

The Roots of Community Development in Colonial Office Policy and Practice in Africa

Rosaleen Smyth

Abstract

This paper looks at the origins of ideas about community development as they emerged during Britain's administration of its African colonies from the 1920s to the 1950s. Significant influences on development policy and practice include changing ideas about state intervention within the British government, international scrutiny from international organizations, US interest in Africa, ideas and activities of missionary societies, technological schemes, great leaps forward by key individuals, examples of state-sponsored mass education schemes in Russia, colonial disturbances, and cataclysmic events such as the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler, and pre-eminently, the Second World War itself. The evolution of community development ideas in Colonial Office practice will chiefly be illustrated through instructional films. Those which illustrate the argument are a striking example of community development in action because they are a visual medium in a visual age; they were seen as having a pivotal role in mass education schemes; they illustrate through their topics and scenarios what were seen as the hot development issues of the day; they capture the flavour of the period; and because they are a concrete illustration of the continuity of community development schemes in Africa in the colonial and post-colonial eras.

Keywords

Community development; Colonial period; Instructional films; Africa

Introduction

The Second World War produced an epic moment in the changing relationship between state and society, as seen in the Beveridge Report and the introduction of the welfare state in Britain. This had its counterpart in Britain's African colonies with the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (1940 and 1945). This act brought into British colonial administration in Africa a new era of state-sponsored social welfare initiatives first described as mass education but from 1948 termed community development.

Address for correspondence: *Dr Rosaleen Smyth, International College, Ming Chuan University, 5 Teh-Ming Road, Gwei-Shan, Taoyuan, Taiwan. Email: rosaleen_smyth@hotmail.com*

Community development at its broadest was about involving people in a community in educating themselves to improve the circumstances of their lives through health, agriculture, civic education and mass literacy schemes. The 1950s, when community development programmes were being implemented, was also the era of burgeoning African nationalism, with the former being constrained by the latter. Though the early 1960s saw the end of empire with African nationalism triumphant, development thought and practice, nevertheless, came to be one of the most enduring legacies of colonial government.

This paper examines how ideas about social development first began to emerge in the public arena in the 1920s, what groups of people, what individuals and what evolving circumstances were involved in propelling these ideas on to Britain's domestic and imperial policy agendas, and how experimental development schemes began to be devised in the African colonies in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Significant strands of influence on development policy and practice included changing ideas about state intervention within the British government; international scrutiny coming from the League of Nations and later the UN and international organizations; US interest in Africa coming via philanthropists, NGOs and academics; ideas and activities of missionary societies at a local and international level; technological developments; great leaps forward by key individuals; examples of state-sponsored mass education schemes in Russia; colonial disturbances; and cataclysmic events such as the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler, and, pre-eminently, the Second World War itself.

The evolution of community development in Colonial Office policy and practice will chiefly be illustrated through instructional films. They are a striking example because they are a visual medium in a visual age; because they were seen as having a pivotal role in mass education schemes, since they offered a means of jumping the literacy hurdle; because they illustrate through their topics and scenarios what were seen as the hot development issues of the day; because they capture the flavour of the period; and finally because they are a concrete illustration of the continuity of community development schemes in Africa.

Social message films began with individual initiatives by colonial officials in Nigeria and Kenya, who made films respectively on rats in Lagos and hookworm on the Kenya coast in the 1920s to educate people about these health hazards. The Director of the Colonial Film Unit (1939–55) later joined UNESCO; UNESCO took a special interest in development broadcasting in Central Africa; and today we have NGOs such as the US-based Media for Development International (MDI 1994) and other agencies continuing to foster the production of films in Africa dealing with contemporary issues such as AIDS, teenage pregnancy, women's rights and general health in dramatic social message films and videos. The use of radio for community development will also be touched on as the potential of radio for use in development was given early recognition in colonial policy. However, radio really did not take off till the transistor radio appeared at the end of the 1950s.

Historical Context

By 1905 most of Africa had been shared out among half a dozen countries in Western Europe: Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Portugal. After the First World War German Africa was redistributed between Britain, France, Belgium and South Africa by the League of Nations.

By the 1920s British colonial administrations had been established in a number of territories and, while some formal education began to be made available, mainly through mission schools, for a small number of elites, the great mass of people in villages and towns had no education in the Western sense. The small numbers of Africans who obtained a Western education held posts such as schoolteachers, pastors and clerks, but there was a yawning gap between them and the great mass of people. When colonial administrations sought to go beyond the rudimentary maintenance of law and order to communicate with their colonial subjects and seek their cooperation in improvement schemes, then ideas about adult education and community development began to be formulated.

Prevailing Ideas about Colonial Administration

The prevailing idea about colonial administration in the 1920s was derived from the League of Nations' concept of the mandate, a trust given to certain metropolitan powers to rule African territories which were deemed not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world; their well-being and development were "a sacred trust of civilization". Under the mandates the powers were required to suppress slavery and the slave trade, and the use of forced labour for private gain; they were forbidden to use African manpower to strengthen their own armed forces and were expected to maintain an open door to Christian missions. A new force had appeared in the field of international relations. Colonial powers were now subject to international scrutiny and, to maintain prestige, Britain needed to be seen to be fulfilling its trusteeship obligations.

