.R. Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Essex: Longman Group Ltd, 1983), 86.

carrying parasite within the grass. Hence, cattle had to be dipped more regularly than elsewhere because of the high prevalence of stock diseases like quarter evil and lumpy skin disease in Seke. Cattle dipped weekly in summer and fortnightly in winter, while the national average was fortnightly and monthly.⁶⁵ Most of the land degradation would occur at these dip tanks, which were constructed at the major rivers of Seke, namely the Nyatsime, Hunyani and Nyarushezhe, to be near adequate water supplies. The heavy trampling of the sloping ground by large numbers of cattle destroyed the natural grass cover, and severe erosion of the bare soil ensued.

When the NRA was passed, Seke only had three dip tanks, namely the Manyere, Seke and Nyarushezhe dip tanks, catering to around 14 000 heads. In January 1943, the three dip tanks dipped 3712, 6054, and 4617 heads of cattle, respectively.⁶⁶ A new dip tank was constructed in 1943 at Chirimamunga to alleviate the pressure of livestock dipping at the three dip tanks.⁶⁷ However, this was insufficient because the Natural Resources Board (NRB) recommended a maximum of 1000 cattle per dip tank.⁶⁸ Thus, the Chirimamunga dip tank only managed to spread the heavy trampling of the river banks to another location. Moreover, G. Gerema claimed:

Another problem that we encountered was that the hand pumps which they used would be out of order repeatedly, resulting in us travelling longer distances to other dip-tanks which would be operating.⁶⁹

The breakdown of hand pumps further increased the ruin at dip tanks with functional hand pumps.

The damage not only took place at the dip tanks but also *en route* to dipping cattle. The movement of large numbers of cattle at frequent intervals over long distances produced cattle tracks, which developed into shallow-like trench formations. G. Gerema explained that 'this would become particularly worse during the rainy season as cattle would easily 'shovel out' the wet soil along the track to the dip-tank'.⁷⁰ He also recalled how Mushangwe villagers banded together to fend off hyenas and other predators from attacking their livestock during the late hours of the night or very early hours of the morning and herd their cattle to the dip tank at Nyarushezhe in time for its opening.⁷¹

The AN Commissioner had two options to solve these emerging challenges. The first was to build more dip tanks to cover the stock population in the Reserve adequately. This

65.W. E. Bond, "Soil Conservation..." *Tropical Agriculture* 25, no. 1 (1948), 4.

66.NAZ, S15/A/47, Correspondence General. (cf. Appendix 1).

67.NAZ, S1051, District Annual Report, NC, Salisbury, 1945. (cf. Appendix 1).

68.W. E. Bond, "Soil Conservation..." *Tropical Agriculture* 25, no. 1 (1948), 4.

69.Interview with G. Gerema on 16/8/2002 in the Mushangwe Line of Seke Communal Lands.

70.Interview with G. Gerema on 16/8/2002 in the Mushangwe Line of Seke Communal Lands.

71.Interview with G. Gerema on 16/8/2002 in the Mushangwe Line of Seke Communal Lands.

option implied constructing at least eight more dip tanks in 1944, as the Reserve had about 12 307 cattle.⁷² The second option was to reduce the number of livestock to meet the Reserve's carrying capacity and maintain that precarious balance between the grazing capacity of the veldt and the livestock population.⁷³ In 1945, the AN Commissioner opted for the seemingly cheaper second option. The first option required more funds for the development of the Reserve—which the NAD maintained was unavailable. This option would also violate the settler governments' stance of making native reserves self-sustaining.

