

## **Surveying Africa: Local Agricultural Surveys and the Creation of Development Knowledge**

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The art of collecting information on agricultural and other matters is as old as Doomsday, but the technique and the type of information required have somewhat altered since then. The matter is one of which we have so far little experience in the Colonial Empire.

- C. Eastwood, Colonial Office, 13/7/1938

At least by the 1930s colonial governments began to intensively survey the capacity of the land for production and the capacity of the people for work. To this enterprise several sciences, including Agriculture, Ecology, Anthropology and Medicine, contributed and new interdisciplinary fields of research, like nutrition studies and land-use studies, emerged. While the overarching aim of these studies lay in the accumulation of 'development knowledge', these texts were often the very first comprehensive studies of African production systems, making it imperative for scientists and technical officers to legitimize their findings both in terms of the development aims of the Colonial State and in relation to an emerging interdisciplinary scientific community claiming expertise in interpreting Africa's people and their environments. How surveys were to be organized and staffed, how and where information should be collected, which techniques were to be employed, how to ratify collected information and how translate it into practical development knowledge were questions that continuously occupied the minds of colonial researchers during the inter-war period. To legitimate their findings, to resolve heterogeneities and insecurities and to make their research comprehensible, researchers created a world of acceptable statements and narratives that informed later development projects. In the paper proposed I will take a comparative approach by exploring local surveys undertaken in colonial Zambia (especially the Ecological Survey and Land Use Survey), Malawi (the Agricultural and Nutrition Surveys) and Uganda (The Mutala Surveys), trying to further elucidate how colonial researchers dealt with the posed complexities, where differences and similarities emerge and how their research was absorbed into colonial development projects.