Britain's rulers agreed, in theory, that they should, as trustees, prepare their wards in tropical Africa for eventual self-government, on the analogy of the white dominions and recent developments in India. But this was a far distant prospect. The first moves to consider the provision of social services in a general way had begun in 1909 with the creation of a Tropical Africa Medical and Sanitation Committee. The establishment of an advisory committee on Native Education for Africa followed in 1923; and between 1925 and 1930 advisers in agriculture, economics, finance and medicine were appointed for the whole empire.

In the field, the emphasis of colonial administrations staffed by district officers was on law and order. At the local government level, under a system known as indirect rule, power was delegated to traditional African authorities, a system which accorded with metropolitan pressures to economize. Colonies should pay for themselves. As Oliver and Fage, among others, have noted: "Essentially this was a projection into the colonial field of the limited view of their economic responsibilities in their own countries taken by most

European governments.” The first hesitant steps in a long progression away from this negative financial policy came with the Great Depression, which led to the setting up of a modest Colonial Development fund in 1929. “This was not altruism but self-interest . . . Britain needed to increase her foreign trade and the stagnant colonial economies seemed a suitable outlet conveniently within her reach . . . the results were not spectacular. By 1938, the British dependencies in Africa had received only 4,000,000 [pounds] from the Colonial Development fund, a sum equivalent to the addition of only about 1 per cent to their combined annual revenues” (Oliver and Fage 1970: 220–1). In addition, the rise of Hitler demonstrated the link between economic depression and political instability. In parts of Africa, including Northern Rhodesia’s Copperbelt, cutbacks in employment and industrial unrest drew attention to the problems posed by semi-proletarianized African wage earners. Strikes in the West Indies presented a timely warning of what might happen elsewhere.

In the post-depression 1930s there was a decreasing faith in indirect rule and in the omnipotence of the district officer. At least in some quarters, there was a new awareness that not only the doctrine of trusteeship but imperial self-interest called for social as well as economic investment in Africa; manpower was a resource to be developed. In these conditions the Colonial Office began to formulate what was called a “forward policy” for social improvement and to reverse its own approach to the formulas which had been developed in the late 1920s. In so doing the Colonial Office was strongly influenced by the arguments used in Britain for improving British social services. There was concern about degeneration in British towns and cities and the need for good citizenship practices. Amongst British intellectuals “there were conservatives as well as socialists who believed that national economies required deliberate management while the economist John Maynard Keynes had radically questioned the value of balanced budgets” (Roberts 1990: 63). State intervention was becoming the mantra of policy makers in the Labour Party.

Also prompting this sea change in British colonial policy were a number of reports that appeared on the eve of the war critical of the way in which Britain had been handling its trusteeship role. Financial crises provoked inquiries into the operations of African governments. Sir Alan Pim investigated seven colonies between 1932 and 1938 and proposed a variety of social as well as economic reforms. The Colonial Office adopted the new social survey techniques, which had been widely applied to identifying British social service needs and were contributing to the growing sophistication of administrative practice. A survey into nutrition needs was conducted as a result of publicity associated with a League of Nations’ health organization report. A wide variety of social needs in the colonies were identified in Lord Hailey’s *African Survey* (1938), supported by the Carnegie Corporation.

Informed by this research a new Social Services Department, set up in the Colonial Office in 1939, was responsible for the discussion of draft legislation to improve colonial development and welfare. (A General Department had previously dealt with Social Services along with Defence, Aviation and Communication.) The publicity which the West Indian inquiry attracted, and the parliamentary interest which the colonial problem in international

affairs aroused, persuaded officials that they should design a colonial development bill with appropriate machinery to attract support from public opinion at home and deflect international criticism coming from the United States as well as Nazi Germany. (This was a time when image and perceptions were coming to be recognized as a major force in domestic and foreign politics. It was in early 1939 also that the Colonial Office acquired a public relations department.)

The Colonial Development and Welfare Act was a remodelling of the 1929 Colonial Development Fund to provide finance for African development schemes. The new Social Services Department was to be a source of advice for officers in the field and undertook to process applications for grants from the new Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. The passage of the act also sparked the establishment of the Fabian Colonial Bureau. "The Labour Party pamphlet *The Colonies*, originally drafted by Leonard Woolf in 1941 and prepared for publication by Labour's Reconstruction Committee under the guiding hand of Arthur Creech Jones, was publicly unveiled in March 1943." What made this document unique, as David Goldsworthy noted, is that it was "the first detailed party statement—by any party—to take full account of the new concepts of dynamic development and metropolitan financial responsibility embodied in the 1940 Act" (quoted in Lee and Petter 1982: 159). An advisory Committee on Social Welfare was created in 1943, which treated African poverty as an extension of social problems in Britain.

At the onset of war Lord Hailey made an extensive trip to African territories and, capturing the mood of the moment, he reported in his *Native Administration and Political Development in British Tropical Africa* (1940–2) that the principle of state intervention was vital to making improvements in the material advance of society's most vulnerable members, endorsing the new emphasis on government being "an agency for the active promotion of social welfare". Hailey warned that, like the British government, colonial governments would be judged according to whether they acted as "agencies of social betterment", and their capacity to "assist in the expansion of social services" (Hailey 1979: 305). On Britain's role as trustee, Hailey pointed out that self-government would not be successful unless they could "build up a social foundation adequate to bear the structure of the political institutions in which they will ultimately find expression" (1979: 62).