The DNA wanted to increase agricultural yields by providing cheap natural fertiliser in manure obtained from livestock within the Reserve. Some DNA officials estimated that for the crop rotational system practised in Seke to produce the desired yields, about 10 tonnes of manure was required per acre every 4 years or 15 tonnes of manure every year for 1.5 acres of the 6-acre holdings.⁷⁴ The AN Commissioner, however, realised that there was not enough fodder to sustain the cattle in Seke, figuring that:

[T]o produce 15 tons from 6 animals, at least 11 tons of trash are required, of which 4 tons can be got off the arable land after harvest, but the remainder had to be found from elsewhere [i.e., common grazing ground].⁷⁵

However, this was a moving target. In 1935, the land set aside for communal grazing based on the cattle population necessitated only a minimal de-stocking exercise. However, a decade later, the number of cattle to be culled had significantly increased owing to the increased number of livestock.⁷⁶ Seke was now 48% overstocked, meaning up to 4043 heads had to be removed.⁷⁷ Seke's carrying capacity for livestock was therefore pegged at 8264 head.⁷⁸ Effecting such a large-scale culling exercise would have greatly impoverished a large section of the population.

It is significant to note that de-stocking was carried out at the same dip tanks, which had been reeling under the pressure of being trampled upon by large numbers of livestock. The dip tanks were the only area where the NAD could gather all the cattle in the Reserve for the de-stocking exercise. De-stocking did little to lessen the massive soil degradation *en route* to and at the dip tanks. For instance, in March 1950, the Nyarushezhe and Madamombe dip tanks dipped 2666 and 2657 heads, respectively.⁷⁹ Moreover, the problem of the hand pumps breaking down continued, and the dip tanks

72.NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NPTC Written Memoranda, 1944. (cf. Appendix 1).

73.NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NPTC Written Memoranda, 1944. (cf. Appendix 1).

74.NAZ, S160/LS100/3A/50-100/1/50, Native Townships in Native Reserves and Native Areas, 1950. (cf. Appendix 1).

75.NAZ, S160/LS100/3A/50-100/1/50, Native Townships in Native Reserves and Native Areas, 1950. (cf. Appendix 1).

76.Destocking (*nhemura* as it was known in Seke) entailed selecting unsuitable cattle to be withdrawn from the reserve either through slaughtering for household consumption or sale to the Cold Storage Commission (CSC) or other private buyers.

77.NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NPTC Written Memoranda, 1944. (cf. Appendix 1).

78.NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NPTC Written Memoranda, 1944. (cf. Appendix 1).

79.NAZ, S150 DG 100/1/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

also had to accommodate other stock from the adjacent crown land and farms, of which, in the same month of 1950, 569 cattle came to be dipped in Seke.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the two-pronged desire of keeping the cattle population within the carrying capacity of the Reserve and ensuring that each family unit had enough stock to fertilise their fields left about half of the landholders without stock and unable to attain yields equivalent to or nearing those achieved by stock owners. This unequal distribution created an additional social problem arising from the financial differentiation between non-stock and stock owners.

The NAD's rigid method of attaining the carrying capacity of stock in the Reserve created problems by failing to anticipate the probable future standard of living and needs of the people. These needs emerged as Africans increasingly engaged themselves in market gardening. D. Besa remembered how they used to push their garden produce during the night in a wheelbarrow for sale the following day in nearby white-occupied suburbs such as Hatfield during the 1940s.⁸¹ Such practices incensed the administrators as evidenced by the Land Development Officer (LDO), S.G. Trow's 1945 report, which claimed that:

The greater number of male adults are either employed in or loafing around Salisbury; others are using the damp places for growing tomatoes, green peas, green mealies, etc., which they market in Salisbury instead of growing vegetables for their own consumption.⁸²

What incensed Trow the most was that these gardens used up valuable grazing land, which would consequently affect the precarious balance they were trying to establish. However, Trow's successor, E.A. Ditelaw, soon realised that trying to stop the practice was futile and resolved to regulate it. Ditelaw noted that '... the only... suitable land for this crop [rice] occurs in the stages demarcated for grazing'.⁸³ He proposed that:

... Only limited areas be granted for the production of rice and vegetables only in grazing areas, and I suggest that one acre per family be allowed for the production of rice and a quarter of an acre for vegetable growing.⁸⁴

This land was subsequently set aside, primarily because, in 1947, a pernicious drought rocked Southern Rhodesia.⁸⁵ Therefore, this implies that based on the Forestry report of 1950 by Forrester A.J. Barry, which recorded 2617 landholders in Seke, 3272 acres of valuable grazing land would have been earmarked to meet the new needs of the African people.⁸⁶

80.NAZ, S150 DG 100/1/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

81.Interview with D. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands. (cf. Appendix 1).

