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Confessions of a reconstructed planner

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I was once a land use planner! Armed with a first degree in Botany, experience on 2 student expeditions and two weeks orientation training at Silsoe College, I arrived in Zambia in 1972 to the surprise of the Land Use Services Division of the Ministry of Rural Development. I subsequently spent a total of 9 years as a planner and then soil surveyor in Zambia.

Land use planning in Zambia is limited, being almost exclusively for agriculture. It does not involve forestry, wildlife, water use, urban issues, etc. The main tasks undertaken by land use planners is illustrated by the chapters in the Land Use Planning Guide (1977) many of which derive from technical papers of the old Federal Department of Conservation and Extension (CONEX), eg:

- aerial photography interpretation
- land classification
- land use survey techniques
- mechanical protection of arable land
- basic instructions for dam construction
- agricultural land use planning in Zambia
- national, provincial and district inventories
- catchment conservation planning
- farm planning
- farm management
- settlement planning
- planning of irrigation schemes
- special projects
- subsidies

The process is very 'top down' and most of the Planning Guide is comprised of technical instructions. The need to 'involve' people is mentioned only twice in the document. In the chapter concerning Catchment Conservation Planning, one finds:

> *"The aim in [catchment conservation] planning would be to direct the people to cultivate suitable land, to use the best methods applicable to the area and to make sure that controls to land use are implemented in both the mechanical and cultural spheres".*

This chapter goes on to admit that:

> *"the people must be informed and consulted about the plan so that in the early stages they can help with the survey and, at a later stage, they can participate in drawing up the plan proposals and the implementation of the plan itself".*

Unfortunately, whilst this chapter provides much technical guidance, it gives no advice on how the people should be involved. Nor, in practice, are they systematically involved.

Similarly, in the chapter on farm planning, an objective should be

> *"to work with the farmer to help him gain a full insight into land capability and the potential of his farm and to assist him to draw up a plan to further his farming inclinations within the capabilities of the farm".*

But this chapter is again rich in technical guidance whilst giving no indication of how to ensure farmer participation. In practice, farm planning is mainly conducted on commercial farms in state land areas and rarely, if ever, for subsistence farmers in the so-called trust lands.

The cornerstone of much of the planning process in Zambia, as elsewhere in the region, has long been 'land use capability classification'. The system used derives from

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one originally developed in the USA and places land in suitability grades ranging from good to poor arable land and includes grazing classes and land unsuitable for either arable use or grazing. The system was designed during Federal days, based on criteria for the commercial production of maize and tobacco, and has mainly been applied in state land areas. It is ill-suited for other crops and has little relevance to non-commercial and subsistence farming systems. An attempt in the 1980s to promote a separate system for small-scale farming was made but was little used.

During the 1970s, a Soil Survey Unit was developed within the Department of Agriculture as a service providing land capability and soil maps to planners. The unit gradually took over all land capability surveying so that planners themselves gradually lost the function and ability/experience in undertaking such surveys. With little technical direction provided by government, the Soil Survey Unit moved gradually in the direction of producing mainly technical soil maps and became less concerned with land capability surveys. During the 1980s, soils were increasingly mapped in terms of units of two international systems -the USDA Soil Taxonomy and the FAO-UNESCO legend for the Soil Map of the World. There was a certain mesmerisation with the Soil Taxonomy as a vehicle for international agrotechnology transfer a concept heavily promoted by USAID. Land capability was replaced by a modification of the FAO system of land evaluation which itself requires much data not available or not collected by soil surveys (eg socio-economic data).

Thus, technical soil maps were undertaken for specific government projects (eg large state farms, crop production schemes, settlement schemes, etc.) and a system of national soil mapping was instituted. At first, this was based on quarter degree sheets at a scale of 1:100,000 (to mirror the existing geological map series) and subsequently on administrative districts at a scale of 1:250,000. The first scale was of little relevance to either regional or local planning. The latter was possibly of more use for strategic regional planning but the maps were not useable (see below).

It is not clear why the government instigated this systematic mapping. There appears to have been no clear idea of why the particular map scales were selected or for what purpose they could be used. Experience indicates that, with the exception of professional soil scientists and academics, no one could understand the classification systems used certainly not decision makers, planners or farmers. Who, for instance, could conceptualise an Oxic Paleustalf? These systems provide an international language for the scientist and academic but are, in reality, an impossible obstacle for planners. The momentum given to the systematic mapping programme and the use of international classification systems came mainly from within the Soil Survey Unit. Perhaps the only real benefit of these systems has been the enriching of the source of names for children. Somewhere in Zambia, vertic Ngoma and Pachic Phiri are alive and well!

Most of the maps and reports produced are rarely consulted and gather dust on shelves. One particular survey of the Mtetezi River Area in Eastern Zambia, which conservatively cost at least £250,000 to undertake, remains unpublished after several years. It was to have been followed by a land evaluation exercise to interpret the base soil map for various crops and management systems. This was never done. These soil surveys required a very technical procedure and local people were seldom involved (except as labourers).

The land systems approach to resource assessment for planning purposes has also been tried in Zambia. For instance, the then Land Resources Division of ODA undertook such a survey in the Northern and Luapula Provinces over several years in the early 1970s. The maps and reports, whilst technically excellent and full of data, are seldom used by planners, who cannot understand their complexity.

The main market for the soil maps appears consultants who can utilise the data and then government.

There will always be a need for national and regional strategic planning. But this process needs to involve information delivery to planners which is understandable and

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utilisable, and which reflects both national/regional and local needs. There is also a vital need for local level planning which involves local communities in identifying issues and designing solutions. We need planning systems which bring these two requirements together. Neither are mutually exclusive.

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