Other Influences: Missions, American Philanthropy and New Technologies

Education was largely in the hands of missionaries, and the Colonial Office looked for guidance to J. H. L. Oldham, Secretary to the International Missionary Council. Oldham in turn had learned much from experience of African American colleges in the USA, and took a leading part in the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical African Dependencies, which reported in 1925:

Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples . . . Its aim should be to render the

individual more efficient in his or her condition of life . . . to promote the advancement of the community as a whole through the improvement of agriculture . . . the training of people in the management of their own affairs, and the inculcation of true ideals of citizenship and service. (Advisory Committee 1925)

In 1932 the Carnegie Corporation had funded a commission of inquiry into the effect of Northern Rhodesia's copper mines on African society, conducted on behalf of the International Missionary Council. The report had urged that more attention should be paid to adult education and had pointed to the potential of film for such a purpose.

The idea of using film as an aid to colonial development was already being explored in the 1920s, although it is a-historical to expect that a full-blown philosophy of "development" using the mass media could have been articulated in the interwar years. Film and radio were in their technological infancy. They were the "new media" of the interwar years. One theme for a conference of the International Colonial Institute in 1936 was "the means of spreading thought and ideas in the colonies more particularly by the Press, Broadcasting and the Cinema". The Secretary of State for Colonies told the conference:

What railways and steamships were in their far-reaching effects to the nineteenth century world, cinema, wireless and the cheapening of the daily press are in the twentieth century.¹

Adult education was a popular topic in the 1930s because of the success of workers' education programmes in Britain and the reputed success of crash mass education programmes in Russia, which had a large illiterate population.

"A feature of the expansion of knowledge about Africa between the wars was the crucial role played by the USA. This was part of a broader move to promote racial harmony, and the extension of capitalism, through greater understanding between black and white, and the dissemination of technical skills among Africans" (Roberts 1990: 57). From the mid-1920s the Carnegie Corporation, established in 1911 to advance "knowledge and understanding" in Britain and her colonies as well as North America, provided support for a variety of educational projects. One project was the funding of Jeanes Schools which, in a model imported from US Afro-American adult education, trained African teachers to demonstrate agricultural methods in their communities (the scheme came to Kenya in 1924) (Lewis 2000: 54). Carnegie support for Lord Hailey's *African Survey* (1938) has already been noted. Rockefeller Foundation funding made possible the establishment in 1926 of the International African Institute "to promote an understanding of African languages and social institutions, with a view to their protection and use as instruments of education" (Roberts 1990: 58). Britain, France and Germany were strongly represented in the Institute, which advanced the international exchange of ideas among scholars, educationists and missionaries. As a result of American funding there was now a substantial body of academic knowledge about Africa, much of which was specifically focused on contemporary social problems.

Community Development/Mass Education: the Practice

In 1926 Dr A. R. Paterson of the Kenya Department of Medical and Sanitary Service made a 16 mm amateur film to introduce and record a campaign against hookworm on the Kenya coast. Dr Paterson, using a cinekodak, filmed all aspects of the campaign: the screening of hundreds of Africans; the digging of demonstration latrines; lectures by the medical officers to assembled villagers; and “the building of a sanitary type of hut which was then compared with an ordinary native dwelling”.² In 1927 Hanns Vischer, Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa, suggested to the Colonial Office that films should be used in the colonies not only as a teaching aid in formal school but to help spread general knowledge, particularly about “health and economic development” (Vischer 1927: 28). In 1929 the Colonial Advisory Committee on Native Education sent biologist Julian Huxley to East Africa to assess the status of biology education. On his own initiative, Huxley, a Fabian and founding member of the London Film Society established in 1925, took three films from the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) to show to schoolchildren. In his report he said that films could be used to advantage for adults as well as for schoolchildren. For adults, he noted, “they will in the present state of tropical Africa be much the most powerful weapon of propaganda which we have at command”.³ Huxley was keen for local government departments to get involved in instructional film-making, with a leading role being played by the Empire Marketing Board. As the Board ceased operations soon afterwards nothing came of this particular suggestion.

Another sign of interest in the use of the new medium of film for development purposes in the colonies came in 1929, when the Colonial Secretary L. S. Amery created a Colonial Films Committee whose terms of reference included the examination of the educational use of the cinema (Colonial Office 1930b: 2). The Committee, on which sat a number of ex-governors, Colonial Office officials and representatives from the Board of Trade, Marketing Board and the British film industry, endorsed the educational and cultural value of films but warned that there was insufficient experience with the medium to embark on anything more than an experiment. The Report was tabled at the 1930 Colonial Office Conference, which endorsed the value of films “for educational purposes in the widest sense not only for children but also for adults, especially with illiterate peoples” (1930b: 5). In August 1930 the new Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Passfield (the Fabian, Sidney Webb), forwarded a copy of the Colonial Film Committee’s Report and the Colonial Office conference resolution to Colonial Governors with a covering note:

It is my considered view that the use of cinematograph film as an instrument of culture and education merits the closest attention, especially with primitive peoples, and I am anxious that its development, not only as a means of amusement, but more particularly in the sphere of education, should be most carefully watched in the territory under your administration. (Colonial Office 1930a: 32)

In 1929 William Sellers, a health official with the Nigerian government, had made a film to combat the outbreak of plague in Lagos. In 1932 his work received some official encouragement when he received a grant from the Colonial Development fund. The Colonial Office Conference of 1930 had recommended that Colonial Development funds be used to provide cinema vans and related equipment to the colonies. Sellers went on to produce 15 health films on such topics as infant welfare work in Lagos, anti-malaria fieldwork, school sanitation and village improvements. In 1931 Sellers had introduced a specially designed mobile cinema van. By the mid-1930s he had developed a health propaganda unit within the Nigerian Health Services Department which combined film production, mobile film shows, exhibits, school services and field days. Sellers was also concerned with the issue of how to design films for people, who were illiterate, who had no formal education and who were unfamiliar with the medium.