82.NAZ, S150 DG 100/1/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

83.NAZ, S150 DG 100/1/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

84.NAZ, S150 DG 100/1/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

85.J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1990); See also T. Takuva, "A Social, Environmental and Political History of Drought in Zimbabwe, c. 1911 to 1992", PhD Dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2022.

86.NAZ, F453/1 NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

Such a scenario led to problems when the NAD reviewed the carrying capacity of the Reserve again in 1952, but meanwhile the condition of the stock dropped from good to fair.

Besides ensuring against the depletion of the grazing land, another feature of the 1941 NRA was the provision for safeguarding against the uncontrolled loss of soil through agents of weather like wind and water. The construction of soil conservation works such as contour ridges and storm drains was prioritised. Mukundwa (2002) remembered that:

.... [T]hey [staff from the DNA] just marked our plots and where the contour ridges were to be located. Tractors would then follow behind them, unearthing the soil and leaving us with the task of piling it into mounds.⁸⁷

Mukundwa also remembered that at around this time, storm drains (*zvikende*) were also marked out at the edge of the field to curb erosion.⁸⁸ These physical soil conservation structures proved to be a constant dispute between the DNA and the NAD on the one hand and the Africans on the other. For instance, in 1945, Trow, the LDO who doubled as the Soil Conservation Officer, reported that:

Damage to soil conservation works is on the increase, and no heed is taken of warnings given. The Agricultural Demonstrators are afraid to report the culprits, fearing the wrongdoers taking revenge... Not only is damage being done to contour ridges, [but] also by ploughing up and down the slopes, in vleis, and at sides of watercourses.⁸⁹

M. Besa, however, disputed Trow's version of events. M. Besa argued that what the demonstrators could have interpreted as practices aimed at damaging the contour ridges were attempts on their part to improve the structures. M. Besa (2002) said that:

In times of heavy downpours, water would settle into our contour ridges and could be released with great force into our fields after they gave in to the heavy pressure exerted by the water ... which was not very beneficial to us or our crops.⁹⁰

When the contours 'buckled' to a load of water in its course, the damage extended from the young crops to the soils as the water came down the field very strongly, washing away the sandy loam soils in the Seke Reserve. Hence, to prevent this, they dug large holes at various intervals along the ridge so that the heavy rainwater would sink in without threatening their crops.⁹¹ However, D. Mwoyondizvo agreed with Trow's account that some damage occurred in these contours, but he blamed this on the lack of roads, which left them with no option but to use the depressions in the contours as footpaths,

87.Interview with M. Mukundwa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

88.Interview with M. Mukundwa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

89.NAZ, S160DG 100/1/50, LDO Monthly Reports.

90.Interview with M. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

91.Interview with M. Besa on 30/8/2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

or tracks, to lead their stock to the dip tanks.⁹² D. Mwoyondizvo (2002) also stated:

The younger children were partly to blame as they damaged the contour ridges in search of mice. But, our parents, as responsible adults, always tried to repair the damage before the onset of the rains.⁹³

Mwoyondizvo argued that since most of this damage occurred during the dry season and was repaired before the onset of the rainy season, such damage was of no consequence to either soil loss through run-off or their crops.

