

Tractorisation? Peasants' agro-technological choices and preference in the Irrigated Rice Farming in Mbarali District, 1960s to the Present

George K. Ambindwile (PhD)

Department of History

University of Dar es Salaam

Agricultural mechanization has been considered as an important perimeter for agricultural development in the globe. Europe and Asia have been power houses and centres of agro-technologies for Africa. Unfortunately, what has been right in Asia or Europe has also been considered to be right in Africa without any regard of socio-economic and agro-ecological differences. The state and scientists pre-occupied with conventional thinking regarded peasants as passive receivers of these technologies without any modifications to suit their needs. In this regards, the outcomes have been adversely disastrous on environment¹ and therefore on production too. In the light this experience, this paper examines the changing preferences of agro-technologies in the irrigated rice farming in Mbarali from the 1960s to the Present. Drawing data from archival and documentary reviews as well as oral reminiscences, the paper argues that while tractorisation has been common for the large scale rice farming in the region throughout the period, peasants rationally preferred hand hoe and ox-ploughing to tractors (1960s and 1970s) and power tillers (1980s) to tractors because of the flatness of the terrain and nature of the constructed fields (*majaruba*). The preference has positive results on both production and environment. The paper further argues that nothing beats the power of a skilled, knowledgeable farmer who is equipped with the right information at the right time in the right context. Generally, this paper uncovers the changing nature of agricultural technologies used by peasants over the period from the 1960s to the present. By uncovering peasant preferences, this paper makes an important intervention by going beyond the studies that have privileged the active role of the state, corporations and large-scale capital intensive schemes in the development of agriculture through agro-

¹ George K. Ambindwile (2018) "The Chinese Mbarali Rice Farming and Its Environmental Menace, 1971 to the mid-1980s in *Tanzania Zamani*, Vol.10. No. 2

technologies. It does so by demonstrating that the peasants in Mbarali district were agents who made their own history by transforming their circumstances, including the agrotechnologies, through their own material production and ideas.