In 1929 the British Institute of Adult Education and the Association of Scientific Workers, in order to undertake the first thorough investigation of the film in education, set up the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films. The Commission was an unofficial body on which were represented members of government departments including the Colonial Office. Its highly influential report *The Film in National Life* was published in 1932 with the assistance of a Carnegie United Kingdom Trust grant. The Commission recommended that a national film institute be established to encourage the development and use of the cinema as a means of entertainment and instruction in both Britain and the Empire. The result was the British Film Institute (BFI), founded in 1933. The BFI's Dominions, India and Colonies Panel showed an interest in establishing an experiment in the production of development films in East Africa, along the lines of the work of Dr Paterson. Finance proved a stumbling block, but an experiment did go ahead under the auspices of the International Missionary Council, initially with corporate and NGO funding and a later injection of funds from the Colonial Development Fund as detailed below.

The missionary input into early community development work in Africa was exceptional. In 1932 J. Merle Davis, Director of the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the International Missionary Council, had gone to the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt to lead an inquiry into the effect of industrialization on African society. The Carnegie Corporation financed the investigation and the results were published in 1933, in *Modern Industry and the African*. Merle Davis and his team found that the mines of the Copperbelt had profoundly altered the pre-industrial society of Central Africa. Davis recommended the use of the cinema to help the illiterate African to adjust to the coming of Western capitalist society with its alien social and economic standards. As a follow-up to his Copperbelt study, Merle Davis drew up a plan for a film experiment on behalf of the International Missionary Council. The experiment would study the use of cinema as an instrument for "educational and cultural adjustment".⁴ It would help to bridge the knowledge "gap" between the young educated African and his illiterate elders; and it would produce films which might become a substitute for old forms of recreation which were disappearing.

The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), one of the earliest Western technical aid projects in Africa, was conducted in eastern and central Africa between March 1935 and May 1937. The experiment was carried out under the auspices of the International Missionary Council and organized in London under the general direction of Merle Davis. An advisory council representing missionary, educational, mining and Colonial Office opinion, with Lord Lugard as chairman, gave advice. The Carnegie Corporation provided the bulk of the finance. Others who contributed were the Roan Antelope, Rhokana, and Mufulira copper-mining companies, the International Institute of African Languages and Culture and the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation. In 1936 additional funds were acquired from the Colonial Development fund and from the governments of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika.

The films were produced and processed locally, and then taken on tour to test audience reactions. The production side of the experiment started at Vugiri in the Usambara Mountains in Tanganyika. Later films were sometimes made outside the Vugiri studio. The producer, Notcutt, had a staff of five Englishmen and a number of African assistants. The BEKE organizers were emphatic about the "Africanness" of their films, insisting on being guided by African advice and reactions on the spot. African advice was solicited during filming on matters of content and effectiveness and Africans were trained in all aspects of production and exhibition (Merle Davis 1936: 380).

The films were 16 mm and silent, but the experiment used a special technique, sound on disc. The discs could be made locally, which reduced costs. It also meant that recorded sound could be provided in the languages of many of the areas visited. Where an area's language was not on disc, a narrator was used. The films were shown on the back of a lorry in a tour of 9,000 miles through Tanganyika, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Uganda. Subsequent films were influenced by feedback solicited from the audiences.

Some films were strictly instructional, some social message films had a story format, and one was a pure farce. *Hides* demonstrated the correct methods of tanning; *Tea* explained how tea is grown and prepared. *The Chief* dramatized the conflict between the old and the new in the village: the protagonists were the sick chief, the witch doctor and the medical doctor. *Tax* and *Post Office Savings Bank* had story formats. The latter was one of the earliest uses of the Mr Wise and Mr Foolish format. Mr Foolish buries his money in the ground and it gets stolen. Mr Wise puts his money in the bank.

The BEKE produced 35 films ranging from one to seven reels: 19 on agriculture and 6 on health. Latham drove 9,000 miles showing films to about 80,000 people during 95 performances (Notcutt and Latham 1937: 98).

There had not been sufficient interest from some of the colonial administrations for the continuance of the BEKE. Opinions were divided at the Colonial Office and among colonial administrators on the spot, with the Parliamentary Under-secretary, Lord Dufferin, finally deciding that if money was to be spent on colonial films it would be much better spent in the way it had been in the past, in Nigeria and Malaya: that is, by civil servants instructed in film technique making films themselves:⁵ "an infinitely cheaper method".⁶

Despite this pronouncement, the ideals of the BEKE lived on at the Colonial Office, at least in the Social Services Department. In June 1939 C. Eastwood of that department minuted that the BEKE may be “dead” but “the subject most certainly will not be allowed to drop”.⁷

Thus by the eve of the Second World War, the Colonial Office had demonstrated a strong interest in the use of film in development and there had been some useful experiments in several colonies, with some support in Nigeria and East Africa from the Colonial Development Fund. A precedent had been set for the financing of colonial development films through a special development fund.