Overall, conservation works were not progressing as fast as the AN Commissioner would have wanted. The AN Commissioner reported at the end of 1946 that the results from an 'aerial survey, of part of the Goromonzi sub-district ... undertaken by the NRB', which was 'primarily concerned with soil erosion and pasture research ... showed that the position was far from satisfactory'.⁹⁴ The AN Commissioner, put the blame squarely on Africans because, in his view, 'it is still very hard to induce natives to turn out for work on different schemes introduced for the benefit of the natives in the Reserves'.⁹⁵ The promulgation of the 1942 Compulsory Native Labour Act (CNLA) did not improve the position as anticipated.⁹⁶ In 1944, the NC for Goromonzi explained:

It was with the greatest difficulty that the natives were caught: most of the chiefs and kraal heads were useless and were incapable of making their people turn out [therefore] to get the labour, we had to hunt the natives in the Reserves until the required numbers were obtained, and it caused most Reserve natives to run on the appearance of a Native Department official.⁹⁷

D. Johnson's study of the CNLA discovered that resistance to conscript labour was at its peak during the planting season when rural Africans needed to spend more time on their pieces of land.⁹⁸ As a result of these labour constraints, not much physical conservation work was done as the units employed for such work usually turned deserters because of the harsh working conditions that characterised such work in return for rather a meagre remuneration. For instance, in 1948, 214 627 yards (196 km) of ground had been prepared and pegged in anticipation of the arrival of a mechanical unit (for soil conservation measures), but unfortunately, the unit did not arrive, and all the work that the peggers had done came to nothing.⁹⁹

92. Interview with D. Mwoyondizvo on 20/8/2002 in the Chinyowa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

93. Interview with D. Mwoyondizvo on 20/8/2002 in the Chinyowa Line of Seke Communal Lands.

94. NAZ, S1050, Annual Reports, NC. Salisbury, 1945. (cf. Appendix 1).

95. NAZ, S1050, Annual Reports, NC. Salisbury, 1945. (cf. Appendix 1).

96. See K. P. Vickery, "The Second World War Revival of Forced Labour in the Rhodesias," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22, no. 3 (1989), 423–37; D. Johnson, "Settler Farmers and Coerced African Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1936–46," *The Journal of African History* 33, no. 1 (1992), 111–28.

97. NAZ, S1563, Annual Reports, NC. Goromonzi, 1944. (cf. Appendix 1).

98. D. Johnson, "Settler Farmers and Coerced African labour..." *The Journal of African History* 33, no. 1 (1992), 121. (cf. Appendix 1).

99. NAZ, S 1050, Annual Reports, NC. Salisbury, 1945. (cf. Appendix 1).

Owing to the constraint of labour, the LDO for Goromonzi reported in the mid-1940s that '... all work of this nature (soil conservation work) has stopped, [except for] correct drainage and protection of roads'.¹⁰⁰ In Seke, this commenced with the repair of roads, which urgently needed attention, as well as drifts on river crossings. In October 1949, the LDO expressed satisfaction with road work done in the Seke Reserve. However, he still voiced his concerns and reservations that '... protection and proper drainage [are] very necessary [because] this road passes through arable land practically all the way, and the verges have not been grassed over'.¹⁰¹ To curb the soil from being eroded from the roads to the arable lands, labour gangs dug deep, narrow drains running parallel to the road to circumvent the cost of grassing over the verges of the roads. These drains proved of little help as they scoured into deep gullies over time as most of the water from the roads drained into them – causing permanent scars on the landscape of Seke.

