



**Rohland Schuknecht.** *British Colonial Development Policy after the Second World War: The Case of Sukumaland, Tanganyika.* Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010. 364 S. \$48.95 (paper), ISBN 978-3-643-10515-8.

Reviewed by Emma Hunter

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (July, 2011)

## R. Schuknecht: British Colonial Development Policy

Development, as Rohland Schuknecht reminds us in his new study of British colonial development policy in Sukumaland, Tanganyika, offers a key to understanding the history of late colonialism. It is thus not surprising that late colonial development policy has attracted an increasing amount of historiographical attention in recent years, as historians of Africa increasingly turn their attention to the late-colonial state and the transition to independence. But while its importance as a topic of study is accepted, significant disciplinary and sub-disciplinary differences remain concerning the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted. Is development to be understood as a Western discourse constructed as a means of perpetuating imperial relationships in a post-imperial age? Was it a means of creating and asserting state power, both in the late colonial state and in the post-colonial state, or was it an emancipatory language, which subaltern actors could employ to make demands on their rulers, both colonial and post-colonial? Or should we instead focus on the instability of development aims, the ways in which, as Monica van Beusekom shows in her study of the Niger project, development projects were contested between colonial officials and changed through interactions on the ground? Monica van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development. African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920-1960*, Portsmouth 2001. Schuknecht's findings from Sukumaland support this latter viewpoint, demonstrating that we should indeed be sceptical of claims that colonial development was a coherent and consistent vision.

Schuknecht has chosen an excellent case study through which to investigate these themes. Sukumaland, the region of North-East Tanzania around Lake Victoria, was a focus of colonial economic and land use interventions from the beginning of the British mandate until the end of colonial rule. The plant-more-crops campaigns of the 1930s gave way to the ambitious Sukumaland Development Scheme of the 1940s and the promotion of cotton marketing. In the 1950s, anti-colonial opposition to compulsory destocking and strict land use regulations helped smooth the path to power of Tanganyika's nationalist party, TANU. Schuknecht structures his account around these episodes, and the result is a richly textured history which does justice to the complexities of colonial motives and African responses.

The first major contribution which this book makes is therefore empirical. While much has been written about colonial Sukumaland, this is the first sustained and focused discussion of colonial development projects in the region over the period of the British Mandate and Trusteeship, and Schuknecht is able to draw on many previous writers, from travellers and anthropologists to post-independence political scientists, to add narrative richness to his account. He also has a marvellous cast of characters with which to people his story. Some characters, like Hans Cory, the Austrian anthropologist who was at the heart of post-1945 efforts to democratize Sukumaland from the grassroots, will be familiar to students of Tanzania's history. Others, like Donald Malcolm, one of the authors of the Sukumaland Development Scheme

may be less familiar, but thanks to his diary, which Schuknecht located in the Mwanza branch of the Tanzania National Archives, we learn much about the challenges he faced as he investigated Sukuma land tenure in the 1930s and set up the Sukumaland Development Team at Malya in the 1940s, and the ways in which he may have been perceived by the villagers among whom he worked. Schuknecht quotes a passage from Malcolm's diary which recounts his surveying attempts in the village of Nyashima in 1937: "The local inhabitants are getting accustomed to me and my queer antics. I expect they think I am mad: if so, so much the better as africans [sic] are always kind to the afflicted of God." (p. 78)

But while this book will be of value to students and scholars as a case-study of a fascinating region, it also makes an important contribution to rethinking the ways in which we conceptualise late colonial development. In the introduction, Schuknecht makes the point that the idea of development was always contested. He therefore proposes to use the term "development" as a "dependent variable whose meaning was and is flexible and determined by various factors, thereby illustrating the ambiguity of the term itself" (p. 31). In this sense, he argues, the book also contributes to a history of the concept of development, and helps to "highlight the difficulties of using it as an analytical or descriptive category in assessing social, economic or political change in Africa or elsewhere" (p. 32).

This, it seems to me, is an enormously important point. The same term, "development", was used to describe contradictory and conflicting ends by different colonial officials and by African politicians. And so the structure of the book is not only chronological, but also shows the contradictory aims embedded within the shared vocabulary of "development". The contrasting nature of the Sukumaland Development Scheme (SDS) and the Lake Province Increased Cotton and Food Pro-

duction Scheme (LPICFPS) demonstrates this point very clearly. While the SDS was implemented in the 1940s, and had much in common with those other grand development schemes of the post-war era like the Groundnut scheme in southern Tanganyika in terms of its ambition and scale, its priorities were determined in the 1930s, when the agenda was not increasing colonial production but stabilising ecological environments in the face of perceived population growth and environmental crisis and reversing a tendency towards individual land tenure. Like other plans developed in the late 1930s, it was frozen during the war, and so when it finally began to be implemented it ran in a contrary direction to the LPICFPS which represented the beginnings of the shift towards promoting individual enterprise and consumer goods encapsulated in the East African Royal Commission Report of 1955. Meanwhile the Sukuma Union, discussed by Schuknecht in Chapter Five, was as concerned with "development" as colonial planners, but they understood it as something much broader than simply destocking or cotton production.

But if the concept of "development" was broad enough to be used in multiple and conflicting ways, how are we to conceptualise the relationship between competing and contrasting agendas? There is perhaps a limit to how far this point can be taken while working within a framework of colonial policy and African response or resistance and one is left wondering what the relationship was between emerging African economic elites, who embraced the opportunities offered by cotton, and the ideological and policy framework within which they operated. The next step in taking this research forward may lie in developing new theoretical approaches which enable a more thorough examination of shifting webs of ideas and practice. This book sets out a promising line of enquiry, and it will be interesting to see how it is taken further in the future.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

**Citation:** Emma Hunter. Review of Schuknecht, Rohland, *British Colonial Development Policy after the Second World War: The Case of Sukumaland, Tanganyika*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. July, 2011.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33797>

Copyright © 2011 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.