Radio

Meanwhile, from the second half of the 1920s, the Colonial Office had also been expressing an interest in the potential of broadcasting. (When the Empire Service was established Lord Reith became a particularly forceful advocate for colonial broadcasting.) In 1936 the Colonial Office had appointed a committee to undertake a thorough study of colonial broadcasting under the chairmanship of the Earl of Plymouth. Paragraph 14 of the Plymouth Report (Colonial Office 1937) described colonial broadcasting as an “instrument of advanced administration” to be used particularly, “for the enlightenment and education of the more backward sections of the population and for their instruction in public health, agriculture, etc.” (*ibid.*). The Plymouth Report hoped that colonial governments might find the money to investigate the possibilities of local broadcasting along the lines of the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment which was then under way (1937: 111–17). In 1938 the Carnegie Corporation agreed to pay half rather than the full cost of a broadcasting experiment via loudspeakers to the Kikuyu residents of the Kiambu Reserve near Nairobi. This would broadcast talks by various veterinary, medical and agricultural officials.⁸ But the Kenyan administration then went cold on the idea. By the start of the Second World War, apart from the setting up of several rediffusion stations in West Africa, there had been little implementation of the Plymouth Report.

Mass Education, Colonial Development and the Second World War

War stirred up colonial thought and practice as never before. A huge propaganda effort, using print, film and some broadcasting, was organized from London through the Colonial Office and the Ministry of Information. At the start of the Second World War in September 1939, Information Officers were appointed in the colonies and public relations offices were established to promote the British war effort at the local level: using film, in some cases radio, pamphlets, posters, government-sponsored newspapers for Africans, and the local efforts of district officers. Propaganda guidelines and publicity materials were supplied through the Ministry of Information, which liaised on policy matters with the new Public Relations Branch at the Colonial Office. Mass observation techniques were adopted to monitor the pulse of

public opinion with monthly public opinion reports compiled by district officers and forwarded to provincial headquarters, with summaries then being forwarded to the Ministry of Information in London.

As part of this war propaganda effort the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) was established by the Ministry of Information to make war propaganda films for illiterate Africans. William Sellers, who had started experimental film production in Nigeria, was seconded from the Colonial Service to direct the new unit.

The Colonial Office disliked the idea of war propaganda films, but took the long-term view that at the end of the war the unit could concentrate on the production of development films. In 1942 the Colonial Office succeeded in persuading the Treasury to enlarge the brief of the CFU to include the making of instructional films. "The object of the Colonial Film Unit like that of every branch of colonial administration", said *Colonial Cinema* in June 1943, "is to raise the primitive African to a higher standard of culture".⁹ One Colonial Office official minuted his objection to the patronizing tone:

Colonial peoples want sympathy, not films on soil erosion, humanity not lectures on how to kill bed bugs. Can we not discard this pose of instructional superiority and get down to learning from people as well as teaching them?¹⁰

The Treasury authorized the spending of £24,000 on an increased establishment, noting that the proposal was in line with the government's new colonial welfare policy. Treasury did stipulate, however, that the making of films for colonial welfare purposes should have a "fairly low priority";¹¹ and not interfere with the primary work of war propaganda. In any case a shortage of manpower and materials caused by the war prevented a film unit from being sent to Africa. One method of trying to get around the problem was to re-edit and release films that had been made in Africa before the war. These included some of Sellers's Nigerian health films and a South African anti-venereal disease film, *Mr Wise and Mr Foolish Go to Town. Machi Gaba* (1934, The town that crept ahead) had been made by Sellers to encourage chiefs in Northern Nigeria to take a greater interest in the cleanliness of their villages.

A poor substitute for instructional films in an African setting were those made in England by the CFU, in the hope that the message would be extrapolated to an African setting. When the CFU included in its shooting schedule films about Boy Scouts, the games played by English children and the village hall, the head of the Ministry of Information's Film Division insisted that one or two Africans should be appointed to the unit to sharpen its focus. As a result Nigerian musician Fela Sowande joined the unit in 1944. A way of getting around the African footage problem was the Raw Stock Scheme, which saw Colonial Information officers being provided with raw stock film and a camera to shoot their own films. This scheme led in Kenya to *A Kenya Village Builds a Dam* (1944), originally produced in Kenya under the title *Jonathan Builds a Dam*. It is the dry season in Jonathan's village. The grass is brown, the cattle emaciated, and water half a day's journey away. Jonathan hears of another village, which has cooperated to build a dam. He succeeds in promoting a

similar self-help scheme in his own village after winning the cooperation of, first, his chief, and then of the district commissioner (Smyth 1985).

CFU films were shown by mobile cinema van with a European in charge. Local chiefs assembled audiences for the films with educated Africans being employed as commentators. In 1945 the Secretary of State for Colonies told the House of Commons that it was his intention “to maintain and expand” the educational and social work of the CFU “to ensure a vigorous presentation of the British case in the colonies”.¹²

The wartime information officers had brought with them the apparatus of modern publicity: radio, films, photographs, and press service. The introduction of these artefacts created “new habits and an ever increasing demand for the ‘wonders’ of the modern world”,¹³ while the necessity of keeping the colonies informed of the progress of the war, and therefore of the events outside their own territories, had revolutionized the world view of many Africans. Returned askari brought back with them a raft of new experiences and back home in the villages and towns district officers had been actively soliciting African support for the war through recruitment drives, through propaganda denigrating the enemy and justifying the Allied cause and through war charity drives.