Besides the problems posed by the absence of labour, there were other constraints, as evidenced by the LDO's report for 1949:

The road from [the] Charakupa crossing of the Hunyani to Dema is still being regraded and drained. [The] Trouble with the tractor has set us back on the regrading, and a shortage of labour makes the draining a very slow process.¹⁰²

So apart from the general labour shortage, a shortage of equipment, capital and trained staff to supervise such works made progress on conservation works in Seke a prolonged process.¹⁰³ By the 23rd of December 1950, 136 922 yards (125 km) of contours had been completed and 9538 yards (8.7 km) of storm drains.¹⁰⁴ Besides the work done to the arable lands, the labour gangs marked 10 000 yards (9.1 km) of pasture furrow, 4000 yards (3.7 km) of river banks and erected two small check dams, among the most notable 'achievements' in Seke by the end of 1950.¹⁰⁵

The Native Land Husbandry Act in Seke Reserve, 1950s

In light of the slow progress made in Seke and elsewhere, the colonial government decided to dig in and make the individual landholder responsible for conserving natural resources on their holdings. They felt that heavier penalties had to be imposed for non-compliance. Moreover, they also sought to restrict land sales to prevent further land fragmentation in the reserves. The NAD, through its Director of the Africans Marketing Branch, Arthur Pendered, blamed the slow

100. NAZ, S160 DG 1001/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

101. NAZ, S160 DG 1001/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

102. NAZ, S160 DG 1001/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

103. For a detailed uncovering and description of road infrastructural development in African reserves during colonialism in Zimbabwe, see C. Masakure and E. K. Makombe, "To Serve Administrative Purposes and Native Interests?", *Road Infrastructural Investment in African Reserves in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1924–1948*, *African Economic History*, Oct. 2023, 51(2), 24–51.

104. NAZ, S160 DG 1001/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

105. NAZ, S160 DG 1001/50, LDO Monthly Reports. (cf. Appendix 1).

progress on the dualistic nature of the Africans as both farmers and labourers in the major towns, more so in areas like Seke, which were very close to Harare.¹⁰⁶ Emory Delmont Alvord, the Director of Native Agriculture, argued that:

We cannot expect... to persuade conservative and stubborn people to change over en masse to systematic crop rotation. It is time to change our policy. We need a Land Utilisation Act, with a good Husbandry Act, which must be enforced ... through compulsion.¹⁰⁷

The colonial government used such arguments to rationalise the passage of the NLHA in 1951. The NLHA marked the pinnacle of the colonial state's endeavours to reorganise African agriculture and is often considered the most comprehensive and extensive rural intervention programme of the time¹⁰⁸ Yudelman, for instance, views the NLHA as one of Africa's 'most far-reaching land reform measures'.¹⁰⁹ The NLHA sought to incorporate all the settler government's views as enforceable measures to make the Africans on the land better farmers if that was their choice.

Historian V.E.M Machingaidze noted that Part IV of the NLHA reserved land for townships and business centres, hoping that these would offer economic opportunities for the landless Africans.¹¹⁰ In Seke, the Provincial Native Commissioner (PNC) reserved 5000 to 10000 acres in the northern part of the Reserve for townships in 1950. This portion of Seke is only 10 to 12 miles (16 to 19.3 kms) from Harare.¹¹¹ The PNC (1950) justified the selection of this piece of land as follows:

... I have selected large areas for townships in Seki North and Chinamora South because I consider these parts are of little value for anything else. The areas are so near Salisbury that the Natives therein have lived in Salisbury for years. They have no need or interest in agriculture, and no legislation will change their outlook or method of life ... These areas would serve a better purpose if turned into large townships than waste further effort on them in a useless endeavour to make the inhabitants true agriculturists.¹¹²

The PNC's utterances that the area reserved for the township in Seke was 'of little other value' clearly lacked foresight, for only a year later, the NC for Goromonzi was a distraught man, emanating from the possible implications of subtracting land for use as township land. The NC's 1951 report established that:

106.NAZ, SRG 4, S.R Miscellaneous Reports, 1946-48, Arthur Pendered, Director of the Africans Marketing Branch in the NAD, 1948 Report. 51.

107.*The New Rhodesia*, Volume XV, #837, August 1948. Article by ED Alvord the Director of Native Agriculture.

108.See, for example, V. E. M. Machingaidze, "Agrarian change from above: the Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African response," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 3 (1991), 557-88; I. Phimister, "Rethinking the reserves: Southern Rhodesia's Land Husbandry Act reviewed," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993), 225-9.