Public opinion had become a force to be reckoned with in colonial administration. Colonial subjects, like British citizens (and particularly the British working class) now needed to be rewarded for their war effort, while signs of self-government had to be shown if American and Soviet criticism of imperial rule was to be countered. In the spirit of the Beveridge Report advocating state intervention to improve the quality of life of British citizens, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed to concentrate on improving social services in the colonies. A new era of social inclusion had dawned; Africans were now looked on by the reforming left-wing intelligentsia inside and outside the Labour government as “Tropical East Enders” (Perham 1942). Remedies that had been advocated to the English working class—adult education and self-help—were now incorporated in the new social engineering formula to implement the Act: mass education.

Mass Education in African Society

The chief architect of the new colonial development and welfare strategy was Arthur Creech Jones, founder member of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, Labour MP and, from 1946 to 1950, Secretary of State for Colonies.

Creech Jones first raised the question of adult education in 1940 in the context of urban unrest in the West Indies and on Northern Rhodesia’s Copperbelt. Inspired by his own experience with the workers’ educational movement in Britain, he was convinced that adult education was an “essential factor for securing the health of these states where a wider participation in the social, economic and political life of the colonies is necessary”.¹⁴ In May 1940 the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies accepted Creech Jones’s proposal:

that a Sub-committee should be set up to survey the adult education field in the Colonies, and the types of agency available, including films,

gramophones and community centres, and to make recommendations which could go forward to Governors on the further development of the work.¹⁵

In the subsequent report, *Mass Education in African Society* (Colonial Office 1944), mass education was nowhere specifically defined, but emerged as meaning education for the betterment of the community to improve the quality of life of the people. A crucial aspect was that the community should be active participants and, if possible, the initiators of improvement schemes. The objective was not just to enable Africans to live more healthy and productive lives; there was, too, a political target: education for citizenship, for unless people had some general education “true democracy cannot function and the rising hope of self-government will inevitably suffer frustration” (Colonial Office 1944: 3). Mass education became the training component of the post-war colonial development and welfare policy.

The term “mass education” was replaced after the war by “community development” with UNESCO preferring “fundamental education”. Mass education was thought to have an unfortunate political resonance hinting at “an inferior kind of education specially designed for primitive peoples”.¹⁶

The Mass Education report noted the great popularity of films and acknowledged that they were “the most popular and powerful of all visual aids” while noting also that they could not supplant the teacher. The report further urged that documentary films be used to extend the horizons of villagers and help them to adjust “to changing political, economic and social conditions” and that news films could help to develop a “national” outlook. Films could explain new types of organizations like trade unions and cooperatives and new techniques and processes like crop rotation, sanitation and making brick kilns (Colonial Office 1944: 44–6).

New Directions in Colonial Policy, 1947

A new urgency was injected into the work of the CFU in 1947, following the appointment, in 1946, of Creech Jones as Secretary of State for Colonies. In 1947 Creech Jones dramatically revised Britain’s colonial policy. Suddenly the life expectancy of the empire was reduced from a leisurely eighty years to twenty. Under Andrew Cohen, the dynamic new head of the Colonial Office’s Africa Division there was a heightened interest in the role of film in the development process. In 1948 the British Film Institute sponsored a conference on “The Film in Colonial Development”. A paper on “The Use of Cinema in African Territories” was read at a Colonial Office summer conference on African administration, and instructional films featured in *Education for Citizenship in Africa* (Colonial Office 1948), in the sequel to *Mass Education in African Society*. And there was also a move to give Africans a greater role in the actual film production. As John Grierson, Film Controller at the COI, said in 1948, “putting the film into the Africans own hands” as “an instrument for their own development” (Grierson 1948: 279–80).

Funding for the educational work of the CFU was transferred from Imperial funds to the Colonial Development and Welfare vote. George Pearson told

the BFI conference that the CFU's long-term aim was: "to elevate the social life by broadening the minds of millions of loyal natives, at present illiterate and isolated from world contact" (Pearson 1948: 26). The films' target audience was not the educated elites, who were often critical of the films for being patronizing and paternalistic.

CFU film schools were held in the Gold Coast, the West Indies and Cyprus; local units were established in Ghana, Nigeria and the West Indies. (The local government film units that were established in Central Africa, Malaya and India were the result of different initiatives.) By 1952 the CFU had ceased making films itself, although it continued to provide processing and editing facilities until 1955. In its lifetime the CFU had been responsible for the production of 280 short films.

The films ranged in length from approximately 7 minutes to about 30 minutes, the majority being in black and white and in 16 mm. In most cases the films were shown with a spoken commentary (or later a commentary recorded on magnetic stripe) in the appropriate language, rather than with a recorded English soundtrack. Some of the films have captions either in English or the local language or both, but these were of limited use because of widespread illiteracy. An English soundtrack was added to some CFU films which were used for propaganda and educational purposes outside Africa.

Weaving in Togoland (1946, 22 mins, black and white, sound) records how the introduction of modern methods of spinning and weaving brought "happiness and prosperity" to a village in the Avatime district in Togoland. Weaving had been a part-time occupation in the village for a long time with the people using the old-fashioned methods of their forefathers; some women spun cotton by hand, others dyed it; men did the weaving on looms which could only weave narrow cloth. At the invitation of the "wise" chief several students from Achimote College come to the village and introduce more sophisticated methods: a box device enables the women to accelerate the spinning process and the men are taught to use wider looms. As a result spinning and weaving become a full-time industry, more cotton is grown and there is more work for dyers, the local market expands giving people a better and more varied diet, the village school is extended, and better stone houses are built, so the commentary goes (Smyth 1985: 8–9).