109.M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land...*, 117.

110.V. E. M. Machingaidze, "Agrarian Change from Above..." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 3 (1991), 568.

111.NAZ, SI60/LS/100/3A/50-100/1/50. (cf. Appendix 1).

112.NAZ, S160/LS/100/3A/50-100/1/50. (cf. Appendix 1).

... It is anticipated that owing to the decision to reserve 5000 acres of the reserve for [establishing] a township, [it] will necessitate some de-stocking. How this will be affected is a bit of a mystery as [most] cattle owners hold four heads and less than four heads.¹¹³

Therefore, de-stocking at this stage implied that a plot holder would not have been able to meet the manure requirements advanced by the agricultural demonstrators.

Had de-stocking been carried out using the prevailing formula assessment of the carrying capacity of one unit to 10 acres for the remaining 72780 acres, of which 72500 were estimated to be usable, this would have implied reducing the animal units to a meagre 5502.¹¹⁴ However, knowing fully well the implications of such an option, the NAD tried to avert a political backlash from the Africans by revising the carrying capacity of stock downwards to 1 unit to 8 acres. The NAD re-pegged the carrying capacity of the Reserve at 6878 heads in 1956 using the new formula.¹¹⁵ As a result, when Seke finally managed to meet its carrying capacity of 8260 in the mid-1950s, as it had 8179 heads declared in 1956, the goalposts were shifted as it was once again deemed to be overstocked. According to the grazing assessment carried out that year, one animal unit was found grazing an area of around 6.79 acres, but to comply with the new DNA formula, 1261 heads consequently had to be removed.¹¹⁶ Before implementing these new guidelines, on average, the stock owner in Seke had 5.1 animal units while the landholder had just three. These stock holdings nullified the yield requirements envisaged by passing the NRA in 1941.¹¹⁷

The NAD did not confine its re-assessment to the carrying capacity of livestock alone. N.I. Boast, the NC for Goromonzi soon realised some unintended problems from the township's creation. Boast, in a letter destined to the PNC in 1954, wrote that:

Conditions in Seke Reserve (with which must be included Dema and Rutongo)*, despite centralisation in 1935, appear to me far from satisfactory. The establishment of the Township area has not improved matters, and a re-assessment of arable and grazing areas, the re-alignment of roads and villages, and the re-planning of the area would appear to be essential.¹¹⁸

Seke was placed high on the agenda for implementing parts II and III of the NLHA, which dealt with granting farming

113.NAZ, S1618, 1951-1953, Quarterly District Reports 1951. In 1949, the Goromonzi sub-district was separated from Harare (Salisbury), and as a result, it attained full district status with a full and substantive NC. (cf. Appendix 1).

114.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 - 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

115.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 - 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

116.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 - 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

117.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 - 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

118.NAZ, S2808/1/26, Seki, Chikwaka. Goromonzi and Chinamhora Reserves. Dema and Rutongo were created after an amendment was made to the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 in 1950 making provision for the creation of Special Native Areas (SNAs), which were supposed to serve as additional land for the Africans in the Reserves. Dema and Rutongo, which came to be known as SNA 'B' and SNA 'C', respectively were duly acquired in line with the amendment from European-owned land bordering the reserve. SNA 'B' was acquired from the Dunstan Farm, which had hitherto owned land protruding into Seke on the other side of the Hunyani River, likewise SNA 'C' was acquired from the Great Bromley Estate to the east of Seke Reserve. The combined acreage of the two SNAs was 3969. Dema and Rutongo were therefore considered part of Seke when it came to administrative and planning purposes. (cf. Appendix 1).

and grazing rights and providing 'good farming practices' similar to those of the NRA of 1941.¹¹⁹