A Challenge to Ignorance (1950, Uganda, 10 mins, black and white, sound) is a report on the work of a demonstration team in Mangala in Uganda. Demonstration teams were used in community development projects, which were a feature of Britain's postwar colonial development and welfare policy. In Mangala the team, which had originally been recruited from the region, put on a sketch to encourage better methods of cotton-growing, use a display model to explain soil erosion, demonstrate the right and the wrong way to ride a bicycle, and discuss with locals ways of improving the water supply. After the demonstration the team stay in the district for some time doing follow-up work (Smyth 1985: 3).

Nigerian Community Development in Ahoada Division (1950, 20 mins, black and white, silent with captions) is an illustrated lecture punctuated by numerous captions chronicling improvements that have been made through cooperative efforts. It was made with the objective of inspiring others to emulate the

industry of the district. Community development activities include road-building, home craft and childcare, and village improvement (Smyth 1985: 8).

Marangu (1950, Tanganyika, 12 mins, black and white, sound) extols the virtues of cash crop production for export. The people of the Chagga chieftainship of Marangu near Mount Kilimanjaro are happy and prosperous and their chief wise. The village has a store and a primary school and craftsmen such as woodcarvers and tailors. The villagers (mainly women) grow maize, beans, oranges and bananas, but the backbone of their economy is coffee, which they produce for export and market through the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Association. It is largely because of the quality of their exports that the people are happy and content, says the narrator (Smyth 1985: 6).

The Central African Film Unit

The Colonial Film Unit did not cover the central African territories of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which were served by the Central African Film Unit (CAFU) (Smyth 1983), which made instructional films in these territories with Colonial Development and Welfare funding between 1948 and 1956. There were two production teams, one based in Salisbury (Harare) and the other in Lusaka. As this was the time of the push towards, and beginning of, the white settler-dominated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Africans were not given the same opportunities on the film production side as they were by the Colonial Film Unit.

The content of these films gives a good overview of key aspects of the postwar mass education/community development programmes and campaigns. In *Nyono Gets A Letter*, Nyono's wife is about to give birth to her first child at a time when Nyono has to leave the village and go to work on road construction for the Northern Rhodesian Public Works Department. A mass literacy instructor arrives in the village and Agnes learns to read *Mutende* (the government newspaper for Africans) to the other patients and to write to her worried husband to announce the birth of their child. *Husbands and Wives* describes a community development project—the area school at Katete in Northern Rhodesia—where residential schools are given in carpentry, road-building and mass literacy supervision; the wives had classes in beadwork, knitting and home craft. *Lusaka Calling* (1950?) is a promotional film for the “Saucepan Special”, “the people's radio of Central Africa”. This radio, once celebrated in a Ripley's “Believe it or Not cartoon” in the *Sunday Express*, was designed to enable the Africans of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland to listen to Lusaka's Central African Broadcasting Station (CABS), the first radio station in Africa designed exclusively for Africans. The scheme came about as a result of the initiative of Harry Franklin, Northern Rhodesian Information Officer, who obtained financial assistance from Colonial Development and Welfare funds, technical advice from the BBC and the cooperation of Ever Ready in Britain to research and develop the idea of a cheap, short-wave, dry cell battery receiver (Franklin 1950). The CABS staff (both European and African) put together a series of experimental programmes designed to encourage African music and drama, as well as engage in adult education and the promotion of government policy.

Lusaka Calling shows a mobile recording van arriving in the Tongan village of Chief Shiamundu. The engineer recorded some local songs and played the record back to the people, telling them that the record would soon be played over the CABS. The chief buys a radio and the film shows the people listening incredulously at first, as their music is played over the radio. The film also shows Chief Shiamundu being shown around the broadcasting station in Lusaka.

In 1950, inspired by the greatly enlarged radio audiences, the Northern Rhodesian Information Department, using all the media at its disposal—newspapers, posters, pamphlets, film and broadcasting—launched a five-year mass education campaign. The campaign concentrated on six areas, which included improved hygiene, education for girls and better agriculture. The CABS launched a women's programme in 1950 with an African woman announcer. "Know Your Own People" was devised to explain one ethnic group to another. The station broadcast in four local languages and in English, with the most popular programme being devoted to musical requests. Other programmes included quizzes, health programmes, language lessons, radio plays (some improvised by African announcers) and serials carrying a social message. John Grenfell Williams, head of the BBC's Colonial Service and author of the UNESCO survey, *Radio in Fundamental Education in Undeveloped Areas* (1950) visited the station, as did the noted British broadcaster Cyril Ray, who wrote that Northern Rhodesia had "made one of the biggest contributions to the whole field of mass communications" (Ray 1950).