The government incorporated Boast's requests when it unveiled its 5-year plan. The Reserve was 'recentralised' to accommodate changes brought about by the creation of the township and increases in population, which H.A. Lawrence, the LDO for Goromonzi, estimated to be around 13085 in 1956.¹²⁰ This process of 'recentralisation' entailed the opening up of new arable holdings, which had not been marked out as such during the initial process in 1935, and some arable land was reverted to grazing. By the end of 1956, 64850 acres of the total Reserve had undergone this process.¹²¹

Under the NLHA, the minimum standard area of dry arable land allocated to a farmer was 6 acres. The area was increased to 8 acres, and the extra third was for soil restoration in pasture crops.¹²² However, K.E. Brown, a former agricultural officer in Rhodesia, saw that particular development as a flawed measure. The proportion of ley to crops at any given time was 1:4, the reverse of what it should have been.¹²³ He asserted that even if, in theory, erosion and soil exhaustion could be halted under the NLHA system, that is, without long leys but with special methods of tillage, manuring and conservation works, the land in the Reserve was so exhausted that it would have needed at least 12 years to rest the grass to restore them to a state of structure and fertility enabling economic crop-production commerce.¹²⁴ However, because of a shortage of arable land, M. Besa asserted that land was only fallow between seasons or at most 1 year in 3 years, raising the cropping index to 66% and 100%.¹²⁵ Such a high intensity of land use, without a corresponding change in the system of restoring soil nutrients – through introducing extended ley periods in the crop rotation system resulted in decreasing soil fertility and, ultimately, soil loss because of the constant corruption of its granular structures.

Opening up new grazing lands in previously used arable lands created unforeseen problems as reports emerged of noxious weeds or grasses like *lopho/aena coriflora* appearing in such lands. In response, the Pasture Officer's report (1957) recommended using:

A two-camp system providing a January, February, [and] March rest for each camp in alternative years. A burn after the first good rain after four years to clean up old grass in the camp, which

119.NAZ, S2808/1/26, Seki, Chikwaka. (cf. Appendix 1).

120.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

121.NAZ, SRG 16/1/54, Annual Departmental Report 1954. (cf. Appendix 1).

122.W. V. Brelsford (Ed.), *Handbook to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1960), 284.

123.K. E. Brown cited in E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem: A Documentary Record 1923–1973* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1975), 131.

124.K. E. Brown cited in E. Windrich, *The Rhodesian Problem...*, 131.

125.Interview with M. Besa on 30 August 2002 in the Besa Line of Seke Communal Lands. The cropping index is the number of crop seasons as a percentage of the total rotational cycle including fallow. Put differently, it refers to the frequency in which the land is cropped.

received the rest. This system may be modified to incorporate a first half-season and second half-season rest to each camp alternately. A burn as above to the camp, which received the second half-season rest.¹²⁶

Now, if we remove all the technical jargon in the Pasture Officer's recommendations, the system he was proposing was not very dissimilar to the system the people of Seke had traditionally used to improve their beast's grazing and as a system of pasture management.

The problems of heavy trampling at dip tanks continued more with the inclusion of the Special Native Areas (SNAs) as part of Seke when it came to de-stocking and dipping, which were done at the dip tanks. For instance, in August 1958, 8798 Animal Units were declared for the Reserve and the two SNAs.¹²⁷ As a result, pressure on the dip tanks was not alleviated. An Assessment Committee appointed by the Minister in terms of Section 4 of the NLHA after inspecting the Goromonzi District in 1957 could not help but mention that even though the area around Chirimamunga was well watered, the area around the dip tank was badly trampled as over 3000 head had been there.¹²⁸ The Committee recommended that a new dip tank be constructed in the area.