Another type of CAFU film was the "Profile Film", in the Africans in Action series: real-life success stories about individual Africans—farmers, a welfare officer, a midwife, a home demonstrator—who had managed to bridge "the gap between the commercial and industrial world and the primitive tribal life". In no. 5 in the series, *Herbert Gondwe—Welfare Officer* (1952), who operates in the Dowa district of Nyasaland, is shown riding around on a motorcycle organizing the building of a welfare hall, the repair of a bridge, the acquisition of a film projector, and editing a district newspaper. *The Wives of Nendi*, set in Southern Rhodesia, chronicled the work of Mai Mangwende, wife of Chief Mangwende, in forming women's clubs throughout the Mangwende reserve—in spite of the opposition of the headman. The clubs, it was claimed, were responsible for raising the standards of hygiene, cleanliness, cooking and general housekeeping. *Colonial Cinema* argued that the *Wives of Nendi*

was particularly apposite in reinforcing the thesis that among unsophisticated and primitive villagers local leadership, self-help and the simplest techniques contribute more to the successful creation of community centres, than all the paraphernalia of imported technical assistance experts, fellowships, seminars and the like. (*Colonial Cinema* 1953)

By far the largest number of CAFU films were on agriculture; other subjects included health and hygiene, the value of self-help and hard work, the welfare services, law and order, crime does not pay, and road safety. A popular story format was (again) that of Mr Wise and Mr Foolish, as in *Zimbani*, made in the Petauke district of Northern Rhodesia in 1949. One

family grows good crops, the other head of family is lazy and will not let his son try new methods. Eventually the son gets his chance and, using modern methods and taking the advice of the agricultural demonstrator, not only succeeds at farming but also wins the hand of the good farmer's daughter.

The CAFU films were a financial success as governments and organizations outside Central Africa, where similar mass education programmes were in progress, purchased them. Buyers included the governments of the Belgian Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanganyika, Gold Coast, British Somaliland, Bechuanaland, British Honduras, Australia (for use in Papua New Guinea); and Lever Brothers, UNESCO, the South Pacific Commission and African Consolidated Films, Johannesburg.

Most of the CAFU films were in a story format because it was believed that the messages would be more effective if the emotions of the audience were engaged. The BEKE had also strongly endorsed the use of dramatic narrative as a means of getting a social message across (Smyth 1983). Today we are very familiar with the genre as many television drama series have a self-conscious social purpose, working through such social problems as child abuse, AIDS, and teenage pregnancies.

Yet the films had their limitations. Towering above all others was the inequitable white-dominated political structure in which the CAFU operated. Fundamental to Britain's postwar development policy was the encouragement of initiative in African society—with the Colonial Office holding a conference on this theme in London in 1947. Development would not “take off” if it was imposed from above, was the orthodoxy. But this initiative—the participation in the development process—had only a limited amount of room for movement. CAFU films might show Africans at the community level, deciding to form a cooperative, to join a farming scheme or form a women's club, but when Europeans appear in the films they are always authority figures and experts: government officials, agricultural advisors, doctors, welfare officers and cooperative society managers. An editorial in 1950 in the Southern Rhodesian Bantu newspaper *African Weekly* proved prophetic:

From our point of view the making of African films is not a well that will dry up in a few years' time, but a spring whose resources are inexhaustible, and for that reason we are justified in thinking that this is a landmark in the history of Africa. (*African Weekly* 1950)

Conclusion

The history of colonial development policy and practice in British colonial Africa has been traced using the example of instructional films, from the first health propaganda films of the 1920s dealing with hookworm on the Kenya coast and rats in Lagos up until the 1950s. Then the postwar development policy of the Colonial Office, in which the film featured with some prominence, was overtaken by the decolonization process, and in white settler colonies by vigorous opposition to the devolution of power to African majorities. The films had their flaws, technical deficiencies, sometimes lack of relevance, ethnocentrism, patronizing paternalism, but they still have their

place, at the very least as a benchmark in the history of community development in English-speaking Africa.

They are of significance because their themes continue to be of relevance. The colonial superstructure may have been swept away but the pursuit of development continues. The agents are no longer colonial administrators but independent African governments in association with a myriad of international and national government and non-government aid agencies. Many of the issues they address remain: conservation, improved agriculture, water supply, literacy, consciousness-raising at the village and community level, the training of health and community development workers, and the promotion of civil society.

Notes

1. W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, Speech at Lancaster House, 8 October 1936, CO 323/1400/7004.
2. J. Huxley, Report on the Use of Films for Education Purposes in East Africa, 1930, CO 323/1252/15/1.
3. Huxley, Report on the Use of Films, 1930.
4. J. E. W. Flood, Minute, 8 November 1934. CO 323/1253/30141.
5. C. G. Costley-White to G. C. Latham, 25 July 1939, CO 859/1406/23.
6. Minute, 17 July 1939. CO 859/1406/23.
7. C. Eastwood to G. Clauson, 2 June 1939, CO 859/7/1413.
8. Memorandum on Broadcasting for Africans in Kenya, sent to W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, Secretary of State for Colonies, 31 October 1936; and R. Brooke-Popham to Ormsby-Gore, CO 323/1390/5301/17.
9. *Colonial Cinema* (1943), 1, 4: 1.
10. E. R. Edmetts, 26 March 1942, CO 859/46/1255/1.
11. N. W. G. Tucker (Treasury) to H. Welch (Ministry of Information, MOI), 18 June 1942, INF 1/1/144/A 529/40.
12. *Colonial Cinema* (1945), *Hansard* (extract) 24 October, 3, 4: 79.
13. H. V. Usill, The Ministry of Information and its Work in Relation to the British Colonial Empire, June 1944, INF 1/945.
14. A. Creech Jones, Adult Education in the Colonies, 28 May 1940, CO 859/22/12015/1.
15. C. W. M. Cox, Minute for J. J. Paskin, A. Dawe and G. H. Hall, 19 May 1941, CO 859/44/12014.
16. Colonial Office Information Department, Notes on Education in the Colonies, Memo no. 24, October 1961.

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