The same Assessment Committee pointed out that some vleis in the Reserve were severely gullied and required urgent attention. After the government issued its 5-year plan in 1955, 5000 acres of arable land and 6 acres of grazing land were fully protected by the end of that year.¹²⁹ The protected arable land area comprised roughly one-third of the land under cultivation. Grass buffer stripping was carried out on the remaining unprotected arable spaces. Road works continued with greater speed following the 1955 plan. By the end of 1956, Seke had a main road network measuring 50 miles connecting the Reserve to areas like Dema, Bromley and the Chihota Reserve in the south.¹³⁰ It also had a network of about 70 miles of subsidiary roads traversing the length and breadth of the Reserve.¹³¹ However, the system of draining roads using contour drains had to be halted as the NC's 1952 report observed that:

The recent heavy rains make it evident that contour drains are unsuitable for roads since they tend to hold water back, permitting only a slow run-off. Some roads become sticky as a result.¹³²

In 1958, C.M. Kleinenberg, writing on behalf of the Director of Native Agriculture, all but admitted that their efforts at physical conservation had failed when he drew:

126.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

127.NAZ, F460, Implementation of the NLHA, August 1958. (cf. Appendix 1).

128.NAZ, F453/1. NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

129.NAZ, SRG ARG 16/1/5.4. (cf. Appendix 1).

130.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

131.NAZ, F453/1, 1957 February 28 – 1961 August 7. (cf. Appendix 1).

132.NAZ, S1618, 1951–1953, Quarterly Reports, Report of the NC, Goromonzi. (cf. Appendix 1).

The attention of all field staff ... to the serious dangers attendant upon the premature construction of contour ridges in arable land. In many instances, waterways and drain strips are not yet in a condition to take the discharge of water from these contour ridges and to ignore [*sic*] the basic rules of safe water disposal will, without doubt, lead to future reclamation problems which far outweigh the immediate benefits gained by the construction of these ridges.¹³³

But if Kleinenberg was to be reminded, his department had been doing just that (ignoring the basic rules of safe water disposal) for the past 20 years in Seke and elsewhere, worsening problems they had sought to curb.

Conclusion

This article has revealed that implementing measures intended to bring about a lasting change in African agricultural systems by enforcing good land-use practices and conserving the environment of Seke led to a host of new and profoundly difficult problems created by such large-scale and sudden changes. These measures made it impossible to grant the standard holding, or any area large enough for successful farming or a decent living standard, to all who had a claim. The article also exposed how the pursuit of these measures, which were supposed to protect the environment from the effects of the hitherto 'old slapdash methods' of African agricultural practices, only managed to expose the environment to the adverse effects of the weather. For instance, the issue of de-stocking and disease control of livestock was given as an example, after which the frequent movement of cattle to and from the dip tanks led to the severe pulverisation of the soil. The article pointed out many other examples that exposed those attempts at conservation for what they were – bad measures.

By carrying out interviews on how the colonial state implemented these policies, the article revealed that the measures were bound to fail because the institutional framework upon which they were passed was all wrong. These policies were imposed upon people who could only react to them either through apathy or with some degree of hostility. This hostility manifested covertly, such as continuing 'traditional' farming practices in specific designated fields and compliance with the 'good husbandry' methods in other fields. The state realised when it was approaching the end of the decade following the passage of the NRA that it had failed. Still, in a classic case of missing the point, it decided to scapegoat by blaming the Africans for the failure of the land-use measures while also digging in and insisting on extending the same failed measures from the 1930s. The state proceeded to introduce the NLHA in the 1950s. As with the NRA, the factors responsible for the failures of the NLHA were already discernible in the 1930s. All in all, using the case of Seke Reserve, we note that the colonial state's implementation of the NRA and NLHA was just another classic example of colonial arrogance and the scapegoating of Africans for the agroecological problems in the reserves.

133.NAZ, F448/1/3, Correspondence from Provincial Agriculturist. (cf. Appendix 1).

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Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

E.K.M. conceptualised, researched and wrote the original draft and the subsequent reworking of drafts. C.M. was involved in the writing of the original draft and the subsequent reworking of drafts.

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Disclaimer

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Appendix

Archival Material from the National Archives of Zimbabwe

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